



James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Special Music: Screen Door Rich Mullins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NF3EiCGrKQM>

Why Work?

Myron McIntosh wiped the sweat from his brow with a dish towel. He had cleared most of the lunch crowd tables at Daisy's Diner. There were still a few people eating, so he pushed his cart laden with dirty dishes and cleaning supplies back to the dish washing area. He was glad his mother Daisy had bit-the-bullet and bought the automatic dish washer a few years earlier. She was still paying for it, but it had made everyone's load at the diner a little easier.

Myron started the water running in the gopher (Myron's pet name for the commercial garbage disposal) and flipped the switch. Then he scraped all the leftover food into the mouth of the beast, letting it swallow the remains like a starving beast. Then he took the time to load the belt on the dishwasher. He wouldn't be turning it on until the racks on the belt were full. No reason to waste electricity and water for half a load. Having emptied his cart, he returned to the dining room to clear a few more tables.

Myron was a hard worker and his dedication to what he was doing was obvious to anyone who happened to see all the things that he accomplished. Besides helping his mother at the diner, he was also still helping Sheriff Thom over at the Sheriff's office, keeping his studies up for his last year in high school while starting to take a couple of online courses in Criminal Justice to get a jump on college, and working three days a week for Max Sanders, the local plumber. Yes, Myron was an extremely busy young man.

At a table in the corner of the diner sat a small group of well-dressed men and women. They talked in hushed voices while nursing the last of their lunch. Whatever they were talking about seemed pretty intense. None of them seemed to be smiling even though they appeared to be enjoying their meal. Myron was anxious for them to finish. He had a busy afternoon ahead and time was not his friend. He didn't want to rush the people at the table, but he didn't want them to dawdle either.

He approached the table, wiping his hands on his towel and asked, "Can I get you folks anything else? Desert maybe? Daisy's Cocoanut Cream Pie is the best around."

A balding, portly gentleman responded, "I don't think so, son. We'll be finished in a minute."

"Are you sure? How about a refill on your tea.?"

"No, son, we're good. Time to get back to work"

"Well, you sure are missing out on that pie, but I will get your check and be back in a minute. Will this be all together?"

The man grumbled what sounded like 'of course' and with a wave of his hand, turned back to the discussion at the table as Myron went to grab the ticket from cash register. He didn't hurry because it was obvious that the group wasn't quite finished with what they were talking about. When it looked like they were wrapping up, Myron returned to the table with the ticket, which he handed to the man who seemed to be in charge of the group.

“I have a question for you son,” the man said as he pulled a credit card from his wallet.

“What is that, sir?” Myron replied.

“Well, son, I’ve been watching you. You are a very hard worker. You look to be a great employee.”

“Well... I don’t...”

“I’d like to offer you a job, son,” the man interrupted. We’re from out of town and looking to build a hotel here. Not a big one, mind you. But something with a little more class than that old Bent Tree Motel just outside of town.”

“Well, sir, I ...”

“We need a young man like yourself with his pulse on the community, a real go-getter, someone who knows everyone in town. I think you could be that guy.”

“But I...”

“Don’t stammer, boy. What are they paying you here?” the man asked.

“Sir, I don’t get paid for working here.”

The portly man was taken aback. “What are you saying son, you work your butt off here. I’ve watched you work. What do you mean, you don’t get paid?”

“Sir, my mom owns the restaurant, and I just come around to help her out.”

“And she doesn’t pay you?” the man said incredulously.

“No sir. And I don’t expect her to.”

“Well, I’m changing my mind about you, boy. You should be paid for all your hard work. Doesn’t your mom understand that? She’s taking advantage of you. I don’t care if she is your mother. Why do you put up with that? I think I have misjudged you. You don’t seem to have any business skills at all!” It was quite obvious to Myron that the conversation was starting to become very unpleasant. He did not like this man.

“Sir, my mom struggles to keep this place open. This is a small town with a wonderful community of people, but most of them are not well off. I don’t work here to earn money. I work here to help my mom. I do that because I love her. Not because I expect something from her. Now, if you will pardon me, I’m going to go run your credit card.” He tried hard not to sound angry, but the man was just flat outright rude.

Myron ran the card and brought the receipt back to the table. He put on his best smile and said, “Thank you, folks, for eating at Daisy’s. I hope you found everything acceptable, and we hope to see you again.” He tried to sound sincere, but felt he might have fallen a little bit short.

The portly man started to stand, and it looked like he had more to say Myron, but Myron turned away and slowly walked back to his cart. When he returned to the table to collect the dishes, the door was closing on the last of the group as they left. Myron started collecting the plates and silverware, placing them carefully into the tubs on the cart. Whenever there was a tip on the table or

on the receipt, Myron always let his mother keep those tips. He was doing well enough and didn't need the extra money, but his mother was always scraping to get by. Myron picked up the receipt, he noticed something written on the tip line.

"I never leave a tip for someone who undervalues themselves."

Myron took a ten from his wallet, and then took it and the receipt back to the register. No reason his mother should suffer because someone else was ungracious.

Then a thought occurred to him. "Isn't it strange that in many ways I'm far richer than the man who picked up the check for his group?" Myron refused to let the man's attitude spoil his mood. He started whistling as he finished clearing the table and wiping it down. He then pushed his cart back towards the dishwasher. There was still a lot of work to do before he was done for the day.

“What’s in it for me?” Don’t you just cringe, at least a little bit, when we hear those words come out of someone’s mouth? Especially if we hear it coming out of our own mouths. “Sounds like a great deal, but what’s in it for me?” What is so horribly wrong with doing something for someone just because we love them, or maybe because they need it and we can help?

When we are we are out somewhere running errands or taking care of business,, and we park our vehicles, and we see someone approaching us who is obviously down on their luck, why are we so anxious to hurry away? I mean, it’s broad daylight and there are plenty of people around us, but we still want to turn away. We think about the ten bucks we have in our purse or wallet that we brought for lunch somewhere, and that’s all we have on us. “No, this is mine. I worked hard for it. I’m not going to just give it away.” Maybe we should remember that we had a big breakfast, and we are looking forward to a good dinner with friends or family. It certainly won’t hurt us to skip a meal. “But no, this is mine and I’m keeping it. I earned it. There is no return on helping this person out. Besides, they will probably just use it to buy drugs or alcohol.” Yeah, we have it all figured out and we aren’t going to buy into the notion of just giving it away.

Don’t tell me that you have never thought that. Don’t shy away form it and please don’t take offense. It’s human nature. We are born into sin and selfishness, where our self-protective mode kicks in whenever we feel we are about to be accosted on some level. We look for any reason to avoid involvement. We kick Jesus off the judge’s bench so we can do our own judging

because Jesus just doesn't understand how hard we work for our money. He doesn't understand all the constraints on our time. He doesn't understand what we are going through and how much we need that ten dollars. At least we believe that at some level.

This is what James teaches us. He doesn't pull any punches. He is right in our face telling us that if we are going to call ourselves Christians, people should see the fruit we are producing.

And let's be totally honest with ourselves here. If we get to sit on the judge's bench and determine right from wrong, then we keep control of the resources in our lives. If we allow ourselves to be the judge, then we get to determine if someone is worthy of our help. Jesus might dole out mercy, grace, and justice like candy, but we're human. And we are selfish. And it is much harder for us. Jesus should understand that, right?

I'm not sure when we as Christians managed convince ourselves that this is an okay attitude, when Christ specifically tells us it is not okay.

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"

29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

And who is our neighbor? Anyone that needs our help. The man who is accosted on the road to Jericho in the story of 'The Good Samaritan' is a faceless figure that we know nothing about. He is simply someone in need.

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That's the in-your-face preaching of James.

"But preacher, if we are saved, what difference does it make? Once we are saved, aren't we always saved? Once we come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the good works really don't matter, do they? After all good works aren't going to get us into heaven. Isn't that right?"

Paul says this in the 5th chapter of 2nd Corinthians:

16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here

According to Paul, when we become reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are new creatures. We become vessels for the work of Christ. Salvation is not the end point on our Christian experience. Instead, it marks the transition from self to service. We have to stop looking at Salvation as a golden ticket to heaven, but instead as the point where we begin to understand our purpose and begin our service to God's children. I'm going to be rather blunt here, kind of like James. The purpose of Salvation is not to earn a place in heaven, but instead to embrace the opportunity of serving our Creator by becoming his hands and feet in this world. To be able to thrive, we need to stop treating Salvation as fire insurance and start looking at it as the opportunity to fully engage with God. Heaven is not the goal. It is the reward. And we did nothing to earn it. And it isn't a shiny trophy we get for finishing the race. The goal is to constantly allow God to use us to advance his Kingdom, to be in full communion with him every step we take. Once we have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ, heaven becomes our home, and we are free to engage with our Creator at a level that brings us the understanding that salvation isn't about some place to go to, some mansion on a hilltop, a couple of pearly gates, or streets of gold. But the real treasure is in our relationship right this moment with God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. A relationship that will carry us through eternity. A relationship that cannot be severed.

Why does Myron work so hard at his mother's diner? He did it because he loves his mother. He has a desire to help and please her. His reward is in his relationship with his mother, not in his relationship with the work, or with some kind of compensation. While the portly fellow felt this was foolish (which is a common worldly attitude), Myron did not undervalue himself. And his mother didn't undervalue him either. And neither did the other members of the small community of Parable Texas.

So, yes, it is true. Often people who do not understand our relationship with Jesus, consider us as undervaluing ourselves when they see us serving the needs of our community and the people with whom we engage without consideration of recompense. It may even seem to some that we are making ourselves a doormat to the world. The world has always seen servants as people to be looked down upon by people who do not understand the nature of being a servant. Especially when we present an attitude out of love, with no other thought to compensation. They often cannot see the strength, joy, and attitude of abundance comes from our love for our Creator who teaches us that we are bound with Jesus to become foot washers to every person that needs their feet washed.

It is not up to us to judge whether a person is worthy of having their feet washed by us. All God expects us to do is see the need, see the dirt, and wash the feet, no questions asked. Jesus washed everyone's feet before bringing them to the table, even though he knew that Judas was going to betray him, that Peter was going to deny he even knowing him, that Thomas was going to doubt him,

and that most of the others would run and hide in fear because of their association with him.

The concept of servanthood is what Christ expects of us.

Robert Schuller, Reformed Church of America pastor and evangelist, said it this way, **“The secret of success is to find a need and fill it, to find a hurt and heal it, to find somebody with a problem and offer to help solve it.”**

And John the Baptist said it this way in the 3rd chapter of John:

“He must become greater; I must become less.”

It’s not about us. It’s about Jesus. It’s not about our needs. It’s about the needs of God’s children.

And the late, great Rich Mullins, Christian Music artist, said it this way:

“Faith without works is like a song you can’t sing. It’s about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.”

We work because we love Jesus. We served because we love Jesus. It’s as simple as that. There is no other reason when we bear the standard of Christ.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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