

“Where the Rubber Hits the Pavement!”

There was once a Brethren woman
Who worked as a nurse for a home health agency.

She was from one of the traditional congregations
Made evident by her prayer covering.

She was making her rounds
Visiting patients at home
When she ran out of gas.

Lucky for her
A gas station was just a block away.

She walked to the station
To borrow a gas can and buy some gas.

The attendant told her he had no gas can.

So she returned to her car
To look for a container suitable to hold gas.

She spotted a bedpan.

The resourceful Brethren sister that she was
Took the bedpan to the station
Filled it with gas and returned to her car.

As she was pouring the gas
From the bedpan into her tank
Two Methodists ministers watched.

One of them turned to the other and said
“If her car starts from the contents of that bedpan
I'm joining the Church of the Brethren!”

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People ask, “So, why the Church of the Brethren?”

What makes Brethren stand out
From among 37,000 denominations in the world?

Good question!

Simply put, we embrace a “practical” theology.

As James says earlier in 1:22
We don’t just listen to the word
But we seek to do what it says.

If the Bible says to do it . . . we do it.

If it says don’t . . .
We try like anything to do keep from doing it.

We consider the entire Bible
To be God’s inspired word.

But Brethren place special emphasis on the NT . . .
Claiming the NT as our only creed.

Brethren especially find Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount
And this little book called James
To be particularly useful in faith and practice.

Martin Luther called James the epistle of straw.

He did so because of his own emphasis
That grace alone and our belief in it
Was sufficient for salvation.

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Brethren do not argue against this but add
That faith must include some kind of response.

In the Sermon on the Mount and the Book of James
We find words to live by.

Both have a special place in our theology.

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In the book of James we find a kindred spirit
Speaking to the heart of who we are as Brethren.

We stand on James’ premise
That faith must be revealed in action.

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In our text today, James asks a question
That is asked of all religions, then and now
By all seekers yesterday and today;

What good is a religion if it does not in some way
Express itself in action?

The way in which the question is asked
Already assumes the answer is not much good.

Faith that is visible . . .
Faith that is expressed
Not only in words but in deeds . . .

Faith that concerns itself
With the wellbeing of others . . .

Faith that is made evident in one’s lifestyle
That’s the kind of faith worth having.

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The comedian Louis C. K. says:

I have a lot of beliefs . . . and I live by none of them. That's just the way I am. They're just my beliefs. I just like believing them—I like that part. They're my little “believies.” They make me feel good about who I am. But if they get in the way of a thing I want, I [just do what I want].

James says, faith by itself,
If not accompanied by action
Might as well be dead.

Let’s be clear,
Our salvation hinges on trust in Jesus Christ
His sacrificial love made evident on the cross.

Salvation rests in Him alone.

But let’s also be clear
That our faithful response
Is lived out in obedience to God!

The Bible is filled with instructions
To care for the oppressed and marginalized.

James 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

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Faith that bears fruit
Has always been a teaching in scripture.

It has always been a teaching in the early church.

It will always be a teaching with the Brethren.

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Ambrose, a church leader in the 4th century, wrote;

There is your brother, naked and crying! And you stand confused over the choice of an attractive floor covering.

Basil the Great, also from the 4th century;

The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked.

The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor.

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True faith in God will be made evident
In the way one lives life.

And not just in personal piety . . .
But in acting out neighborly love!

True faith is Christ-centered and not self-centered.

Faith that is true broadens the definition of neighbor
To include the whole human race!

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Brothers and sisters, the rubber hits the pavement
When Christians move
From simple belief to faithful action

The rubber hits the pavement
When Christians concern themselves
With feeding the hungry and clothing the naked.

The rubber hits the pavement
When Christians reveal who and whose they are
In their action as well as their speech.

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In our given text today,
James asks the question

And then he answers it with an illustration . . .
In my words,

Suppose someone from our church chances upon a person who is in need of food and clothing. What kind of faith would he or she have if they simply walked passed and said, ‘Go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing to help that person . . . what kind of faith is that?”

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There are things happening in the world
That should concern us.

Things that our Christian faith demand
Not only that we speak out against
But to act out in response.

There has been a rise in xenophobia . . .
The fear of foreigners . . .

And consequently, people who are at risk
Are being denied a safe haven.

We have seen a rise in racism
That needs a Christian response
That all people are created equal.

There is a blatant rise in discrimination
Against, not only Christians
But Jews, and Muslims

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And people of others faiths.

We need to speak out against this.

Not only speak out against it

But take steps to overcome this fear and hatred.

A counteroffensive of love and compassion is needed

Christians need to put their faith in action.

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Though it is taken from history

Let the following example be a lesson for us today:

It is from the book by Erwin Lutzer

Entitled *When a Nation Forgets God*

I lived in Germany during the Nazi Holocaust. I considered myself a Christian. We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews but we tried to distance ourselves from it because what could anyone do to stop it?

A railroad track ran behind our small church and each Sunday morning we could hear the whistle in the distance and then the wheels coming over the tracks.

We became disturbed when we heard the cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!

Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sound of those wheels because we knew that we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp.

Their screams tormented us. We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the

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time the train came past our church we were singing at the top of our voices.

If we heard the screams we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more. Years have passed and no one talks about it anymore. But I still hear that train whistle in my sleep.

God forgive me; forgive all of us who called ourselves Christians yet did nothing to intervene.

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Silence is complicity.

Those of us who do nothing
Are liable to God’s judgment.

God forgive us who call ourselves Christian
And who do nothing to intervene!

Stir in all of us
The Spirit that moves faith to action

For the glory of God and our neighbor’s good.