

Faith which saves

In Matthew 25, 2 days before His crucifixion, the Lord gave His disciples some of His last instructions. These contained warnings to stay awake and not sleep like the 5 foolish virgins (Matthew 25: 1-12), as well as not to bury what God entrusted to them, like the unfaithful servant did (Matthew 25:14-30). As He made clear, neither the foolish virgins nor the unfaithful servant would enter the Kingdom of God. After these parables the Lord continued, explaining how He will do the judgment at the end. Let's read carefully what He said:

Matthew 25:31-46

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. “And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. “Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ‘for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ‘I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ‘When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ‘Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: ‘for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ‘I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked

and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Many unfortunately choose to ignore this passage as well as many other similar ones. They somehow believe that whatever they do, does not matter. What matters, they think, is that they "believe". For them having faith and living the faith is two different things and one can exist without the other. But this is not true. As James says:

James 2:14-17

"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**"

And John in his first epistle tells us:

1 John 3:16-18

"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

John makes a contrast between love in words and true love in deed. Love which stops just at words, without getting into deeds – though it has the ability - is not true love. The same contrast makes James using the same example: faith which just stays in words and denies to go into action is not a living faith. It is dead faith.

Returning to the gospel of Matthew, the Lord does not seem to ask the people whether they had read their Bible or had it all right doctrinally. Instead He went directly to the practical side and the way they treated others. And He took this personally: if they fed the poor brethren, they did it to Him. If they visited the sick or those in prison, it was a visit He counted as if it was done to Him. And those that didn't care to do such things, they didn't care for Him! Do we care for Him? If we do care for Him, then we will care for His brethren in trouble, feeding the hungry among them, dressing the naked and helping in any way we can (and as secretly as we can - Matthew 6:3).

We should not therefore think that it is OK to have faith but not live it. Or that it is OK to call Jesus Lord, consider Him doctrinally as such but in reality not making Him the Lord of our lives. As He made clear:

Matthew 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, **but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.** “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

They were calling Him “Lord”! Not only that, but they also did wonders in His name and prophesied in His name! But this does not mean that they were doing the will of the Father. Despite their miracles and prophesies, all in the name of the Lord, despite calling Him “Lord, Lord”, the Lord said that they were not doing God's will. In the last day they would not hear a welcome from the Lord but instead: “I never knew you; depart

from Me, you who practice lawlessness!". Therefore, believing that Jesus is Lord and calling Him as such, has to be accompanied by also doing the will of the Father. And what is this will? It is such plain and very simple things as: walking in love, helping our brethren in their needs and not closing our heart from them. As James said:

James 1:27

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Living out our faith is not something complicated. It is as simple as helping the poor in their afflictions and keeping ourselves unstained from the world. As Paul also says:

Galatians 6:7-10

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

And Romans 8:12-13

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

If we live according to the flesh we will die, regardless of how frequently we call Jesus "Lord, Lord". Living selfishly, denying to do the will of the Father, closing our hearts

against the needy brethren are not signs of a living faith and will keep us – if there is no repentance - out of the Kingdom of God and eternal life.

Let us then renew ourselves, putting deep into our hearts the precious sayings of our Lord and live out our faith in deed and in truth. This does not mean that we will not fall. We will fall and perhaps frequently so!! However this is not a problem, as long as we get up and continue. What is really a problem is to believe that we can sleep like the 5 foolish virgins or the unfaithful servant and that this is fine. To think that we can live selfishly, not doing the will of God – with whatever failures – and we will find the door of the Kingdom of God open. The Lord never left place for such illusions and we should not have such illusions either.

Let us then strive to do His will day after day. If we fall, let's get up and continue. If we sin, let us repent. As Paul told us:

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

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