

Living Out Our Faith II:

The Gospel of the Feet: Living the Life of the Gospel in Front of Others

Base Scripture: *Jesus answered 'even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going...' – John 8:14a*

Who I Am

Last week we looked at the first part of Jesus' statement to the Pharisees to understand the basis for His statements to them. Jesus knew his heritage in God, and that heritage was not simply "on paper", but was in active relationship. God was constantly with Jesus, affirming His heritage, and He is doing the same with us.

Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father". The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children – Romans 8:14-16

It was this "active heritage" that gave Jesus the confidence, both to know that his testimony was valid, but also to not need to maintain an external appearance for those around Him. This is important, because it sets the tone for any action that takes place: *If I am doing something because I am seeking reward or recognition, it has a different value than if I am doing it simply for the sake of the deed itself*

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness – Romans 4:1-3

Like Abraham, we will never be justified by our works. *Our* righteousness before God will never be declared *because* of our works. Like Abraham, our righteousness comes from believing in God, in His active presence in our lives, and in His active heritage that He continually reveals to us: testifying with our spirit that we are His children.

Active Faith

The tension we live in is in knowing how to live our lives. Expectations are placed on us from all sides, and, like Jesus, we are challenged by the standards of others. There is also the internal challenge of proving our faith to ourselves and others. It is increasingly difficult when those that we would want to prove it to are not accepting of the truth.

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When

Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, woman, you are set free from your infirmity. Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God – Luke 13:10-12

Jesus was doing what was natural to Him: teaching in the synagogue. He was not there looking for a miracle that would help justify His position. In fact, on many occasions Jesus would give people the “out”, letting them choose what they wanted. His focus was on communicating what He was receiving from the Father when he received it. On this occasion, for Jesus, the declaration of the Word and the acting out of the Word were coming from the same source, and neither was done to prove who He was. Both were done, not only out of who He was with His Father in relationship, but we see from Jesus’ repeated statements that these were done at the very beckoning of the Father.

John 8:28	So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.
John 12:49	For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.
John 14:10	Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

*You **are** the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven – Matthew 5:14-16*

What we see in Elijah is a man who spent his time listening to God, and doing just what he was told to do

Jesus gave his followers the principal that he demonstrated in the synagogue. Jesus **was** the light, and was simply letting that light shine. In that way, people saw his “good works”, or saw (perceived) that his works were good.

*After a long time, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land."... Elijah stepped forward and prayed, "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that **you are God in Israel** and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command." – I Kings 18:1,36*

On the outside, Elijah could be seen as this great man

of faith, that only a prophet could have that type of impact. We look at Elijah as if he is out of our league, that we need to have a similar calling to move in the power that he moved in. Yet, what we see in Elijah is a man who spent his time listening to God, and doing just what he was told to do. Even his challenge of the prophets of Baal, and all of the details in the challenge (the trench, the water, etc.) were God's direction to him. James used this example in talking about our life of faith:

*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a **human being**, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. – James 5:17-18*

Was it how earnestly he prayed that affected the atmosphere? If we believe this, then we believe that it comes with *our effort*, and not by God's design. Elijah's own confession shows that **his intensity of prayer was a reaction to his belief that he had heard from God to move in this way**. Therefore, like Elijah, our work is to focus on the ongoing relationship with God, and what He desires to speak, and how He desires to move.

Nice Things vs. Good Works

In our quest for winning the world, we sometimes trade the power of the Kingdom for the acceptance of nice things. Was Jesus talking about being nice people, so that the world would like us and feel comfortable enough to hang around us?

Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "there are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath" – Luke 13:14

For this woman, she did "nice" for 18 years: coming to the synagogue, listening intently to the teachings, not making waves. Those that saw and knew her did the same. They would all be seen as nice people doing nice things, acceptable to everyone – everyone but God. This day, God saw something that needed to be made right, and moved on His Son to take action.

The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath from what bound her?" When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing – Luke 13:15-17

For Jesus, the action to heal the woman was no more out of the ordinary than taking care of the most basic need – feeding one's animals. The same way the religious leaders wouldn't dream of letting their animals go without water even on the Sabbath, Jesus knew that the Father's heart was for this woman (and all of us) to not go without what was needed in her life.

Walking In the Father's House

*But he answered his father "Look! All these years I've been **slaving** for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet **you never gave me** even a young goat so **I could celebrate with my friends** – Luke 15:29*

He was... not realizing that he already had a special place

The draw toward justification by works is so strong, as evidenced by the older brother of the prodigal. He had everything at his disposal, and could have enjoyed any or all of it at any time. In his anger, he displayed his own failure in his focus: he wanted to be seen as honored before his friends for what he did, not before his Father for who he was. The older brother did what he did to distance himself from his younger brother ("I never disobeyed you"), expecting special consideration from his Father. He was looking to use the works he was doing to earn him a special place in his Father's house, not realizing that **he already had**

a special place.

*My son, the father said, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But **we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again...** - Luke 15:31-32*

The older brother thought that the younger was celebrating with his friends, only to find out that it was the father who was celebrating with him. Similarly, our Father wants to celebrate with us in every establishment of relationship, every returning to Him, every opportunity for Him to declare that we are His children. We don't have to feel that we are being treated differently or less because of what we see, because our position with our Father is not because of what we do, but because of who we are in Him.

Not Losing Focus

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit" – Acts 8:18-19

Simon's life before Christ was one of doing things to get attention. Simon had a following and used sorcery to amaze people. When Philip came, Simon became a believer, and everything was fine, until he saw something that was new to him. Because of this, he lost focus, and went back to his thought of "things" that could bring him attention.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up – Galatians 6:9

Simon lost focus because even though he realized his spiritual heritage in God, he failed to recognize where he was going. His experience waned in the face of new things, new challenges. If we are not careful to focus on where God has us, and where He is taking us, we can also find ourselves off course. God wants to give us such a clear course that nothing can take us off of it, that we never take our eyes off of Him, and that we can have the same testimony of Jesus: “He who sent me is always with me, because I always do what pleases Him”.

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Not Proving Us

The power of the Gospel is not just in what people see in our lives, but in the life of God that is seen in spite of circumstances.

Live such lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us – I Peter 2:12

When our lives regularly reflect, not just stuff we do, but a relationship that demonstrates sensitivity to God, even people who don't believe what we do will recognize there is something real about our faith. It could be through a power encounter with God, like the woman at the synagogue, or through a demonstration of faith that goes beyond the natural. It could be in an act of sacrifice for a stranger. Whatever the circumstance, our focus on our relationship with God allows God to show up in ways to touch people where they are. It is an active living out of our faith with a God who is active in our lives, touching those around us in active ways.