

**“Faith, Deeds & Michael Jordan” May 2020**

**Matthew 19: 16-22 and James 2:14-26**

Let us pray, Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, Amen.

This morning we heard a lesson from the book of James.

James is very concerned about moral living.

He’s focused on assisting the needy and working together for good!

The basic theme throughout the book of James is good deeds & harmony

In chapter one verse 22 he says :

“be doers of the word, and not merely hearers, who deceive themselves.”

Don’t just listen to God’s word, do what it says!

Hearing the word of God is ok....selective, but it’s ok

“ let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;”

From James 1: 19

But “Deceiving ourselves”....well that’s a problem.

So what’s at the root of self deception?

(pause) I’ll make an argument that it’s egotism...

We tend to think we are better than we actually are.

We think pretty highly of ourselves.

We are better and more important than others

Our ideas, values, thoughts, opinions...well, they’re just better!

We tend to want things our own way...

“Look if you don’t do it my way, I’m taking my ball and going home”

“If you don’t like my ideas, I’ll simply find new friends.

The interesting thing is....

This egotism, or vanity, or pride is visible in others; never ourselves.

Egotism is a form of self-deception...(pause) “Deceiving yourself”

And we don’t refer to ourselves as being  
childish, conceited or self centered.

No, it’s always the other person!

James says:

“be doers of the word, and not merely hearers, who deceive themselves.”

Think of all the sermons we have heard from preachers,  
from grandparents, from our parents, from this very pulpit!

Hearing that word has had some positive impact on us...no doubt.

Not all is self-deception.

We are different because of our Christian upbringing.

We are better people.

We’re more aware of the good, more conscious of what’s right.

We are more generous, kind considerate, more gracious, polite

More concerned, more sympathetic and understanding.

More conscious of the needs and feelings of others.

(Pause) Just like James said we should be!

I really believe we are better people because of Christianity.

Somehow, we don’t think slander is a good idea.

Somehow we think peace and harmony is good.

We try to avoid estrangement and bad feelings.

We try to act as understanding and mature adults!

This is exactly James' message!

All these deeds....All these actions

All these behaviors are essential for harmony in the world!

You see for James, Christianity without Christian works

Is not really Christianity.

Its something false, a sham ...an illusion.

(pause) In this morning's lesson, James says:

“ faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”

There is an old colonial saying that goes:

“Trust in God, but keep your powder dry”

There are some practical aspects of Christianity, you know.

Look, we may all have great faith!

We may be great church members.

But until we live it, until we act it out...it's useless!

It has no value to anyone.

In this morning's gospel lesson, from Matthew Jesus tells the man:

“Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor and hungry”

James says: “You foolish person, faith without works is barren”

Faith without deeds is phony...your deceiving yourself!

Jesus performed deeds of meaningful consequences.

For James, the only expression of true Christian faith is works!

Good deeds.

You don't have one without the other.

Faith only lives through works

Faith only has meaning and substance, through our works.

Talk is cheap! Show me the works! Let me see the fruit!

(pause) There is a 10-part documentary on ESPN right now

Called "The Last Dance". I've been glued to it!

The program depicts the 6-time world Champion Chicago Bulls team during the 80's & 90's.

And as you may guess, much of the show revolves around

Michael Jordan, who many will argue was the greatest

basketball player ever to play the game.

There are many scenes that that depict Jordan's incredible faith

In his basketball abilities...his basketball skills.

One of my favorite scenes is footage of sports reporter asking

Michael Jordan;

"ok, Michael, games on the line, you're down by 1 point...it's the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter with 5 seconds left on the clock, who do you want to take the shot"

Without hesitation Jordan confidently & emphatically responds, "Me!"

Then Jordan stares at the reporter for a little longer and says...

"That's a stupid question!"

You don't have to watch the documentary to know that Michael

Jordon, didn't just have faith in himself, he produced!

He said he was a winner and in fact besides a 6-time world champion  
he was: League MVP 5 times, 6-time NBA finals MVP

2 time Olympic gold medalist

14 time NBA all star...3 time NBA all star MVP

10 time NBA scoring champ....9 time all defense team

College national champion...

Jordan had to practice...he had to PRODUCE on the floor.

He talked the talk...but he walked the walk!

I may have all kinds of faith:

I may be kind, gentle, forgiving person...but that's only half of it!

We may have all the faith in the world that our church is going to  
have a positive influence on our children, our community...

but that's only half!

James challenges us regarding our deeds!

He challenges how we perform and function as Christians

He challenges us to step out of our self-deception

He judges faith by action.

We have to produce!

What sense does it make to go to church and listen and understand  
all these good Christian ideals, if we don't put them to work in the  
world.

To be the best, Michael Jordan practiced.

So must we practice good deeds!

Michael Jordan had tremendous faith in his skills & abilities.

He had tremendous faith in himself!

But his faith was manifest by his deeds!

Years and years of practice, training and sacrifice.

But finally, at one point, he has to step onto the world court.

He's no longer in his backyard in North Carolina.

This is the Olympic games, the National Championship,  
the NBA world finals!

It's the test of his faith and works

(Pause) it's kind of like a final judgment, isn't it?

I personally imagine that I have some kind of faith and  
some good deeds.

But there's always that element of self deception...

I know my deeds are not enough

I'm not as good as I think I am....and my deeds show this.

I'm not ready for the Olympics, or NBA world finals.

I'm not ready to step out onto the world stage, the world court!

Why?

(Pause) Because I haven't practiced!

I haven't practiced good deeds!

There will be a day when God asks us to step onto the court  
and take the final shot! Will you be ready?

We must be doers...and be careful we are not deceiving ourselves.

“Be doers of the word, not hearers only”

James says : “Faith is completed by works!” chapter 2: 22

We get better when we practice!

Let me end with this, I wan to imagine how it would feel;

Suppose a reporter is asking God:

“ God, the game is on the line,

it’s the forth quarter,

there’s very little time on the clock

there’s a corona virus pandemic,

death rates are skyrocketing, hospitals are overflowing

people around the world are out of work,

schools are closed, churches are closed....

Who do you want to take the last shot?

(pause) God, who do you want to save the world?

(Pause) And God, without hesitation,

very confidently and emphatically mentions your name!

