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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
AUGUST 13, 2006
KARL SCHAPHORTST

1 MR. SCHAPHORST: I was driving in this morning, I
2 came in about 7:00 o'clock, and it was really interesting, it
3 was kind of light over at my house, it was overcast, but as I
4 drove toward Bethany it was dark.

5 I thought for sure it was just pouring rain. I felt
6 like I was driving into the night.

7 The headlights were lighting up the signs, it was
8 that dark.

9 It was really kind of strange and I felt like I was
10 driving in the darkness.

11 But it reminded me of the Gospel of John, when it
12 talks about how Jesus, when he came into the world, he was
13 born into the darkness of this world and he was the light to
14 shine light in this place.

15 And I hope that that is exactly what happens today,
16 is that light will be shined in your heart and you will carry
17 that wherever you go, even if it is a dark place.

18 We are in the Book of James. It's a great book, as
19 I said before, and it really is a convicting book.

20 I almost feel like I should apologize for how harsh
21 sometimes he can make the truth seem.

22 But we shouldn't apologize for God's word, it's
23 truth, we ought to accept it, learn from it, and grow from
24 it.

25 If there is conviction, I always look at that as the

1 Lord's gift to move us closer to him.

2 Without it we would probably fall back into a life
3 that was maybe further from Christ.

4 Conviction is a good thing, and so it might be my
5 prayer that I would convict you a little bit today with
6 today's message.

7 We are going to talk about faith. We are going to
8 talk about works.

9 In the Book of Matthew it goes, "Therefore, anyone
10 who hears my words and puts them into practice is like the
11 one who goes and builds a house on a rock. The rains come,
12 the streams rise, the winds beat against the house, but it
13 did not fall, because it had a foundation of rock."

14 Faith and deeds. Which is more important? It is a
15 doctrinal debate in Christian circles.

16 Are works more important or is faith more important?
17 Are we saved by faith? Are we saved by works?

18 Let's dig down a little bit. Let's take one at a
19 time.

20 Let's start with works. Let's say we can be saved
21 by works alone without the faith. Saved by works without the
22 faith.

23 I go to the Book of Romans and in the 4th Chapter
24 here is what Paul writes to the Romans.

25 "Now, when a man works his wages are not credited to

1 him as a gift, but as an obligation."

2 That makes sense, doesn't it? That's the world we
3 live in.

4 We work, we do things, and we earn, maybe it's
5 money, it might be other things, based on the value that we
6 provide, right?

7 It makes sense. Because of our work, we are
8 rewarded.

9 Now, I'm taking this verse a little out of context,
10 this is Chapter 4, I would encourage you to read all of the
11 chapter, but Paul recognized that even back then that you
12 work, and you receive, so maybe we can earn our way into
13 heaven, right?

14 Certainly laziness isn't going to get us there. In
15 fact, God's word talks about that.

16 If I was to go to the Book of Proverbs, I go to
17 Chapter 6, Verse 6, listen to what it says about not working.

18 "Go to the ants, you sluggard. Consider its ways
19 and be wise. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet
20 it stores its provisions in the summer and gathers its food
21 at the harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard?
22 When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a
23 little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and
24 poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an
25 armed man."

1 We better being doing something. We surely don't
2 want that to happen to us. Maybe works are it.

3 We are being commanded not to be lazy, we have to
4 get out, we know that we earn things when we work, but does
5 it earn us entrance into heaven? Does it give us salvation?

6 If we were to rest on this, and say works is it,
7 there are some questions you really have to ask.

8 The first one might be how much work is enough?
9 When do we cross the line?

10 And when we screw up, do we lose some of those chips
11 that we've earned?

12 Do we have to pay back maybe when we do things that
13 are contrary to good works, right? How much is enough?

14 The Pharisees, we know how Jesus talked about the
15 Pharisees in the Gospels.

16 He wasn't very kind to them. In fact, he often
17 entered into vigorous argument with them on things so much
18 that they wanted to stone him right there. Very much he
19 angered them.

20 Why is that?

21 Pharisees, if you look at what the Pharisee was,
22 maybe even is today, they are people who understand the law.

23 They understand the law. They understand what it
24 means to do good works, and they live by that. They live by
25 doing good works.

1 We know they don't have faith. Do they believe in
2 Jesus? Certainly not.

3 And Jesus says if you don't believe in me, then you
4 cannot believe in the one who sent me.

5 So they had the works, but they were absent of
6 faith, and Jesus many times called them children of satan.

7 Another question that has to be asked is that if we
8 are doing works without faith, who gets the glory? Who gets
9 the glory?

10 The Pharisees loved to do their prayers on street
11 corners.

12 They loved to do their good deeds in the sight of
13 others, because they wanted to take the glory, right?

14 Who gets the glory? If you are apart from Christ,
15 certainly God is not going to get the glory for your deeds.

16 In fact, one of my Christian brothers challenged me,
17 and he said, I honestly believe that, and this is doctrine,
18 this is doctrine, understand doctrine is not a bad thing, it
19 allows us to fellowship, it challenges us, it allows us to
20 sharpen each other

21 He said to me, "I don't think it's possible apart
22 from Christ to do anything good. I don't think it's possible
23 apart from Christ to do good deeds. We are born into sin and
24 all we know how to do is evil. That's all we can do."

25 And of course when I heard that I said no way.

1 Certainly people who don't know God can do good things.

2 We see it happening, right? We see people being
3 helped across the street, or someone drops their papers or
4 books, someone is helping them pick them up.

5 People do good things. The world sees it that way
6 anyway.

7 What about God? How do you suppose he sees the
8 deeds of the unfaithful?

9 Because if you look at the heart, why do we do good
10 deeds if we are apart from God, if we are apart from Christ?

11 It might be because it makes you feel better, makes
12 you feel like you made a difference maybe.

13 It makes me, me, me feel glorified, and in the eyes
14 of God maybe those deeds are detestable.

15 I don't know. The jury is still out on that one for
16 me.

17 But in the Third Letter that John wrote, he writes a
18 little bit about this, and I want to share with you and maybe
19 I'll challenge you to turn this over in your own hearts to
20 see if good can truly be done apart from Christ.

21 He says, "Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil,
22 but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God.
23 Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God."

24 You know, the seed was planted and I churn over it
25 and I meditate on it, I looked for scripture, I found this,

1 and maybe there is some truth in that, as hard as it is to
2 really grasp, but in God's eyes it's the heart that matters
3 the most.

4 Can works do it alone? I don't think so.

5 In Ephesians, Chapter 2, when it talks about saving
6 salvation, it says it's not by works. It's pretty clear.
7 It's not by works.

8 And what was the reason? Because then man would
9 have a reason to boast, just like the Pharisees.

10 So I don't know if I can say works alone would do
11 it.

12 So, let's take a look at faith alone. Let's take a
13 look at faith alone and see if that can save.

14 Scripture talks a lot about this. There's all kinds
15 of verses that you can find about how important faith is and
16 that you have to believe.

17 How about, "For God so loved the world that he gave
18 his only Son, so that whoever should believe in Him would not
19 perish, but have everlasting life."

20 That sounds like salvation. Believe your way into
21 heaven, right?

22 That's truth. That is truth. I believe in that
23 verse.

24 You could just keep picking them. "I am the way,
25 the truth, and the life. No one gets to the Father except

1 through Me."

2 Through Me, that's Jesus talking, and there is no
3 access to the Father unless you believe in Jesus.

4 Well, it sounds like faith maybe can do it. Faith
5 alone can get you there.

6 You can believe your way into heaven but, again, we
7 need to embrace all of scripture.

8 I tell you, a lot of people will take a verse, pull
9 it out of scripture, kind I like I did with Romans 4-4, pull
10 it out of scripture and use it for their own purposes,
11 without considering everything else that was written.

12 We have to embrace scripture for all it is worth.
13 That's why we spend a lifetime studying God's word, because
14 we need to understand everything.

15 You know what else Jesus said? He also said that,
16 "Anyone who hears my words, but does not put them into
17 practice, is like the foolish man who builds his house on
18 sand. The rains came, the streams rose, the winds beat
19 against that house and it fell with a great crash."

20 We hear the words. We hear it. We might even say
21 we believe it, but are you putting them into practice is what
22 Jesus is saying.

23 There is no contradiction in what James was writing
24 when he said that faith without works is dead.

25 That is not a contradiction to what is said in

1 Ephesians 2-8, "For it is by grace that we are saved, through
2 faith, and that is the gift of God."

3 It is not a contradiction, because faith and works
4 go together. They go together.

5 We are saved by faith and works. James, Chapter 2,
6 Verse 18 says:

7 "Show me faith without works and I will show you
8 faith by what I do."

9 I think there is truth in that. I do think that
10 there is truth in that.

11 What is really neat about this, is that because
12 works is mixed in with faith, faith now becomes something
13 that we can see.

14 We can see it. Right? Because we can see the
15 works.

16 And that can take many different forms, many
17 different shapes, but we can see it.

18 I think this is by design, because if we truly
19 reside in Christ, wouldn't we want other people to see our
20 faith by how we are living our life according to Christ,
21 because that would draw in other people to the light. It's
22 almost a way of evangelism.

23 What shape can it take? It can take the form of
24 love, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness,
25 self-control.

1 Those are all adjectives, they are not verbs, but
2 what do they describe?

3 They describe our actions. They describe the things
4 that we do, how we live our life.

5 It's the fruit of the Spirit and it is visible. You
6 can see it

7 When we talk about faith and works, I think it's
8 extremely important to recognize that faith comes first.

9 Faith comes first, and faith, it's almost like it
10 becomes the fuel.

11 Try to start a fire without any fuel. Try to start
12 a fire without a match, without anything to burn, try to
13 start a fire.

14 It just wouldn't happen, right? And certainly it
15 wouldn't be pleasing to anybody, it wouldn't be useful.

16 But now add the fuel, add the gas, add the match.
17 Now we have a roaring fire.

18 I'm telling you, when I came into the knowledge of
19 Christ, that is exactly how it happened with me.

20 My faith became a fire in me and it drove me into
21 action. I couldn't help but not sit still.

22 There was no way I was going to be the sluggard. I
23 had to get out there and bring glory to the kingdom.

24 So the faith is the fuel. Then the works come.

25 Now, we do good works and I believe as we do good

1 works we store treasures in heaven, just like Jesus taught us
2 on the mount.

3 Store treasures in heaven, not here on earth, and
4 our faith is our driver that does that.

5 But, again, we certainly don't want to be in a
6 position to where because we are doing good works, and we're
7 storing up a lot of treasures in heaven, that we can take
8 credit for it, right?

9 We have no part in salvation. We are sinners. It
10 all belongs to God. It all belongs to him.

11 It is because of his grace that we have salvation.
12 We have no part.

13 And so as we do these good works it's important to
14 understand and be mindful of what Jesus teaches us about
15 doing the good works, because you can store treasures up in
16 heaven.

17 And it's in the 6th Chapter of Matthew when Jesus is
18 teaching about your works. Here is what he writes.

19 "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness
20 before men."

21 We need to do acts of righteousness. Our faith
22 drives that. There is plenty of evidence for that and we'll
23 talk about that.

24 "Be careful not to do your acts of righteousness
25 before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no

1 reward from your father."

2 You basically have redeemed your righteousness act
3 here on earth and I have a feeling it is going to be worth a
4 lot more in heaven than it is here on earth.

5 We are to do them in secret. We are to go about
6 living a life with Jesus, without blowing the trumpets,
7 without stranding on the street corners like the Pharisees
8 did, because they were trying to earn their way to heaven
9 through their works and they wanted people to see it.

10 Their reward was in full and it was here on earth.
11 People might say look, he's a righteous guy. He really is a
12 good believer.

13 You might get a lot of praise, but remember who is
14 supposed to get the glory.

15 The glory is God's, and you know the neat thing
16 about it?

17 If you humbly serve, and you humbly convert your
18 faith into righteous action, people see it. You don't need
19 to seek their glory. People see it.

20 That's the fruit of the Spirit and then they are
21 drawn into it and then maybe they also will partake in the
22 feast as well.

23 I wondered if I could find some scripture that might
24 describe what a life looks like when you have both faith and
25 works working together.

1 What does it look like? I came across Psalm 15.
2 Here is what David writes.

3 "He, whose walk is blameless, and who does what is
4 righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no
5 slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong, and
6 casts no slur on his fellow man, who despises a vile man, but
7 honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath, even when
8 it hurts, who lends his money without usury, and does not
9 accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these
10 things will never be shaken."

11 He who does these things is the one who has built
12 his house on the rock and it can't be shaken because the
13 foundation is the cornerstone, the capstone, Jesus Christ.

14 Faith and works. They work together.

15 Now, of course, James, who is really trying to cut
16 to the heart, goes on and says you foolish man, because he
17 knew that they probably didn't get this.

18 So he goes on and says, "You foolish man, do you
19 want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?"

20 So he gives us two great examples. The example of
21 Abraham and the example of Rahab.

22 I wanted to give you more, and if you go to the Hall
23 of Faith, which is Hebrews Chapter 11, that is what I call
24 the Hall of Faith, there are all kinds of examples of how we
25 see faith, which is the fuel, drives people into action.

1 Can I share some of this with you? Hebrews,
2 Chapter 11.

3 There is such a great cloud of witnesses right here
4 in this chapter.

5 We start with Abraham. It was by faith Abraham took
6 his only son Isaac up to the mountain to sacrifice him.

7 Even though God promised Abraham that he was going
8 to make a great nation through his son Isaac, sacrifice him?

9 You see, his faith was so strong in God, and he
10 believed that God knew what he was doing, and he had complete
11 trust in God that his faith allowed him to believe that God
12 would raise Isaac from the dead.

13 And in a sort of sense that's exactly what happened,
14 because Isaac was on that altar, Abraham was ready to do it
15 and God spared him.

16 In the same way that he spared our Lord and Savior,
17 and rose him from the dead.

18 Complete trust and faith and it is that faith that
19 moved Abraham into action, and it was that faith that was
20 credited to him as righteousness.

21 That is the stuff that gets us into a loving
22 relationship with Jesus, that gets us our salvation.

23 Then there was Isaac, who by faith blessed Jacob,
24 and by faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of
25 Joseph's sons.

1 There was Joseph, who by faith, allowed him to be
2 taken as a slave, to be thrown in prison, to be tempted, and
3 to rise up to be an incredible influencer in the nation of
4 Egypt and to save the nation of Israel from drought and
5 famine. It was by faith that such action took place.

6 It was by faith that the parents of Moses put him in
7 a basket.

8 How many of you would put your baby in basket and
9 send them off down the river hoping that they might be saved.

10 Incredible Faith. Incredible Faith, but that's
11 exactly what happened.

12 What about Moses himself? He was a king, but by
13 faith he exchanged that for a life of a fugitive.

14 By faith he returned to Egypt. By faith he rescued
15 the nation of Israel from the bondage they were in in Egypt.

16 By faith they crossed the Red Sea. Those people had
17 to be terrified, but it was by faith that he made them do
18 these incredibly impossible things, and it was all credited
19 to righteousness, because God was getting the glory the whole
20 way.

21 It doesn't stop there. By faith Joshua crossed the
22 Jordan, marched around Jericho and the walls fell.

23 It was by faith that the prostitute Rahab, because
24 she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were
25 disobedient.

1 And shall we go on? There are more. It was by
2 faith that we have Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David,
3 Samuel, and all the prophets, and through faith conquered
4 kingdoms, administered justice, gained what was promised, who
5 shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames,
6 and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned
7 to strength, God loves doing that, and who became powerful in
8 battle and routed foreign armies.

9 This is faith that drove them to action. Faith
10 comes first, faith was the fuel, and they just didn't sit
11 there and cross their hands and rested and took another
12 little nap.

13 No. No. They served. They served our Lord and
14 Savior. They brought Him glory, because He is worthy.

15 So there's plenty of evidence that faith and works
16 need to work together. Plenty of evidence

17 And so finally I ask you to take the test. Are you
18 one who lives by works?

19 Are you one who lives by faith and faith alone?

20 Are you one that shows the fruit of the Spirit in
21 everything that you do?

22 Because that's what is great about faith and works,
23 is that faith becomes visible to the naked eye, you can see
24 it, and I think that's a great thing. I think that's by
25 design.

1 I think God wanted his children to see His glory
2 here on earth, manifested in a sinner.

3 Let's pray.

4 Lord Jesus, You are so worthy. You are so worthy of
5 our honor and our glory.

6 Lord, we ask that You would teach us and help us,
7 because the walk is not easy.

8 We pray that You would show us the way; that we
9 would offer our desires to You and that You would light our
10 paths and make them straight.

11 Lord Jesus, we pray that we would glorify You in
12 everything we do.

13 That we would seek Your kingdom in the things we do
14 and things we say.

15 We pray, Lord, that You would be glorified by our
16 word, our thoughts, our deeds, by our works.

17 Lord, give us the courage and the strength to have
18 faith like the great cloud of witnesses.

19 Lord, give us the courage and strength to move
20 mountains.

21 Lord, give us the courage and strength to be true
22 disciples. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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