

Works Are Needed!

We ended our time last week around the altar. I said that, “I was calling you with calling,” and you answered by stepping out from where you were standing and come to the altar and saying, “Hineni! Here I am Lord, send me!” I took the phrase, “I call you with calling” from a thought that the rabbis expressed in the Midrash, which is a body of rabbinical teachings on the Torah. They wrote:

You find that when God gave the Torah to Moses, He gave it to him after ‘calling.’ How do we know this? Since it is said, “And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mount; and Moses went up” (Exodus 19:20). Also Moses our teacher, when he came to repeat the Torah to Israel, said to them: “Just as I received the Torah with ‘calling’ so too will I hand it over to God’s children with ‘calling.’ “From where do we know this? From what is written in the context: “And Moses called to all of Israel and said to them...” [Midrash Rabba, Deuteronomy 7:8]

On that day, the Children of God received the word of the Lord with calling. Calling to be His royal priesthood and His holy nation, a people belonging to Him alone. They were to show forth what it is to be in covenant with Almighty God, they were to spread the knowledge of Him and His glory as they honored and obeyed His commands. They were to receive the teaching of God with calling. It wasn’t enough to simply answer and say, “Here I am.” They were to be willing to put their faith into action.

Far be it for me to compare myself to or put myself in the place of Moses, but to some degree that is the place in which I find myself today. I have received from the Lord a calling which the Lord desires to be extended to you, His children. Yes, hineni requires a response but it also requires an action, or it is dead. We have responded, the time comes now to act.

Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Esther all received a calling. They all came to a moment when they answered by faith and they all came to a moment when they acted on that faith. The question is: Now that you have taken the step to answer, are you ready to act?

James picks up on this idea in chapter 2 of his epistle. Would you follow along with me as I read from James 2, starting at verse 14? James 2:14.

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? ²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

Wow, there is so much in those 11 verses, I can tell you right now, that we will not even try to deal with it all. James probably didn't know it at the time, but this passage would create a lot of controversy throughout the years.

Are you saved by works, as James here says or are you saved by grace through faith and not by works, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9? It does seem that James and Paul are in a pretty stark disagreement. The sad thing is that over the centuries, the debate over this question grew so polarized that churches split, denominations were formed, and people were burned at the stake. So, who's right? That is like asking, "do you need your left leg, or do you need your right leg? The answer is yes! Was Paul right when he said that we are saved by grace, not by works? Or was James correct when he said, "faith without works is dead." The answer is, they are both right. What James was saying was that if we really believe, our works will be consistent with our faith and that the natural outworking of our faith produces works.

It's like someone saying, "I know I'm a Christian because I was baptized, and I go to church." Doing those things is great, but that's not what identifies him as a Christian. The healthy maturing Christian will do those same things, but his attitude and words would be something more like this: "I know I'm a Christian because I love God and I know that Jesus died for me. Since I want to grow and be with God's people I go to church. Since I want to answer the call to action I have been baptized in water to begin my outward witness." The true Christian does righteous works because Jesus lives in him and he is therefore moved to action. He doesn't do righteous works to become righteous. That is the key difference. For the healthy and maturing Christian doing the righteous works that God wants us to do will become more and more something that he loves to do, not something he has to do.

This is the thought that I believe speaks to us directly as we struggle with being called with calling. James explains this relationship between faith and works or answering and acting by referring to one of Abraham's hineni moments. The sacrifice of Isaac, his only begotten son, as a burnt offering. Answering by "faith" was not an acceptable option, there needed to be the work that went along with it.

Have you come to that kind of place in your answer to God? The place where your words give way to actions? A time when you live the teachings of God in such away that you actively become an example of what it is to be His royal priesthood and a member of His holy nation, living covenant relationship with Him? Has your faith spurred the greater works that Jesus spoke of?

Perhaps, you are thinking, "Hey, you have been talking about Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Esther; they are big league. I'm just me!" If that is you, read James 2:25, it is for you!

²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?

Rahab, a harlot living on the inside of the enemy's walls, came to a hineni moment. She heard the calling and with a sense of that calling she was by faith to act and so was justified! A harlot, a prostitute, an unseemly woman by most decent people's standards. But God, is no respecter of persons!

If the truth be told, the big league guys, before their hineni moments, they were not very much to write home about: cowards, liars, murderers were the lot of them. When you think about it, they start to make Rahab look pretty good.

Think about those who Jesus called and entrusted the Gospel of the Kingdom to. From a hot-headed fisherman to a tax collector, maybe not all that we would have expected. But Jesus called, and they abandoned all for the sake of the call. Their yes, became an action. For them it was a hineni moment.

We need to understand that the time we shared last week was and is yet a time of commissioning. A time of calling for us, who are numbered among the Body of Christ, and specifically for us as members of this local assemble. The moment in which we find ourselves is a hineni moment. Will we hear the call and answer by faith with actions that are louder than words?

I invite you to listen to the words of Stephen Curtis Chapman in a song entitled, *For the Sake of the Call*.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen.