

Sermon for Sunday, June 1, 1975, by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
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"FAITH ON FIRE"
St. James 2:14-26

Text: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works
is dead."
St. James 2:26

Lately I have really been frustrated. Part of my frustration has been due to my own inability to get done all of the things I need to do. But another part of my growing sense of frustration is the feeling that here at Central we have an awful lot of problems that we need to be doing something about. Let me share with you some of the problems we have. First, we need more educational space. We need space to provide for the growth of our Sunday School and we need space to provide for the kind of a youth program that will minister to this entire area--a program that will pull the kids off the streets and involve them in something more than the kinds of things they are too often involved in now. Second, we need more parking space. I wish I knew the answer to that problem. The Deacons work hard at it, but still it is a problem for which I can see no easy answer. Third, we have to equip ourselves for a significant change in our community. Already a new highrise building has gone up across the street and approval has been given for the development of a gigantic complex at Hanley and Forsyth. Someone has got to get ready to minister to the influx of people this will mean. Fourth, and a sort of similar problem to the one I just mentioned, many churches in our area are declining in membership. Those people are simply dropping out of church. Who is going to develop a ministry to reach them? Who is going to put out the effort and the energy to reclaim them for Jesus and his Church? Fifthly, we live in a time of family crises. More and more marriages are going on the rocks; more and more young people are getting alienated from their parents. Who is going to provide the sort of help and support people need today? Sixthly, we live in a city that is becoming increasingly secularized. Who is going to do something about the broader community in an effort to reach them for Jesus? Seventhly, out at Centreat we have a facility that could be developed as a resource, a tool for ministering to people--a place where in the atmosphere of fun and fellowship we have a chance to share Jesus with people where we could never touch them any other way.

Now, that is not all of the problems that have been growing increasingly heavy on my heart, but that will give you a sample of the sort of things God has been giving me a burden for. And there has been a growing sense of urgency about these things. What if we fail to seize the opportunities God gives us, I keep asking myself. What if we don't act, what if we just keep on doing the same old things in the same old way and let this golden chance for service slip by; what if we wait and "let George do it," and then George never does. Back during the Civil War, the North and South clashed at Gettysburg. After three days the tide began to turn for the North, and General Meade was winning. Lee and his Confederate forces retreated southward under a driving rain. When they reached the Potomac, it was swollen with rain and impossible to cross. Lee was trapped. Had Meade attacked immediately, the war would have been over. As a matter of fact, Lincoln ordered Meade to attack, but he delayed. He held a council and then delayed again. As he delayed, the waters of the Potomac receded and Lee escaped to carry on the war for two more

bloody years. Because he was indecisive, because he delayed, because he did not act decisively, Meade lost the opportunity that was his. And when Lee did surrender two years later, it was to Grant and not Meade. Meade's chance was forever gone.

What if we are indecisive, what if we delay, what if we put off acting decisively? Will we miss our chance? Will our opportunity be forever gone? As I have been praying earnestly about these things, I have gone back to the New Testament. The Scripture that God has given me for Central--for you and for me--is the passage that I read a moment ago. There we see statements such as this: "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works?" Or again, "faith apart from works is barren." Or again, "faith (is) completed by works." Or again, "a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." And finally, our text for this morning, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead."

As we look at the church in the New Testament and in those first early centuries, we discover that above all, it was a church with its faith on fire. It was men with faith on fire who endured whippings, stonings, imprisonments, and shipwrecks for Jesus. It was men who had their faith on fire who went into the Roman arenas to face the lions, to endure crucifixion, to be abused and mistreated, tortured and defiled. It was men with faith on fire who ventured into the savage interior of Europe to win it for Jesus and who consequently changed the course of human history.

As I have been reading the Bible and studying history, I have been trying to discover the key to a faith on fire. What happened to those first Christians, what was going on in their lives, that set them aflame for Jesus? I would like to share with you this morning at least three of the things that turned them into men and women with their faith on fire.

The first thing that happened to them was that they got changed. St. Paul says that if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation, he is something radically new. Jesus says that for a man to enter the kingdom of God, he has got to be born again, he has got to get himself changed. As we look at the men of the New Testament, we see people who are radically changed men. Something has happened to their lives to make them different. And what made that difference? The Bible tells us that they believed in Jesus as the Son of God, as their personal Savior, and that they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let's ask ourselves a question this morning. Is there anything about your life and mine that an objective observer could see that makes us different from the non-Christians about us? Are the lives that we are living and the things that we are doing radically different from the lives of our uncommitted neighbors? Have we gotten ourselves changed through a relationship to Jesus? Is our faith on fire? C. H. Spurgeon was a great servant of God who was a mighty preacher in his day. As a boy of fifteen, he took refuge in a little chapel during a blizzard. The preacher had not arrived due to the storm and one of the officers of the little church conducted the service for 15 people. Spurgeon tells the story this way: "The man was really stupid. His text was 'Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth,' and he kept repeating it because he had nothing else to say." But young

Spurgeon caught the eye of the impromptu preacher. "Young man," he said suddenly, "you look very miserable, miserable in life and miserable in death, if you do not obey my text." Then suddenly he shouted, "Young man, look to Jesus! Look, look, look!" Spurgeon said, "I did, and then and there the cloud was gone; the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun." Yes, Spurgeon got himself changed and became a man whose faith was on fire. If you and I are to serve the Lord adequately here at Central, first of all each of us must get himself changed. If you don't feel you are really changed this morning, let me issue you a challenge. Invite Jesus into your heart right now and ask him to fill you with his Holy Spirit. Then for 30 days read at least a chapter of the Bible every day, spend at least 15 minutes in prayer each day, and then live those 30 days as if Jesus were right by your side and you are going to do what you think He would want you to do. I promise you, at the end of those 30 days, you will be a changed person.

So, first of all, those early Christians got themselves changed. Secondly, they got together. When people who love Jesus get together, things begin to happen. Jesus says where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there. Things begin to happen. The Bible says that on the day of Pentecost, the 120 were all together in one place and they were praying. When they did that, the Holy Spirit fell on them. Again and again in the book of Acts, when people of God got together, things happen. Do you know how the missionary enterprise of the church got started? Well, the people got together in prayer and the Holy Spirit told them to set aside Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. That event was to change the world.

Central needs to get together. We need to get together in prayer and fellowship and study and worship. Out of that sort of spiritual togetherness comes spiritual power, there comes unity of purpose, there comes the will to work, to put our faith into operation. Do you know what the Bible says about the early church? It says, "And they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." (Acts 2:42-43) God is going to use us when we get together as a church. What do you think would have happened if Peter had said, "Lord, I would like to preach to the Gentiles, but my Jewish friends would disapprove." Or what if Stephen said, "Lord, I would witness for you, but those rocks make lumps on my head." Or suppose Paul had said, "Lord, I want to go to Macedonia, but I get seasick and besides, did you know those Greeks eat garlic?" Well, that happens to us. One doesn't like the order of worship, so he won't come. Another can't stand the sermons, so he stays away. Another doesn't think the Sunday School teacher is exciting enough, so he stays home. One doesn't like a certain program, so he doesn't give. Another doesn't like to meet strangers, so visitors go unwelcomed. Well, if we don't want to miss the opportunity God gives us at Central, first we had better get ourselves changed and second, we had better get together.

Then, the third thing I see in the lives of the New Testament Christians that set their faith on fire is this: they got going. They had some good news to share with the world and the Bible says they got going. After all, that was one of the last things Jesus ever said to them, He said, "Go..."

In the beginning this morning I mentioned some of the problems that are heavy on my heart. Let me ask you some questions. Do you believe little children need to learn about Jesus? If you do, let's get going on teaching and on some more space. Do you believe young people need Jesus and will be better if they have him in their hearts? Then let's get going to meet the needs. Do you believe a person is lost apart from Jesus, that he will be eternally lost and cut off from God without Jesus? Then let's get going on evangelism. Do you believe that the church has to keep finding new ways to reach men for Jesus? Then let's get going on Centreat, let's get going on new programs and new services. Do you believe these things will happen without leadership and money? Then offer yourself and dig down in your pocket let's get going!

Let me tell you the story of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, one of the greatest missionaries the church has ever had. He was a medical student and one evening he was making a house call in London. He saw a big tent and turned in out of curiosity. It so happened that a meeting was being conducted by Dwight L. Moody. A local minister was praying and he prayed on and on and on. Grenfell got up to leave, but about that time Moody stood up and said to the congregation, "Friends, let's sing a hymn while our brother is finishing his prayer." That intrigued Grenfell and he stayed to listen to Moody. When he left that night, he left with the determination to live his life as he thought Christ would want him to. With his faith on fire, he got going and he became one of the greatest missionaries of all times.

The early church had faith that was on fire. That fire was lit when they got changed, when they got together and when they got going. I'm willing to try it if you are!