

*Read also Joshua 2:1-14*

Back at the end of the Great Depression there lived a racehorse who was one of the fastest horses at that time. But he had not won too many races. He had not won because he had a very distinctive personality. He was highly spirited and uncontrollable, and his trainer and the many jockeys who had ridden him did not know him or understand the way he operated.

This horse had an innate love of running, and he possessed incredible speed. When the jockey did not interfere but was more at one with him, his ears went up and he “ran within himself at a championship rate.” His jockey said, “As long as you treat him like a gentleman, he will run his heart out for you.”<sup>1</sup> He was a unique horse with tremendous courage, he said.

That jockey’s name was Red Pollard. A failing jockey, he, along with an obscure trainer and an owner from nowhere made an alliance to work with this spirited, independent racehorse, whose name was Seabiscuit. It was a great step of faith.

We have been talking about the nature of faith this month. What does it mean to believe? How does faith make us distinctive as the people of God? How does it play out in our lives?

Most of the leaders in the Bible talked about it.

Jesus talked about it, again and again. He said one day

"Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock" (Mt. 7:24).

Now I don’t know about you, but I love the idea of a firm foundation.

When you are talking about the foundation of something, you are talking about the long haul. When we built our house, the builder guaranteed the foundation for 25 years. A firm foundation suggests you are talking about making it through both good times and bad, in victory. Jesus said,

“Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock” (Mt. 7:25).

Now Jesus had a half-brother named James. James was the head of the church in Jerusalem. Times were hard. Christians had been persecuted and scattered so he wrote them a letter. In that letter he talked about making it for the long haul. Many people were experiencing the challenge of harmonizing their new beliefs with action; you know, that time when we start living differently; when we take discipleship seriously. Let’s read. JAMES 2:14-26

Now James’s letter very elegant Greek is organized in a common form of Greco-Roman teaching called a “diatribe.” That means you pose a question from a fictional opponent and then the teaching occurs in rapid-fire challenging questions and answers. So James put a lot of thought into his argument. Let’s break down the questions:

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<sup>1</sup>Laura Hillenbrand, *Seabiscuit, An American Legend* (New York: Random House, 2001), 105.

Q1 – “What good is it if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions?”

He then answers.

A1 – “That kind of faith isn’t enough. It is worth nothing. It is useless and dead.”

Q2 – “Some have faith and others have works.”

A2 – “You think faith is saying ‘God is one;’ but demons believe that much. So what!”

Q3 – “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? Don’t you remember Abraham?”

A3 – Abraham was shown to be right with God by what he did, not faith alone.

So there is the argument about faith and works. To support his argument, James gives three examples. Certainly James could have chosen many examples. But I believe his examples were carefully chosen to teach us something significant about faith. Let’s look at them.

Example 1 – Someone in God’s family needs food or clothing and you ignore the need and brush them off with platitudes.

James says the first evidence of faith is *generosity*.

Generosity is the act that reflects your belief that God provides. Generosity is the act that reflects an overriding trust in God. Giving shows the reality of faith.

The second example is Abraham offering Isaac on the altar. (Genesis 22)

Now Abraham had experienced the initial miraculous action of God in his life. Isaac had miraculously been born. Abraham had

- Believed God
- Waited
- Tried his own hand (didn’t work)
- God sent Isaac
- The test came

God asked Abraham to act on his faith. Abraham trusted. His foundation was solid as bedrock.

How well do you know God? Abraham had gotten to know Him amazingly well. Abraham knew God through many tests. Abraham’s actions weren’t always strong at first. He did his own thing; he made mistakes. But God kept talking to him and he kept talking to God. He learned that obedience is best. He learned that God was trustworthy. So when this test came, he acted in strict obedience.

His faith, backed by the action of obedience, was worth something. It was solid as a rock.

The second evidence of faith is *obedience*.

Let's go back to the racehorse. When I was a child, I wanted to grow up and own a horse farm. My father decided I better learn to actually ride a horse. So he bought a horse. It was great. She looked so nice in our pasture.

A friend came over and her dad wanted to ride the horse. My dad let him. The man knew nothing about horses and pretty soon the horse was running and before we knew it the horse ran under a tree and knocked that man right out of the saddle.

Perhaps action isn't really all it's cut out to be!

So finally I decided to ride the horse, and with MUCH instruction from my dad, the horse and I took a few steps. And I learned some things.

- You don't just get on a horse and ride like a master. Practice is necessary.
- There must be communication between horse and rider. Relationship with the horse is necessary.
- There is a right way and wrong way to ride a horse.

James said Abraham learned there is a right way and a wrong way to relate to God. The right way is to practice obedience and trust. Abraham communicated with God so well that he was called a friend of God.

Then James gave a third example of faith-in-action. Rahab the prostitute threw all her chips in with God. When her nation was threatened, she weighed the risks, and went for the victory.

The three men making an alliance around Seabiscuit recognized they had a champion horse. But, that horse was not going to just go out there and win a victory all by himself. His power and speed needed to be unleashed. The jockey explains: "When a horse and a jockey flew over the track together, there were moments in which the man's mind wedded itself to the animal's body to form something greater than the sum of both parts."<sup>2</sup>

It is like that with God. We have to wed ourselves in heart and mind and will so that his power is unleashed in us. As action was required from each man, action is required on our part to meet the challenges of living by faith. The three men each did their part with the result that Seabiscuit became a legend that lifted the spirits of the entire nation during the depression.

In the same way, Rahab had heard about the miracles of God. At great risk she went for God and she experienced the victory. Her house alone was standing on a rock when the whole town fell.

The third evidence of faith is *risking all with God*.

Faith with action made the difference.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 80.

James challenges us to stand on bedrock. How are you acting out your faith? What will you do this week?

As you take action, may your foundation become strong as bedrock.

AMEN