

*Nazarene Essentials* Sermon #5

Chapters: “Our Wesleyan Theology, Articles of Faith”

**Theology in Life**

**Introduction**

This is a true story about an ordained Nazarene Elder. For the purposes of our discussion today we will call him James. James grew up in a Nazarene home and was a good kid. Oh he had his moments just like any other kid, but by and large, he was a good kid. He knew the meaning of PK (Preacher’s Kid) and tried his best not to bring shame to the church or his family. He even went to church camp, taught classes at his church’s Vacation Bible School each year, and taught a Sunday school class for little children while he was a teenager. He tried his best to live life the right way. The problem was he always seemed like he was falling short.

Growing up in the 80’s, he loved America. He was proud of his country and felt it was his duty to serve in the Armed Forces. He was a good student, but he really liked the idea of proving he was man enough to endure hardship for the sake of his country. So at the age of 17, two months before his 18th birthday, he went to the recruiting center and signed up to join the United States Army. He signed up for 4 years, so that he could join the paratroopers and jump out of planes in the 82nd Airborne Division. He was so excited that he was going to be a part of an elite force. So much so that, right after he signed on the dotted line, he called his mom, and told her that he had joined the Army. That is what every mom wants to hear, right? That her son is pledging to die for his country. She began to cry on the phone because the threat of the first Gulf War in Iraq was upon the country at the time, and like any mother, she didn’t want to lose her son. James, however, was excited.

He went to training and became a leader. In fact, in boot camp, other soldiers would bring their prayer requests to him and would apologize for using profanity in his presence. He was honored as a top soldier in his Battalion, and his superiors were placing more and more responsibilities on him. The problem was, James hadn’t decided what kind of person he wanted to be. He was miles away from the Christian structure he had known as a kid. Even though he knew God saw the choices he was making, he began to do things that to this day he is not proud of. *Sometimes indecision actually is a decision*.

The more indecisive he became about the man he wanted to be the more appealing the things of the world became. Just two and a half years after leaving a preacher’s home and joining the Army James found himself addicted to cocaine. He was no longer the leader he wanted to be. He sold personal belongings that had sentimental value to support his habit. He was always looking for more money to feed his addiction. He was constantly looking for the next opportunity to have a good time. Isn’t it interesting? A decision about the kind of man he was going to be came by default. He was not proud of himself. He knew better, but he continued nonetheless. Isn’t it interesting how quickly the good reputation of a young man can fade so quickly?

He managed to keep most of his struggles away from his superiors. Only his “buddies” really knew the extent of what was happening, because they were doing the same things. God was still there, calling out to James, beckoning him to live life differently and bringing reminders to Him of the life God wanted him to live. But the situation had progressed so far, he wasn’t sure he could ever get out of the life he was in, even if he wanted to. As James tells the story, he will never forget how grateful he was on the day of his release from active duty. He decided in that moment that he was going to try to live life differently. You know the problem with trying? You sure fail a lot, and fail he did.

He moved away from the Army and attended a Church of the Nazarene just shortly after His release. One night they were having a revival service, and James decided he should go. James says, he will never forget how real the presence of God was that night when He truly gave his brokenness to God. He confessed his sins that evening, and God began a work in His life.

He didn’t get up from the altar that night freed of all bad habits or struggles. However, He testified, “I was changed on the inside, I was given a second chance, and I was determined to live differently!” For the first time in his life the struggle was over, and he felt at peace with God.

**I. Theology**

Our lives find their truth in the unmistakable word of God. That is Theology! In our groups this week we will look at the specifics of what we believe in what we call our Articles of Faith.

A. When you first hear the word theology, perhaps you start to think that now the minister is going to talk in ways you won’t be able to understand. Hopefully that is not the case today because deep theology is found in stories just like the one about James’ life. In fact, we believe that God works in people’s lives and saves them just like He did for James. Every Christian can see the move of God in their lives prior to redemption. We refer to this grace as “prevenient grace,” or the grace that goes before us.

The Word of God says it this way:

*Scripture:
Romans 5:6 (NIV)**6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*
B. This truth about Christ cannot be understated, and it is the foundation of our beliefs. We did nothing to earn our salvation. Our Wesleyan Heritage holds onto this fact in its most basic form. Humanity has done nothing to earn the saving work of God. God in His infinite mercy and grace has offered it to us through faith so that we could be set free. The blood of Jesus Christ has offered us justification for our sin. However, He has not simply saved us from sin, He is calling us to more. Justification is just one aspect of the saving work of Christ. Let’s look at Romans 5 again.

*Scripture:
Romans 5:9-11 (NIV)
9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!
10 For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!
11 Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

B. There is something interesting in these verses. We start with the saving work of Christ, and then verse 10 tells us that once we were reconciled to God through Christ, “how much more shall we be saved through His life”. This verse points to the deeper work of God in our lives. If we were reconciled through the entrance of Christ into our hearts, how much more can He keep us reconciled to God as we live our lives because Christ is alive, not dead. He is working to keep us from sin and directing our steps and path to Him. There is the deeper work of God in our lives as Christ takes up residence in our hearts. Once there was death, but now there is life!

This move of the Spirit of Christ in us is saving us from sin. Yes! But He is also enabling us to live above sin while we still live this side of heaven, because His power is living in us!

**II. Life**Let’s go back to our story of James for just a moment. James had accepted Christ, and you will remember, James stated that “…he was determined to live life differently.” He had a profound saving moment with God which left him at peace with God. He laid all of his sins at the foot of the cross that evening. However, James still had two and half years of bad decisions to change. Struggles still remained in his life. He certainly remained a work in progress.

Christ had taken up residence in James’ heart, but there was much housework that needed to be done. All of James’ habits didn’t change overnight, but they began to change. Little by little he began to let go of things in his life through the prompting of the Spirit of Christ.

There was one habit though that was difficult for him to rid himself of. That habit was tobacco. As a new Christian who had given his heart to Christ, James was determined to live differently, and he was living differently. Yet, God needed still to overcome a powerful stronghold in his life.

James can recount the exact moment it happened. These are his words.

“I was praying that God could have anything he wanted in my life. That is a scary prayer you know. I prayed that I wanted Him to have control of my life because I loved Him so much and was so grateful for his saving work that wanted to be used by Him. In that moment I wasn’t really thinking about the tobacco habit I had. I had almost resolved to myself that I was always going to struggle with tobacco. But God had something else in mind. In that moment of prayer God asked me, ‘Could I use you more if you let go of this habit?’ My answer was, ‘yes’. Then God said to my spirit….then why won’t you give it up for me, I will help you! That was the motivation I needed, and from that moment forward I never succumbed to the habit of tobacco. That was the moment God sanctified me and showed me that it was possible to live another way!”

God taught James a powerful lesson that day, one that John speaks of in 1 John.

*Scripture:
1 John 4:4 (NIV)
“…the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”*Theology in real life. The truth of God’s word lived out in our everyday existence. These were foundational truths for John Wesley, and they are foundational truths for the Church of the Nazarene. The same God who is working in Scripture is still working today. He is teaching us how to live and empowering us to be like Him! It only takes our willingness to obey and an understanding of the Word of God.
**Conclusion:**The same resurrecting power of Christ is at work in our hearts and lives, and He can give us victory. God saves us from past sins, and then through His Spirit empowers us to live for Him. Where are you today? You can be free, and be reconciled to God through the power of the living Spirit of Jesus Christ. Would you like to pray?

[Note to pastor: You may use this illustration of James or you may wish to substitute a life illustration from your own ministry that teaches this same theology lesson. We offer this one as an example to show how our Articles of Faith translate into daily life.]