

James 2:14-26

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[0 : 00] Well, the passage we have before us today is one of those that you kind of cringe when! you finally get to teach on it because if you mess it up, it could have some bad effects.

but if you do it well, it could have some really good effects. And I remember when I was in college up here in North Georgia just a couple years ago, when me and Nathan and Sam and Wes and Lesburn were in school together up here, I got invited to speak at the Corps of Cadet Bible study on campus and I knew the chaplain and he was like, we're studying James. And he said, can you come do it this week? And I volunteered like, yeah, sure. Well, what's the passage? And he was like, faith and works. I'm like, thanks, buddy. I appreciate that. I remember I was so nervous. I just actually memorized some of John MacArthur's notes and just like said it and was like, there you go. But to show you how much I've grown in my faith, I did not consort John MacArthur one time in my study during this time, but I consorted several other Johns. But here we go. We're going to be in chapter two. Zach did a really awesome job last week of talking about the beginning of chapter two up to verse 13 about not showing partiality. So we'll, we'll get into that. The next part of this now about faith and works, but just in case you're new, some people are kind of returning from breaks and vacations. James was the brother of Jesus. He was a leader of the Jerusalem church. And he's often given kind of a hard time because he was a little slower to come to faith, like in his brother as the Messiah. And you can just imagine though, the pressure he had growing up as a younger brother with Jesus being his older brother and how often he probably didn't measure up to that and how he heard all the time, like, Jesus is your big brother? Or why can't you be more like Jesus? Those sort of things probably just resonated around him. And whenever, you know, he went to his parents for advice and they would just say, well, I don't know, James, what would Jesus do? And that would just drive him crazy. So you can go on and on with the jokes though, but he like, you know, Jesus has a lot more scripture memorized than you, James. And he lives it out, like get with the program. So it really is a miracle that at some point he really did come to faith in his older brother as the Messiah. So, so this is his letter, this is his contribution to the scripture. And James' focus mainly is not so much how one becomes a genuine believer, but rather what does real authentic faith look like in holy conduct. So a little bit different angle than Paul has in a lot of his letters. So this is more like how to live out one's faith, doing it, being a doer of the word rather than just a hearer of the word. So his audience is definitely a Jewish audience, Jewish Christians. And so let's get in with our passage in verse 14, chapter two, he says, what good is it? My brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works, can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking daily food, and one of you says, says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead.

But someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see, faith was active along with his works. And faith was completed by his works. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

[4 : 34] And he was called a friend of God. You see, that person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way, not also Rahab, the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by one or another, by another way. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. Just pray with me real quickly. Lord, we're just so thankful thankful for your grace. We're thankful for your word, for your people

and your love for us. Just help me to be faithful with this text you've given us. Apply it to our hearts by your Holy Spirit. Let it not just fall on death ears, but may it have the desired effect. In Jesus' name, amen. So this is definitely a section where James, the personality of James comes out. His tone in this letter is just blunt, straightforward, matter of fact, also pastoral and instructive. He's more like a marine or army drill instructor who cares more about training you and getting you ready to survive and not die rather than your personal feelings. That's sort of how a lot of it is. It's not a lot of coddling or pampering.

He just really wants you to hear the truth and like wake up to it. Today's section we're dealing with not a lot in our own day where there was a lot of people who claimed to be born again Christians, saved followers of Christ, yet did not actually possess true faith and salvation. Something we would all do well just to heed today, but I have, I have three points to kind of walk through the passage. I'll give them to you now, but the first one will be faith that is dead. Faith that is dead. Number two will be faith that is demonic. And then thirdly, faith that is dynamic.

So first faith that is, that is dead. And we see that verses 14 through 17. He says, what good is it, my brother, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed, lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warm and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. So three times in this section of the letter, James warns that faith apart or without works is dead. And guess what the Greek means? It means dead.

[7 : 31] It means lifeless, inactive, not breathing or moving. It's the same word used of Lazarus before he was raised from the dead. Same Greek word that Paul used to say that we were dead in our trespasses and sin. So metaphorically, a kind of faith that is lifeless, a lifeless corpse laying in a tomb, a kind of faith that falls short of true saving faith, barren, false, inactive. So James expresses this by making his first argument by way of illustration, if you see the illustration.

So, but to help us understand the entire passage, I'm going to kind of break a little rule of preaching and kind of jump ahead. But I also know that some of you are maybe stuck on a couple of verses. If we don't deal with that now, like you're just going to go, that's going to drive me crazy until he gets to that part. So, but just a clarification on what James is saying and what he isn't saying.

And so that we can just see the whole passage in this. But to illustrate, I want you to imagine that you're, you're speaking to a Roman Catholic friend. I have, I have many friends who are Roman Catholics. And he says to you, so do you Protestants really believe what the reformers taught when someone is saved by faith alone and not by works? And you would probably be like, yes, we believe in faith alone, not by works. And then he would say, well, I see. So how does that actually square with James 2, 24? You see the verse? You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. So you'd be like, what? You know what? What's, I've been lied to this all the time and the five solos is not a real thing. You would kind of have those sort of questions. You'd be kind of second guessing. This is the verse that drove Martin Luther

Bonkers. Like he did not like this verse. So being caught off guard by the question by your friend, your Roman Catholic friend, you're now kind of in a panic to sort of flee and run directly, kind of slide in safely to Paul's words in Romans where he, he just says, you know, um, you see, uh, um, for by works for the law, no one will be justified in his sight for a rehold that one is justified by faith, apart from works of the law. And then you would kind of like run away and say, just read Galatians and just, so when you do that though, two things, not only have you failed to like directly answer his question or her question, but you've kind of given the impression that new Testament writers have contradicted themselves, that Paul is opposing Jesus or opposing James, the heart of opposed Jesus, but Paul opposing James.

[10 : 32] So, however, if you had just kind of slowed down and just asked some really good hermeneutical questions on the passage, okay, well, let's just look at it. You would ask, what's the big picture?

What is James and Paul trying to get out? What question are they trying to answer? What problem are they trying to solve? And thankfully that's not hidden. Like we just read it clearly in our passage. James isn't being obscure. It's not hidden. We don't have to guess at what he means, but look at verse 24. He basically says, can, can, he doesn't say, can faith save you? He doesn't even ask in real faith, save you. Look at what he says. Can that faith save him? What's the, that therefore? So the whole verse, what good or what profit is it? My brothers, if someone says, or professes or

claims, he has faith, but does not have works. Can that faith save him? Meaning can that kind of faith, that sort of faith, that type of faith, he's singling out someone who has an outward profession of faith, acclaimed faith, and not asking, can faith apart from work save somebody, but can just a mere profession of faith alone save somebody? And he's making a clear distinction and catch this between a possession of faith and a profession of faith. There's, they can be two different things. You can profess something you don't actually possess. So that's what he's focused on. And he's aware of Jesus's words, Matthew 15, where he says, these people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And perhaps the most dreadful, sobering passage to me personally, one that the Lord used to scare the junk out of me when I was, when I was probably not a believer in the early 2000s, which is right out of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. Whew, I'm thankful now, but man, this really woke me up. I was just never told to question whether or not I was a Christian, et cetera. But Jesus said on the judgment day, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my father, who is in heaven on that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And I will declare to them, I never knew you depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. I've never shown that, that verse, you know, and it, it scared me in a good way. I think it kind of helped scare me into the kingdom. So as a professed believer, right, I was deceived and misled because my lifestyle did not at all reflect what I claimed to believe on a Sunday and on Wednesday nights. So the Bible is full of such warnings. Hebrews 3, 12, take care, brothers, let, let there be not in you any evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God. So that's a very like real and scary thing for us, for a lot of people to walk around professing something they don't actually possess. And that's what James is after that kind, of faith, a professed faith, just a claim. Can that kind of faith save someone? So the illustration James gives in verse 15 and 16, very simple, right? Food and clothing are basic needs. You have to have them to live. You don't, you're going to, you're going to perish. And true believers have an obligation to meet those kinds of needs of people. They have to, to help people have food and clothing.

Paul says in Galatians 6, so then as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith. So this is an image of a fellow believer coming in among them, clothed and tattered very poorly. And it's cold weather. You can see that in the passage, like he means like someone coming in from the cold is not have really good winter clothes.

[15:11] And they also look skinny, weak, and malnourished, hungry. A person who has dead faith would notice that visitor, see the need they have, but instead of doing anything to meet that need, they offer a simple pious words, go in peace, be warm, be filled. In Hebrew, shalom. Be filled, all is well, and just walk away and not actually meet that person's need. People that have dead feet, dead faith, substitute naked words for deeds. They have words of compassion, but no acts of compassion. They claim, the faith they claim without tangible love for their brethren, James says, is useless. And just because we can offer somebody correct vocab, correct theological definitions, to fail to meet their need is evidence of a dead faith.

So James is saying, if your faith looks like that, shameful, disgraceful, it's worthless. The faith I just described, can such a naked profession save someone? John wrote very similarly, but if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet clothes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. He's concerned, James is concerned about dead faith masquerading around as real faith.

It's not accompanied by works. Faith claimed in verse 14 then is inevitably just a profession of something they do not have. That's what he's going after. Faith by itself, who does not have works, is dead. And so we all know that Luther just drove him crazy, right? He thought that James should be just removed from the canon of scripture because he just didn't think it reckoned with all the other New Testament teachings. But if you could go back to the 1500s and John Calvin, who knew Luther just through letter, they never met in person. And Luther just said, this guy knows what he's talking about.

Pretty much all he said. But if Luther could travel, or excuse me, if Calvin could travel to Germany to hang out with Luther, maybe he could help his older brother in the faith, have some peace with James. No. He would say, you know, rest easy, my German brother. Let's just have a little cup of wine, just a small cup of wine. And let's talk about James and how that squares with the rest of scripture.

Luther would just roll his eyes and be like, wine? You're such a Frenchman. Let's get a mug of beer and let's have a conversation about this. This is their personality, if you don't know anything about them. But Calvin would have agreed. And he, Luther would have said, you know, John, like, I wrote a whole entire commentary on Galatians. I just don't see how that fits with James.

[18 : 35] It seems like they're contradicting one another. So clearly, we are saved through faith in Christ alone, or not by works of the law. That's what it clearly is taught. And Calvin would have said humbly and gently, and this is the only real quote of this whole conversation, but Calvin said, it is faith alone that justifies. But faith that justifies can never be alone. Pretty deep.

And if that wasn't enough to convince Luther, if he disagreed, Calvin could trump him like, well, I wrote 27, 24 New Testament commentaries, including Galatians and James. So just do what I'm saying.

And Luther would have liked the snappy comeback. He'd be like, I like you. So really, just understanding that we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. It's not adorned with good works that prove that the faith is real. So the conclusion in this part is Paul and James are not contradicting. They just have a different starting point. Not contrasting between faith and deeds as the basis of salvation, rather a contrast between true saving faith and a false faith. Any declaration of faith that we make, apart from works, James says, cannot save. It's having creed without conduct. So through faith, right, we are justified alone before God. But works justify our faith. James is dealing a healthy blow to anybody who would suggest that your faith can be separated from godly conduct. It can't. Because it always produces godliness in us. They go hand in hand. So justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. So some application, like does your lifestyle overall contradict the faith that you claim to have? What good is it if you say, or you claim you have faith, but don't have anything to really show that that faith is real?

What kind of, can that kind of faith save you? If there's anyone that you've seen in help or need that you've sort of passed over now, there are people who have issues getting food and clothing, even in our own county here. But for the most part, those needs can be met, but there's a lot of other needs. Have you bypassed someone and just given them simple words and not really help meet their need? On the other hand, don't confuse this. There's a lot of groups out there that say, hey, just help feed them and then don't share truth with them. We're not saying that at all.

We're saying they should go hand in hand. You're, I think Spurgeon said, if you're going to give someone the gospel, wrap it in a sandwich, give them a gospel track wrapped in a sandwich. So like just accompany with good deeds. So number two is a faith that is demonic. You see that in verse 18 through 19.

[21 : 54] So James anticipates an objection from the critic, right? But someone will say, you have faith and I have works arguing basically that faith and works can be separate. They don't have to go hand in hand.

And he answered that challenge by saying, oh yeah, well, show me your faith apart from your works. I will show you my faith by my works. The vitality of someone's faith is evidence through holy living and good deeds. He challenges that person like, okay, well you show me. Then he goes on and says something really strong. He's like, you believe in God is one. You do well. He's saying to this Jewish audience, you know, you know, the, you know, the Shema, hero Israel, the Lord, your God, the Lord is one.

And he's saying, you can say that and you know it, but he shocks them by saying even the demons believe that and they shudder. Someone who has dead faith is only touched by truth in the intellect, but the demons are not just touched in the intellect. They're touching the emotions. They're, they're terrified. They're afraid. They know well who God is. So he's saying basically, so you believe in God, you have correct theology, you can close scripture. Good for you. So what? No different than the demons.

That's all you have. So the characteristics of demonic faith really quickly, right? One is they clearly believe in the existence of God. They're neither atheists or agnostics. They believe in the divinity of Christ as the son of God. In Mark three, it talks about how he threw out the unclean spirits and they cried out. The demons cried out, you are the son of God. And he strictly ordered them not to make him known. The son of God, Jesus could exercise power over them. Thirdly, the demons believe in a real existence of hell. They know that there's a place of judgment and torment. When Jesus delivered that man who was possessed by demons, he said, what is your name? He said that to the demons. He said, legion, for we are many. And they begged him and he, they begged him not to

destroy them. So tell us to depart into the abyss. That's what Jesus did. So they even are aware of hell. They're aware of the divinity of Christ. They know that something's going to happen. But what makes us different than that? That's kind of like his point. Like what makes us any different? Even the demons have that kind of faith. They are well aware of who Jesus is and they're terrified of him. So what's different about the faith that you claim? So that's a shock, right? But like demons have really good theology.

They just don't love God. They don't obey him. They don't reverence him. So that's the scary thought. But thirdly and lastly, a faith that is dynamic. And we see that in verses 20 through 26. For a second time, I won't read it again, but a faith that is dynamic. And by dynamic, we mean a faith marked by steady and continuous productive growth, right? Faith that is marked by a steady, continuous, productive growth and activity. Something's happening. There's life in there. This, we would say, someone who is being sanctified, someone who's growing. So when a sinner is saved, when they're born again by the Holy Spirit, when I, that happened to me and happened to many of you. And I, I remember an old preacher saying this when I was young in the faith, but it just stuck with me for over a decade now.

[25 : 49] But he said, when someone is saved, when someone is born again, there's an inward transformation. The inward transformation leads to an outward demonstration, which leads to an upward destination kind of through that. But that's kind of like what he said. And that just stuck with me. Like something happens that leads to an outward demonstration of what's going on in here.

The Westminster Confession of Faith talks about good works in this way. These good works done in obedience to God's commands are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith. And by them, believers manifest their thankfulness to God, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, and listen to this, and adorn the profession of the gospel. That's like what good works do. They just make the gospel beautiful. And Jesus said that, right? Let all men see, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. But in verse 20, just blunt honesty, here we go, direct matter of fact, do you want to be shown, you foolish person, you vain, empty-headed person? That's like what he says. He says by itself, this kind of faith without works is useless. So you still don't believe me? You fool? Do you not see it? That there's still not registered that you can't have this claim that you love God and belong to him and have been saved by him and then have nothing to back it up? Like you completely walk in the darkness. That's what he's saying. So they're not contradicting one another, James and Paul. They're just coming at different starting points. And to prove that, he calls two witnesses.

He says, okay, I'll give you two examples. Two people that you will be familiar with, Jewish audience, and in people today. But he gives you the example of Abraham and Rahab to prove that. So Abraham was the father of their nation, the father of the faith. God made that covenant with him. The story of Abraham reveals what real faith looks like. He made that promise that through him, he was going to have descendants of many of the stars in the sky, and that through him, all the nations of the world would be blessed through Isaac. Abraham really believed that. Like he really believed God when he said that. It was reckoned to him as righteousness. That's what it says in Genesis 15, 6. But there came a day when that was tested. He had that profession. I believe I'm there. But that was tested when God, it says God tested him when he told him to take Isaac and offer him up as a burnt offering. And so the author of Hebrews tells us that Abraham believed God so much that he even knew that God would raise Isaac from the dead if he had to. That's pretty crazy. Like, I'm going to do this, but

God's going to fulfill his promise. I'm not exactly sure how, but even if you have to raise Isaac from the dead, this will happen. So his actions flowed from the realness of his faith.

[29 : 10] And that's what he said. Our father Abraham's faith in God was vindicated by his loving obedience to God when he offered up Isaac. That story demonstrates what real faith looks like. Not how someone's made righteous, right? Not by works, but what proves that that profession of faith was real. All right, so that was Abraham. It was counted to him as righteousness, reckoned to be his by faith alone.

And then he gives the example of Rahab, who was out of Joshua chapter 2. Go ahead and read that story. Great story. But she was a Gentile woman, not from the people of God, but from the enemies of God.

And she believed the news about the Hebrew God who was destroying all the enemies, destroying all his false gods. And she helped hide the Jewish spies in Jericho and helped them escape.

And she says, So at great personal risk, she acted on what she claimed to be. She was a real sin. She was a real sin. She was a real sin. She wasn't just trying to save her own skin.

[30 : 50] Amazingly, Rahab even appears in the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1, verse 5. And also as an example of real faith, this beloved Gentile woman in Hebrews 11, 31.

That's what real faith looks like, James is saying. She believed in what God had said. They believed in what God had said. Counted them as righteousness and proven by how they lived and how they responded.

So, lastly, in verse 26, he closes this by getting sort of a negative illustration of a body. So you look around the room this morning.

There's a lot of living, moving bodies around you, hopefully. Like, that's pretty much what he's saying. But a body without a soul, that life force, the body would be dead, lifeless, a corpse.

So, worthless faith is like that. A dead body just sits there, has no activity and no life. So, let's wrap this time up.

[31 : 55] Now we're tight on time. And conclusion, I mean, this is clearly a passage of warning. It's a warning passage. There's nothing upbeat about this passage. It's a kick, right?

But, and see it as love. He's trying to warn us. Like, there are people out there who think that they belong to God and don't. And if they're, what they claim to believe is not followed by a demonstration of that faith they claim to profess like they have, then that faith is worthless.

Don't, don't overthink it. Don't overthink it. That's just it. That's just what it says. Claiming to have the appearance of godliness but denying its power, right?

2 Timothy 3, 5. Just write this down. If you want to see a huge illustration of this, Matthew 25, 31 through 46, where Jesus gives that idea that there are sheep and goats.

This is what they do. And this is what it's going to look like one day on the judgment day. And clearly it's the ones who don't only claim to believe but the ones who actually obey and do what the Lord has commanded.

[33 : 07] So, but let's end on an encouraging note. Let's just be thankful. This isn't just implied directly in the passage, but let's be thankful that we are not saved by works. Who wants to take up that mantle?

Nobody. It would crush us. You cannot be good enough. You can never do enough. So I'm thankful that we are saved by faith alone in Christ.

For our sake, God made him, Jesus, who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

And if we really believe that, it's going to show in our lifestyle. Not perfectly, but it's going to be moving forward. It's going to be growing. It's going to be active and not dead. So let's help one another.

There's conversations you need to have with people. Just be careful. Do it out of love. Do it out of concern. Do it gently. Do it humbly. One of my really good friends, well, several of my really good friends, some are even here today.

[34 : 10] No names. But they came to faith because someone said, hey, I love you, but what you're saying does not square with how you're living. And they were like, what?

And the Lord used that encounter to bring them to genuine faith. That's a part of several of our stories in here, including mine. So don't be afraid to have that conversation.

But don't do people the injustice of going around being like, he's not saved. She's not saved. I don't think she's saved. Go and talk to them and actually show compassion and say, hey, I'm concerned. I don't know, but I'm just concerned. Because often other people see it and we don't. So if there's things that we need to do, ask God to give us the faith to do that.