

James Part 6

Faith / Works

James 2:14-26

Memory Verses: James 2:26

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We are in our second week of James chapter 2. Last week we saw how our faith in God determines how we treat people. If we believe in God's love for us, and if we truly love God, then we will love others in the same way, regardless if they are poor, or a stranger, or of a different ethnicity or race. One of the greatest ways the world knows we are truly Christians is the way we love others, especially those who are marginalized or discriminated against... it is the most fundamental way we put our faith into action.

This morning James takes it one step further and shows us that not only does our actions show our faith... but without Godly works we simply do not have faith. Simply put, while we all acknowledge that works without faith is not salvific, "faith without works is dead." The big question today is this.... what kind of faith really saves? Read with me **James 2:14-26**.

So before you start pulling out your pens so you can start writing out your lists of all of the religious works you need to start doing... let's get something straight here. James is not telling us that we must work for our salvation. That would go against everything you've ever heard me preach. The Bible is specific, we are saved by grace alone through faith alone.

Nor is James stating that we must add works to our faith in order to please God or validate our faith. That would mean that we must obey the law fully... and in case you missed it the past 50 times I've gone over this in places like Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, 1 John, and in about 10 other series that we've gone through... you can't fully obey the law. In fact that's one of the main purposes of the law, to show us that we can't live up to it and that we need a savior.

So what is he saying? Put simply... we don't work to be saved, we work because we are saved. James isn't telling us what to add to faith to be saved... he's telling us what type of faith saves. A faith that works. So when we place our faith in Christ and are saved, that faith will be represented by actions that show that our faith is real. And once again... those actions, those works, are not going to be 100% God glorifying all the time. We are still sinners. God isn't looking for perfection, He's looking for progress. One small step at a time. A faith that progresses is a faith that is perfect before God. Got it? Good.

And so, let me set the stage for this morning's message by defining two terms which will help clarify everything. Faith and Works. Faith means to trust God and to obey God. Trust and Obey for there's no other way, right? And we'll see why we must define faith by trust and obedience as we look at the text. If you have a faith that doesn't trust God or if you have a faith that doesn't obey God... then you don't have faith. And what do we mean by works? Do we mean the whole law? Like everything in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy? No. James has already shown us in the first part of chapter 2, in what we saw last week, that there is a royal law of love... the two greatest commandments, right? Love God and Love others. And so when James is talking about works he's talking about living a life of loving God and loving others. The main point this morning is that; **A living faith instinctively trusts, obeys, and displays God through works of love for God and others.**

And, so this morning we will see that if faith doesn't trust God or doesn't Obey God leading to a lifestyle of loving God and others... then that faith is useless, worthless, and utterly dead!

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

Let's take those one at a time.. First, **Faith Without Works Is Useless To Help The Needy**. Let's look again at **vs.14-17**. When James is talking about the needy person being without clothes or food... he's not talking about someone who has Walmart brand clothes instead of Lacoste or eating ramen instead of Olive Garden. He's talking about people who are brothers and sisters in Christ, who are covenant partners of the church, who are so impoverished or in trouble that they can't make it day to day. This friend genuinely needs our help. And so what should be our response? Perhaps it's to simply wish them well or tell them that we are thinking about them... or if you are a religious person you may even say... I'm praying for you. But what good is well wishes and thoughts and #prayers and then doing absolutely nothing else for them? What good is that? It's not.. it's useless. **Saying you'll pray, well wishes, good luck, and thoughts... are useless if not combined with practical actions.** You need both faithful prayers and practical action.

As I was studying for this message and came to this part, I must admit that I felt convicted. I tell people I'm praying for them all the time... but I don't always back it up with some sort of practical action that can actually help. And, before you come at me, I'm not suggesting at all that prayer doesn't work... but the first thing we should do when we say we are going to pray for someone is.... actually pray for them. How many of us have said they are going to pray for someone but they don't? It's a copout. It's a lie. So practically we must pray. And then, secondly we should do whatever we can to actually help in their time of need... we should take them a meal, write them a card, send them some money, offer them help in some practical way.

And of course... sometimes all you can do is pray. If you've earned the right to have a conversation about someone's spiritual state and they don't want to hear anymore on the subject... maybe prayer is all you can do. Maybe you have a friend who has gone apostate from the faith... maybe prayer is all you can do. If someone has serious medical issues and you aren't a doctor... perhaps prayer is all you can do... but if you can do something practical, do it! That's what faith does.

Now, when James says faith without works is useless... you'll see it is useless in two ways. First, it is useless for the person in need because they need more than words or thoughts. The poor and needy are blessed by God via those with abundance in the church. So, if you who are blessed with abundance in wealth, talents, and time, simply offer well wishes without actually using your wealth, talents and time to practically help... that's useless to those in need.

But it's also useless for the person in abundance. You see if you have been blessed by God with wealth, talents and time... you haven't been blessed with those gifts simply so you can build bigger houses and drive nicer cars and go on more lavish vacations. Rather, you've been blessed to be a blessing. And the more you bless others with your abundance the more God will bless you physically... and spiritually. You grow spiritually, and in godly maturity, when you serve others. And so when you just hoard your blessings without using them to bless others... those blessings become useless to you as well. You become one who disobediently and selfishly holds onto what God has commanded you to let go of... while trying to maintain an appearance of godliness. And that's exactly what's happening in this passage. The one with abundance rather than actually helping simply says... "hey, man God bless you. Put on some clothes and go get some food." You've in practice become like the pharisees who Jesus called white washed tombs. Hypocrites who pretended to care for the needy but only really cared for themselves.

This mirrors the teaching of Christ in **Matthew 25:40-43**, where Christ separates the sheep from the goats. Those who cared for the needy by actually meeting their needs were blessed, but those who failed to care for the needy were cursed. The point is clear... a real faith in God sees the love and blessings of God as a conduit by which we love and bless others. **A love for God translates into a love for others.** And that's why we can say without a doubt that **A living faith instinctively trusts, obeys, and displays God through works of love for God and others.**

So faith without works is useless and secondly, **Faith Without Works Is Worthless To Save Sinners.** Look with me again at **vs.18-26**. Here in vs18 James is saying that some may argue that faith and works can be separated (some have faith and some have works... and the two probably shouldn't mix). And so James rebuts this argument in a couple

of ways. First, he says... show me your faith. Simple... just show me your faith. Well faith is hard to see, right? Faith is in your heart and in your mind. And so... you can't merely show your faith. To illustrate... we have **two chairs** here. Me and chairs have a love hate relationship. Let's just say that over the last year... I've broken a few chairs. I've lost faith in certain types of chairs.. mainly plastic ones. Here we have a chair that I have zero faith to hold me... but here is a chair that I have absolute faith will hold me... it's made of steel. This chair represents Jesus. Here's what James is saying... if you have faith in that chair... just take a seat. If you have faith in Jesus put the full weight of your life upon him. The one guy says... nah I'll just stand. I could sit... I trust that that chair will hold me... but I'm good standing. James says.. show me your faith. Sit in the chair.

But once again, our hypothetical friend says; "of course I have an orthodox belief in Jesus as savior.. I can even write a book about my faith and it would match exactly what the Bible says about God, Christ, Man's Sin, and Jesus' salvation. So James counters... that's not good enough... even the demons can do that... probably even better... and they are in no way shape or form in Christ. So, if the demons of hell believe in Jesus as the Christ, saving faith must be more than just a faith that believes in Jesus. Get this... **"intellectual ascent to correct doctrine is not salvation" – Matt Chandler.** So don't talk about it... show me it... just sit down. There are plenty who talk about their faith but can't show it, proving that you can know all that can be known about the doctrine of Christ and still be lost.

First, James makes it clear that faith can't be shown without actually doing something, secondly James makes it clear that sound doctrine alone cannot save someone, and lastly, to drive his point home, James uses two examples to prove that faith cannot be separated from works. Faith alone saves but not faith that is alone. In vs.21 James points us to Abraham. You know Father Abraham had many sons. Do you remember when Paul in **Romans 4:3** made the claim that Abraham was saved in the same way we are saved... through faith in Christ. His faith was one in the promise of the coming messiah... ours is a faith in the messiah who has already come... but it's the same faith. Well, here James tells us how the faith of Abraham saved him. He sat in the chair. He said... I believe what God has said so much that I will put the weight of my life on him .. I will sit in the chair. I will do whatever he asks... I will trust him no matter what. And how exactly did Abraham sit in the chair... by offering up his son Isaac to be sacrificed on the altar. Think about the faith it would take for someone to trust God and be obedient to God in that. But Abraham did trust God and so he obeyed God. **Genesis 15:3** tells us that Abraham's belief in God was seen through his works and those works were credited to him as righteousness... not his own righteousness... but the righteousness of God. When Abraham trusted and obeyed God he was saved!

So Abraham... of course he had a saving faith... But then James

points us to Rahab? There's no songs about Rahab. Why? Maybe there should be. Who was Rahab? Well she was a prostitute. She was a prostitute in Canaan which means that she was bottom of the rung, used and abused in every way imaginable, and she had had a very rough life. But then word came that perhaps deliverance was coming for her through the Israelites. When the Israeli spies came to her she put her trust in God... she had faith in God. But not just a faith that talks... a faith that was real, a faith that works. She sat in the chair by hiding the spies. And now she is our heritage in Christ as she is mentioned in his lineage! Get this.. Rahab the prostitute had a better faith than many who go to church, claim a faith in Christ, and live in religious piety.

You see... it's one thing to say you believe or have faith... its something entirely else to put your faith into practice and sit in the chair. You've all heard the testimonies of those who were so far from Christ that they were in drugs, alcohol, gangs, sexual sin, etc... when they get saved the change is obvious. But what about the testimonies of those who grew up in the church? Those who's faith was always that of their parents. Those who knew everything right to say... they knew the jargon and could easily pretend to have a real faith... but didn't. And then one day that faith became real and it's obvious because they lived it out. There whole life they tried to show their faith by merely... talking about it, dressing the part, who knows... but they never sat down. Now they sit in Christ and it's awesome. Here's the **Testimony** of someone who was like that.

So what James is saying is that there are those who claim faith, are connected to a community of faith, express an orthodox faith, they even support the faith... but they do not love God and it has not led to them loving others and they are not saved! Faith without works cannot save. **A living faith instinctively trusts, obeys, and displays God through works of love for God and others**

Application

So let's practically break this down. You have to have a faith in God to be saved. But that faith can't just be an orthodox understanding of the doctrine of salvation in Christ. You can't just stand there and say I believe... and never sit down in the chair. **A faith that saves is a faith that works**. And so rather than giving you a list of works with which to work out your salvation with fear and trembling... I want to talk to you about a love for God that leads to a desire for God that leads to a devotion for God.

I do works because I desire to...because I love God... not to earn God's love. I don't do dinner for the family, take my wife on dates, fold laundry, etc... because I'm trying to earn my wife's love... no I do those

things for my wife because I desire to, because I love her. But what would you assume about my love for my wife if I never did the honey do list or do the chores, or take her on dates, or buy her flowers after she's had a bad day... you'd assume that maybe I don't love her the way I profess... and you'd be right. Faith works because love leads to devotion.

I also do works because they lead me to a greater desire and devotion for God. I don't pray, read the word, go to church to earn my salvation or to even validate my faith... remember even the demons believe. No, we do these disciplines because by doing so we will grow in our love for God. If you love God you will trust God, you will obey God, and you will display God. **A living faith instinctively trusts, obeys, and displays God through works of love for God and others**

Conclusion

One last thing and we will close. If I were to ask our first responders this morning... if you get a call about someone unconscious and you arrive on the scene... how do you determine if they are alive or not? Breathing? Heart beating? Pulse? Response to light in their eyes? If this is how we determine whether a body is alive... if the heart, lungs, eyes are working... why then is it not okay to determine whether a faith is alive by whether their trust, obedience, and love are working? **Vs26** says for as the body apart from the spirit is dead.. so faith apart from works is dead. If you are here this morning and you don't have a faith which trusts God, or obeys God... you don't have a love for God... and therefore you don't have a genuine love for people... then stop calling yourself a Christian. I don't care if when you were a kid you walked down the aisle and said a prayer and filled out a dedication card. I don't care if you've called yourself a Christian your whole life. I don't care if by confessing that you aren't a Christian that you will feel dumb or silly... this morning we are talking about life or death. This morning you need to truly consider whether you truly are saved because you have a living faith that instinctively trusts, obeys, and displays God through works of love for God and for others... or if you have a dead faith that is useless and worthless. And if you come to the realization that your faith is dead, useless, and worthless... because you don't trust God, obey God, and display a love for God and others... then this morning you can change all of that by repenting of your sins and putting your trust in him and begin to walk in a real faith that truly saves.

So let me ask you some questions...

• does your faith lead you to loving and meeting the needs of others?
• does your faith trust God and obey God and display God by sitting in the chair like Abraham and Rahab?

• does your love for God lead you to desire prayer, reading his word, and fellowship with the body of Christ ... or are you doing those things because you want to continue to keep up the facade that you

are what you really aren't? **A living faith instinctively trusts, obeys, and displays God through works of love for God and others**