

# “Faith” Alone?

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we're going to finish chapter 2 today. So we're going to start at verse number 14. James chapter 2, verse number 14. And our brother Corey is serving us this morning reading scripture.

! You sure can read from right there if you'd like. What good is 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 in daily food, and one of you 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 that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.

[ 1 : 17 ] And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. And he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by the works, and not by faith alone.

And in the same way, was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers, and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Thanks, Corey. Father, we are grateful to be here. We're grateful to have enjoyed the privilege of singing these songs of our faith, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

We're grateful to be reminded of your presence with us. And so, Holy Spirit, as we now turn our attention to the preaching of your word, we ask in particular that you would help us today.

Would you please help me today to say those things that are true and helpful and meaningful? Would you please take away anything out of my mind, even something now that I'm planning to say, maybe something that's written in my notes that is not going to be helpful, that will be distracting, that will be confusing or disorienting?

[ 2 : 43 ] Would you please cause that to be taken away so that we hear those things from your word today that are most helpful for giving us clarity and understanding?

We so want to be faithful to your word. And we so want to be not only hearers, but doers. And in order to be hearers and doers, we need to understand what your word says.

So would you please help us today, Holy Spirit? Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your death on the cross that makes all of this possible and meaningful and real and relevant to us.

Thank you, Father, for loving us before time began, for choosing us and calling us to faith through the preaching of the gospel. We ask that you would encourage our hearts, watch over us as we continue in worship.

In Jesus' name, amen. Two imperatives for us today as we look at this text.

[ 3 : 47 ] I wrote these at the top of my notes. I don't always do this, but I do want to share these with you today because these are the two things that must happen today in my mind in order for us to get this text.

Number one, what this sermon must do. It must explain that there is a faith that does not save.

And the second imperative, what this sermon cannot do, is reduce our clarity or our conviction about being saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

That's my mission. Those are our two imperatives, and we believe that the Holy Spirit will help us as we continue in this time.

Some fireplaces are not real. You've probably seen one. They can look really nice. They can have a beautiful field stone display, a setting.

[ 5 : 01 ] Maybe there's one of those reclaimed wood mantles or distressed wood, I think sometimes they're called. I love the way that looks, even if it's kind of fakey. I still kind of like the way distressed wood looks.

Maybe there's some realistic-looking logs inside. Maybe there's a soft, you know, orange kind of a flicker.

And maybe it's even wired up and they've got a little crackling fire sound. So it's very authentic in appearance. But there is no wood. There is no fuel.

There is no actual flame. And as a result, there is no heat. Some fireplaces are not real. It's a fireplace, in air quotes.

But it's not a real fireplace. In our text today, James explains that some faith, in air quotes, isn't real faith.

[ 6 : 09 ] Because real faith is always accompanied by works. Faith that works is faith that is real.

James is teaching, following Jesus 101. Let's review quickly where we have been so far.

Chapter 1 and verse 18. By his own will, the Father of lights gave us life, brought us into community, and made us the first fruits of his new creation.

That means followers of Jesus are evidence of God's ongoing work of redemption. Chapter 1 and verse 22.

We are called to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Those who hear, those who hear, but do not do, they deceive themselves.

[ 7 : 07 ] What might that look like? Well, you might consider yourself a, quote, religious person. But if you don't control your mouth, James says, you are self-deceived, and your so-called religion, in air quotes, is worthless.

Why? Verse 27, chapter 1. Because pure and undefiled religion, true religion, looks like this. It cares for orphans and widows in their distress.

Chapter 2 and verse 1. If you claim to have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but you are partial to the powerful, or prejudiced against the poor, then there's a problem with your faith.

If you say that you love Jesus, you must love like Jesus. Faith and favoritism are incompatible.

And today, we're going to see that faith and works are inseparable. Look at verse number 14.

[ 8 : 27 ] What good is it, my brothers and sisters? If someone says he has faith, but does not have works, can that faith save him?

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed, poorly clothed, same word from Jesus' parable, Matthew 25, verse 46, 36, same word as naked.

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed, and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

Last week, you may recall that James offered a parable of sorts. And like last week, he seems to do that again here.

Imagine that Lois and I are just sitting down for dinner, and there's a knock at our door. And I go to the door, and there, standing at the door, is a family of four.

[ 9 : 44 ] Their clothes are stained and torn. It's clear that they have not showered in several days, and I say to them, hey, what's going on?

We've lost everything. All that we have are the clothes that are on our backs.

We went to the homeless shelter this week to get help, but they don't have any room for us. The last time we ate a meal, a real meal, it was three days ago.

Now, suppose I say to this family, I'm a follower of Jesus. God bless you.

I hope you stay warm tonight, and I hope your stomachs get full. My thoughts and prayers are with you.

[ 10 : 53 ] And then I close the door and go back to my dinner. What good is that? What good is it, verse number 14, to have that faith?

Faith in air quotes. What good is it to have faith that says, God bless you, but turns away those in need?

Can we agree that faith that refuses to help, that is a good for nothing faith? Can the kind of faith that produces no works, can that be saving faith?

And the implied answer is no. Well, why not? Well, because faith by itself, verse 17, if it does not have works, is dead.

Now, hold on just a minute, preacher, because I've heard a thing or two being at church. I know how this works.

[ 12 : 27 ] Hold on just a minute. Verse number 18, 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.

Now, this is a challenging verse. This is a challenging verse. Follow this with me because it will help us, I think, if we get this right. Based on James' argument so far, based on his telling of this parable, based on what he has said about faith, what objection do we expect this person to have?

Verse 18. What do we expect the objection to be? We expect the person to say, well, James, I have faith and you have works and that should be good enough.

But instead, the objection is what? You have works and I have faith. Sorry, instead the objection is you have faith and I have works.

how are we to understand this? I hope these are two clarifying observations. First, notice, notice how James quickly rejects the notion that faith and works can be separated.

[ 13 : 56 ] Do you see that there in the middle of the verse? Show me your faith apart from your works. James is responding to something that this objector is saying.

Show me your faith apart from your works. But notice, secondly, that James doesn't take this personally. James doesn't try to prove his faith by his works.

He doesn't list out the ways that he has served orphans and widows and cared for his neighbor and so on. So it seems, it seems that we ought to understand this phrase at the beginning of verse 18.

You have faith and I have works. with indefinite pronouns. In other words, perhaps best to read it like this. One person can have faith and another person can have works and they don't always have to be together.

Faith and works are both acceptable to God. to which James says, okay, show me your faith without pointing to your works.

[ 15 : 14 ] prove it. Prove that you have faith. Prove that you have been saved by grace through faith without pointing to your works.

Anyone can say I have faith. Anyone can say I believe in God. Verse 19, you believe that God is one? you do well.

It's like James is saying, good for you. I think someone in my family used to say, well, la-di-da. It's kind of like that, right? Good for you.

You believe that God is one? You quote the Shema and you think that's it? Good for you. even the demons believe and shudder.

If you think that faith and works can be separated, James says you're worse than a demon. Why? Well, because even a demon who believes that there is one God, even that demon shudders when he considers God.

[ 16 : 34 ] But you, you claim to have this faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 1. You claim to have belief in the one true God, verse 19, but you are indifferent to the poor in need.

What good is that? Faith that does not act was never alive. children, do you ever young people, I should say children and young people, children and young people, do you ever recall hearing your parent say something like this?

Don't make me come up there. Or maybe if you're in the car, it sounds like this. Don't make me stop this car. I think that's the tone of verse number 20.

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, do I have to come over there and show you this? Do I have to stop this car to get your attention?

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.

[ 18 : 09 ] You see that 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 and he was called a friend of God.

Now, if you're James, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and you're at this point in your argument and you need a good illustration, you don't have to look any farther than Abraham.

Father Abraham to the Jewish people. This would be meaningful to this Jewish community of new Christians. This is Father Abraham who had many sons.

Father Abraham. Every Jew would recognize this. Abraham believed God. Genesis chapter 15. That's faith. And something else makes him a perfect example.

After believing God in Genesis 15, in Genesis 18, Abraham shows hospitality to three visitors who show up at his door, which leads directly to the promise of a son.

[ 19 : 30 ] A son who, in Genesis 22, God says, I want you to sacrifice your son, Isaac, to me. Abraham's faith acted.

His faith, verse number 22, was active along with his works. Get this. It's not that Abraham had faith, and then he had works, and once he had both of them, he had what it took to be saved.

No. Abraham's faith worked itself out through works. His faith was, James says, completed by his works.

His obedience brought faith to its maturity, its telos, to the design that God intended.

His belief became visible through his works. His faith and God's verdict of his faith in Genesis chapter 15 were given their ultimate significance.

[ 20 : 57 ] They were fulfilled, you might say, when Abraham offered up Isaac. Abraham's faith. faith. It was inseparable from his work.

And that's what made him the friend of God. James does not offer Abraham as an example of faith before works.

Another famous author of the Bible will take up that argument. James doesn't offer Abraham as an example of faith before works. James offers Abraham as an example, as a model of faith that works.

So you see that, verse 24. A person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

And in the same way, was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

[ 22 : 12 ] Why did James choose Rahab? Well, I think because like Abraham, Rahab showed hospitality.

She showed mercy to visitors who showed up at her door. two men were spying out the land of Canaan and specifically the city of Jericho and the king finds out that they made their way into Rahab's house and he demands that she give them up.

She should have turned them over to the king. She could have been more concerned about saving her own skin, reducing the risk for her own family.

She might have just ignored the stories of how God delivered his people from their slavery in Egypt. Or, she could have heard everything about God and believed that it was all true and kept that so-called faith, in air quotes, separate from her works and refused to help the spies in need.

But, like Abraham, Rahab believed and like Abraham, her faith worked and faith that works is faith that's real.

[ 23 : 50 ] this leads to James, this leads James to a dramatic conclusion in verse 26. For, as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

when a spirit and a body are separated, all that's left behind is a corpse.

And, when faith and works are separated, all that's left is dead air quote faith.

workless faith is worthless like a dead body. Faith is proven by practice, not merely by profession.

Faith that does not have works, that faith is like a fireplace with a flickering light, but no wood, no fuel, no heat.

[ 25 : 19 ] It might look convincing from a distance, but it doesn't change the temperature in the room, and it doesn't warm the people who gather there.

That kind of faith, according to James, faith that does not have works is no good, verse 14. It's a good for nothing faith.

It is unable to save, also, verse 14. It is useless, verse 20, and it is dead, verse 17 and verse 26.

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, faith that saves, but the faith that saves, is never alone.

True faith is always accompanied by works. Works bring faith to its completion. Since faith that doesn't have works is no good, faith, then let's be discontent merely knowing the right words, and singing the right songs, and defending the right doctrines.

[ 26 : 46 ] This week, may our confession be demonstrated through our compassion.

salvation. After all, anyone can claim to have faith. Even a demon can claim to have that kind of faith.

So, you might ask yourself, where is my faith invisible? And what would it look like to have faith that works? Maybe that means repenting and apologizing, seeking forgiveness from someone that you've wronged.

Maybe faith that works looks like giving generously instead of half-heartedly. Maybe faith that works looks like being present with a friend, a co-worker, a family member in need, listening with patience and graciousness, and then speaking truth in love.

Perhaps, like Abraham, God is calling you to faith that works right now. Right now.

[ 28 : 03 ] Before you understand all of the details of what he's asking. Perhaps God is calling you to faith that works rather than postponing your obedience until you have every detail sorted out in your own head.

Trust in the Lord. with all your heart, even when you don't fully understand, because you won't, and I won't. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will direct your path.

Proverbs chapter 3. Like Rahab, faith that works may be risky. It may be socially unacceptable.

It may be culturally unpopular. But welcoming someone who is usually left out, and bridging social, racial, or political boundaries, using whatever influence God gives you to protect rather than to prefer.

These are the works of faith that Jesus modeled for us, aren't they? His faith in God motivated Jesus' perfect obedience, not just in his life, but also in his death.

[ 29 : 34 ] Because of Jesus, it's true. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone. And that faith is never alone.

That faith is good for something faith. Active, living, not faith plus works. Faith that works.

True faith, we remember, is tested. And steadfastness through suffering, it results in the delightful gift of becoming wiser with our Savior Jesus.

And this wisdom that we are learning shapes us. Shapes us in humble holiness, gentle reasonableness, merciful goodness.

Every word we speak, every choice we make, every need we encounter is an opportunity to make our faith visible, to testify to our Father's goodness, to offer hope and healing through lives changed by the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 30 : 49 ] Christ. And so, my beloved brothers and sisters, may our faith never be alone. May we have eyes to see and hearts that empathize and hands that respond with more than thoughts and prayers.

May what we believe about God become believable through us because faith is proven by what you practice, not merely by what you profess.

By God's grace, let's be doers of the word and not hearers only. Let's pray. Father, for your kindness and your grace, we give you thanks.

Lord Jesus, for your humility and condescension and perfect faith and obedience, we give you thanks. Holy Spirit, for your life-giving power and for connecting us eternally to our Savior, Jesus, we give you thanks.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we confess these truths that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

[ 32 : 26 ] And we understand that that faith is never alone. would you please give us faith that works and where our faith has softened and mellowed into mere words, into mere profession, into some sort of a title that we might wear of being a follower of Jesus, and yet we recognize that there is no reality, there is no confirmation of our faith by the life that we are living, would you please stir up in us faith that works.

We ask this, believing that you have work for us to do on this earth, believing that we have friends and family members, neighbors, co-workers, contacts that need to come in contact with the gospel, would you please give us eyes to see them and help us to meet real practical needs.

Give us compassion and empathy and grace that we don't even know that we need yet to be the kind of people who show their faith by their works.

We ask this, believing that you will do this for your glory and our good. In the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.