

Sermon Topic: Engagement – Walking in Active Faith and Good Works
 Sermon Text: James 2:14-26 (NIV)

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Big Idea: Faith without action is useless in achieving anything good for God. A man or woman who tries to be an idle believer will be a fruitless and unfulfilled person.

Introduction

- Read the label carefully
- Fake Rice vs Real Rice
- Fake Faith vs Real Faith

Who is James?

- Half-brother of Jesus (Jn 7:5), unbeliever until post-resurrection (Gal 1:19), became one of the key leaders and pillars of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-22, Gal 2:9)

What is James’ Motivation For Writing?

Written to “respectable backsliders” who lived a life of comfort, ease and luxury, with little practical concern for any needy person. James wanted them to know that the Gospel of our Lord has rather different concerns.

What is James’ key thought in Passage?

- ⇒ IS NOT centered on personal salvation, i.e. it is not about how to save oneself
 - ⇒ IS NOT to contrast between faith and works
 - ⇒ IS TO clarify if faith alone can save someone with practical needs
 - ⇒ IS TO contrast between faith with actions and faith without actions
- James exhorts us not to be careless; our faith must look beyond ourselves.

1st Truth: God doesn't want us to have a faith that does no good to anyone.

1. **It is possible to be saved by faith and be inactive in works of good** (vs 14).
 - James addresses his hearers as brothers and sisters. They are Christians
2. **It is possible to be saved by faith and be insensitive to the practical needs of others** (vs 15-16)
 - Although these Christians comfort with words, they did nothing practical to ease discomfort. Real needs are not met with action.
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3. **It is possible to be saved by faith and be defensive about the lack of good works** (vs 18)
 - Defensive reasoning for their lack of action: "I have faith, you have deeds". The "reason" is attributed to different spiritual giftings.
 - James asks: does it take us to have special gifting to be merciful to someone in need of clothes and food?
 - James challenges: "show me your faith" (vs 18b)
 - Make your faith visible. Demonstrate it. Produce action consistent with your faith. Show me. Because up to now, this faith of yours is truly invisible.

2nd Truth: God doesn't just want us to have good theology but empty morality.

1. **It is possible that demons believe in the same truth as us** (vs 19)
 - Basic Jewish affirmation confessed daily in prayer.
 - Simply believing "God is one" makes no difference.
 - Even demons believe "God is One", but remains unchanged by belief.
 - A faith that believes but not act is "dead". This faith is barren and fruitless.
 - The day our faith becomes numb to the golden rule of loving our neighbor is the day our faith shrinks and begins to die. Our faith becomes an empty belief.

3rd Truth: Our faith with action of love proves we are alive in Christ.

- **It is not sufficient to be justified by faith alone. It is also important to be justified by works** (vs 24)
 - Did James contradict Paul?

Gal 2:16	Paul: ...a person is justified not by the works of law but through faith in Jesus Christ
Jas 2:21	James: ...our ancestor Abraham justified by works [of faith] when he offered his son Isaac on the altar
Rm 3:28	Paul: ...a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law
Jas 2:24	James: ...a person is justified by works [of faith] and not by faith alone

Word	Person	“Works” in the phrase refers to	Emphasis
“Works”	Paul	Works of the law and works of self-effort that can never make any person right in the sight of God. Initial conversion is a work of God’s grace. Faith is passive because we do nothing to earn God’s relationship.	Paul was emphasizing the free gift of salvation.
	James	Works of faith resulting from trust in Jesus. Loving and obedient action is a product of a person’s genuine fellowship with God.	James was emphasizing Christian responsibility.

- James was not contradicting Paul but correcting those who distorted Paul’s teaching of grace. Those wealthy, hyper-grace subscribers who refused to change their behavior after conversion.
- James pointed to Abraham and Rahab:
 - Both had initial faith where they did nothing to earn salvation.
 - Both demonstrated actions of faith out of obedience to God as they grow in relationship to God.
 - Action and faith can never be separated. They go hand in hand.

Modern day paraphrase of same passage:

Dear Child,

I want you to know that God initiates faith in your heart so you can know Him. But it is never God’s intention for you to stay passive. I’m concern for you to have real saving faith, not fake faith. If your faith doesn’t work through love, it is dead faith, it is demon faith (vs 19) and it is useless. True faith, however, produces fruit of love. Don’t let your faith be without action and without life change. Follow the example of Abraham and Rahab who believed and acted. Let your saving faith produce actions that engage the needy. By this you prove you’re alive to Christ.

*Your fellow servant,
St James*

Discussion Questions:

- 1) According to James and Paul, what evidence indicates that a person is truly a believer?
- 2) As you think about James’ exhortation to do what the Word teaches, what proof do you see in your life that your confession of faith in Christ is real? If you asked the people closest to you, what evidence of a genuine faith in Christ would they point to in your life?
- 3) Identify someone in your family, neighborhood or workplace who has a practical need. Share how you would like to meet that need. Pray for one another. Do it and update in the next gathering.