

“JAMES” SERIES

#5: “Dead Faith”

SCRIPTURE: James 2:14-26

¹What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and 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? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But 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. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and 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. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵And 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? ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

INTRO:

James moves from the royal law of loving your neighbor as yourself to saying, ***“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?”*** You see, if you love your neighbor as yourself, you will do good works on his behalf. This is the outcome of loving your neighbor.

So, first of all,

NOTE THAT JAMES SAYS THAT SAVING FAITH AND GOOD WORKS GO TOGETHER (14-17).

It’s like the proverbial horse and carriage – they go together. The apostle Paul emphasized the importance of faith; James emphasizes the importance of works. Together, they balance the doctrine of saving faith.

He gives us an example of the “works” he’s referring to: ***“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?”***

Now, do you see how this ties in with the previous verses in this chapter? The “works” involve the actions that you take because of the faith you have in Jesus and the love that you

have, for God, for yourself, and for your neighbor. You have compassion for a brother or sister who needs clothing and daily food, so you see that they get clothed and fed. If you sympathize but don't take action, you haven't helped them at all. They're still naked, so to speak, and hungry.

I struggle with this some, as I get phone calls fairly regularly from people in need. Few of them are looking for food or clothing; most are looking for financial help – money to pay utility bills or rent. I have no way of helping them except from my own pocket, and they usually live outside the Village, so I direct them to some other source. I feel badly about it, but I have no way of checking them out, and I would need to do this because I don't know if they're genuinely in need or not. One thing I always do is ask if they have revealed their need to their home church. Nine out of ten say that they don't have a home church. I invite them to Village Christian and tell them that we take care of our own.

Personally, I support my own family when they're in need, and I support organizations like The Salvation Army, St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, the American Diabetes Association, The Alzheimer's Association, and a few others.

But the point here is: Saving faith produces loving works.

Second,

HE SAYS THAT FAITH APART FROM WORKS IS USELESS (18-19)

Some teach that James contradicts the writings of the apostle Paul, who made it very clear that salvation is by faith and cannot be earned by good works. These are those who generally teach that we are saved by faith "alone." But Paul didn't teach that we are saved by faith alone even though in Galatians 2:16 he wrote: ***"...we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ..."*** Notice that he says, ***"by works of the law."*** What "law" was he referring to? He was referring to the law of Moses. He was not saying that works have no place; he was saying that we are not saved by ***"works of the law."*** The problem he was addressing was that Jewish believers couldn't let go of the Law of Moses; they even wanted Gentile converts to adhere to the Law.

Some reason that baptism isn't necessary for us Gentiles since we are saved by our faith. Baptism, they say, is for the Jews – that when Peter said, ***"repent and be baptized, every one of you,"*** on the day of Pentecost, he was speaking to Jews – our works don't save us, and baptism, if it's a work, it's a work of *obedience*, not a "work of *the law*" – in fact, it isn't a work at all. It's not something that we do; it's something that is done *to* us. It's part of the obedience that testifies of our faith.

The "faith" he's talking about here is belief in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, something that even the demons believe. He says that if your faith is real, saving faith, it will produce the same kind of good works of obedience that he gives examples of.

Faith is like a root and the good works we do are like the tree that grows from that root. If no tree grows from the root, then it indicates that the root is dead, useless. Jesus taught in John 15 that He is the vine and that we are the branches. If we live “in Him,” we will produce fruit – that is to say, we will do good things for the kingdom. If we don’t produce fruit, we are useless and will be pruned and destroyed.

Finally,

HE CITES TWO EXAMPLES OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORKS OF OBEDIENCE (21-25).

The first is Abraham, the father of the faith. After obeying God when he was called, after waiting years for God to keep His promise of a son, became the father he wanted to be at the age of 100. Genesis 22:1-13 tells what happened:

22 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So, they went both of them together.⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So, they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son.¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

James then comments, ²¹ ***Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?*** ²² ***You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works...*** His “works” consisted of being obedient to what he was told to do.

So, what are **we** told to do?

1. In John 3 we are told to get reborn “***...of the water and the Spirit...***”;
2. In John 8 Jesus said, “***abide in my word...***”;
3. In Luke 13 He said, “***...unless you repent, you will...perish***”;
4. In Luke 14 He said, that we must “***...bear (our) own cross and come after (Him)***”;
5. Acts 2:38 tells us to “***...repent and be baptized...***”;
6. In Matthew 28 He tells us to “***Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you***”;
7. In Revelation 2 He says to “***...be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life.***”

And I could go on and on with what Jesus told us to do, in His own words or in the words of Scripture. Do we have to do these things to be saved? Of course.

The second example is that of Rahab. Joshua 2 records her story. When the twelve Israelite spies were sent into Canaan, she hid them and helped them make it safely back across the Jordan.

James says of her: “***...was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?***”

HE THEN MAKES A CONCLUSIVE STATEMENT (24, 26).

He says, “***You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. . . For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.***”

Do you know the meaning of the word “***justified***”? The Greek word is DIKAI00, which means “to deem to be right; to show to be right or righteous.” We might say that we have been “***justified,***” we are being “***justified,***” and in the end will be “***justified.***”

I was taught that a good way to understand the word “***justified***” is to think of it as “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned. Say it with me: “JUST-AS-IF-I’D” NEVER SINNED. Again: “JUST-AS-IF-I’D” NEVER SINNED.

What is a ***“body apart from the spirit”***? It’s a DEAD body. So, what is believing in Jesus ***“apart from works”*** of obedience? DEAD faith.

CONCLUSION:

So, is your faith expressed in obedience? Does your obedience reveal the genuineness of your faith? Shall we go down the list again? I don’t thin I need to. What is it that you need to do to make your faith truly “saving faith”? Do you need to be baptized? Do you need to get active in the church? Do you need to share the gospel with someone? What do YOU need to do?