

**FAITH THAT WORKS - PART 5:
"TRUE FAITH WORKS"
JAMES 2:14-26**

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us.

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Sermon Series Introduction

Today, we're in Part 5 of our sermon series called "Faith That Works" - Where we're going through the book of James together.

The title of today's sermon is "True Faith Works."

Before we begin, let me pray for us.

<prayer>

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Sermon Introduction

Growing up, my family had this cute little dog - a small pug - that's always on the staircase... always sleeping. And I'd just look at this doggy, and it looks so peaceful... sleeping and breathing... you can even see its chest rising and falling.

But really, that's all it can do. Literally.

Because this small pug was actually just a toy that's powered by batteries. It's not actually alive, but just appears to be alive.

But if you look at it long enough, you can see that there's no sign of life. It looks real, but a real dog would do something - run, eat, bark - and grow. Now those are signs of life. But this toy dog - no matter how long you stare at it - will never show those signs.

And in today's passage, we'll also be looking at something that's either alive or not alive. We'll be looking, not at dogs, but at faith - living faith vs. dead faith.

And just like how a toy dog does nothing, James is gonna show us that dead faith also does nothing and is useless, while living faith is evidenced by our actions.

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The One Thing

Dead faith is useless, but living faith is evidenced by our works.

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to James 2:14-26.

James, the brother of Jesus, is writing this letter to his fellow brothers in sisters in Christ.

- And as they're going through various trials and temptations, James encourages them to remain steadfast in their faith.
- Last week, we saw how they're not to show partiality or discrimination toward others - Because partiality contradicts God's evaluation, law, and mercy.

Now, James understands that - after what he's shared thus far - some people may have questions...

They may be thinking, *"James, so far... you've been telling us to do a lot of things: to remain steadfast, to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, and to not show partiality, but aren't you focusing too much on works... when it's really faith that matters?"*

So now James clarifies that - yes - it's faith in Christ that saves us from our sins, but true faith in Christ is evidenced by our works. So in that sense, we shouldn't overlook our actions either.

With that in mind, let's read James 2:14-26...

James 2:14-26 (ESV)

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

18 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. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 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; 23 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. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 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? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

This is God's Word.

Overview

- I. Dead faith is useless (vv. 14-19)
 - II. Living faith is evidenced (vv. 20-26)
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I. Dead faith is useless (vv. 14-19)

Let's look at verse 14 - James asks, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"

Now, before we get to the answer, let's be sure we understand what James is actually asking here...

What he's not asking is whether or not 'faith in Christ' can save us from our sins (that's never questioned).

But he's describing a hypothetical situation, "What if someone says he has faith in Christ?" - So imagine if someone you know says that they're a Christian and that they believe in Jesus (so it's a self-declaration), but then you see that their faith does not have works...

Meaning... that when you observe their lives... They're not showcasing the kind of Gospel-centered works that we'd expect to see from a follower of Christ - So they're not slow to anger, but quick to anger. And they're not extending love and mercy to everyone, but showing partiality (or discrimination) against the poor.

So then notice how the question is not "Can faith save him?" but "Can that faith save him?" So James is distinguishing here between real faith that results in Gospel-centered works VS. that faith that doesn't result in good works.

And since his questions are rhetorical, the answers are implied and should be obvious... *"No, of course that kind of fruitless faith is no good. No, of course that kind of fruitless faith cannot save."*

Because what good is your faith if it doesn't change the way you live? It's useless.

<pause>

And James shows us just how useless it is...

Let's look at verses 15-16 - He gives an illustration...

Imagine if one day, you see a brother or sister in Christ - a fellow member of our church - poorly clothed.

- In the original language, "poorly clothed" also means "naked" - so the description is even more striking; this church member doesn't have enough clothes to cover themselves properly.
 - So imagine how horrible it'd be for them if it rains or if it's cold and windy.
- And you can see that they're also lacking in daily food (which means that they don't have enough food to eat for the day).
 - Imagine how difficult it must be for them to constantly feel hungry...

Now imagine if you see this church member, and then you just say to them, "*Go in peace, be warmed and filled... I really hope you stay warm and eat well. See you on Sunday.*" But then you don't actually give them the things that they truly need (when you actually could have). And then you just walk away... What's wrong with that picture?

What's wrong here is not what was said - because what's said was actually quite a nice prayer of blessings. But what's wrong here is that they're just empty words.

So that's why James repeats the same rhetorical question, "What good is that?" / "What good are empty words?"

The answer, again, should be obvious, "It's no good at all."

Empty words without action to back it up... means nothing.

This is James' point: Just as empty words without action means nothing... It's the same with someone's empty words saying that they have faith in Christ and that they're a Christian. That self-declaration of faith is just empty words and means nothing if there's no action to back it up. It's useless.

That's why James says in verse 17 - "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

And just as dead words cannot save this poor brother or sister from their current predicament, so also dead faith (without works) cannot save anyone from their sins.

<pause>

But look at verse 18 - James is expecting opposition here - "But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works."

James expects that others may disagree with him, and someone may say, "No... faith without works doesn't necessarily mean that it's useless. Because no one is the same, everyone has different giftings. Some people have more faith, and some people have more works."

So James is aware that people can be defensive. In our self-centeredness and sinfulness, our tendency is to be slow to listen and quick to speak, and we tend to be defensive when others correct us (we don't like to be wrong). So James expects some people to justify themselves, saying, *"Hey, you can't expect me to be like that because that's not how I'm like. Some people are more gifted to do more works than others - Some people have more resources, so they can be the ones to give to others. Some people are naturally more loving and patient and compassionate, so they can be the ones to care more for others. But just because I'm not 'gifted in those kinds of works', doesn't mean that I don't have faith."*

To this James would say, *"Then how can you show that you have true faith in Christ if not through your action? You can't."*

That's why he then says, "I will show you my faith by my works."

So James is saying that faith and good works are inseparable. The connection between the 2 is that through our works... our true faith in Christ is evidenced.

<pause>

So if we're to turn this connection into a mathematical equation. What James is saying is: "Faith = Salvation + Good Works."

- So because of our faith in Christ, we have salvation. And because of our faith in Christ, then we also produce good works as fruit (or as evidence to show that we have faith).

Notice that what James is not saying is "Faith + Good Works = Salvation."

- He's not saying that we need to have faith and then add (or supplement) it with good works in order to earn our salvation. That'd be works-based salvation that'd go against the entirety of James' letter and against the entirety of Scripture.

James sees good works not as something that needs to supplement true faith, but as evidence of true faith.

<pause>

And something that's so encouraging to me is when I see evidence of true faith from our church members. That's when I really praise God for how He's been doing good works in you and through you.

I know that there's been times when some of our members are really struggling. Life is not always easy, and there's been times when we struggle with our health, with our jobs, with our finances, and with our relationships. But what's so inspiring to me is when I hear that someone is going through something like this, but then they're not forgotten... Because other members (not just 1 member but multiple members) are coming together - sacrificing their time and resources - to care for one another, and to pray for each other.

It's so encouraging to hear that this is happening in our church, and that we're not people with empty words. So let's continue to do that.

<pause>

But if we look back to verse 18, what James' opposition is essentially saying is: *"I can have faith in Christ even without evidencing good works."*

Look at verse 19 - James is setting up his rebuttal - "You believe that God is one; you do well."

"Ok, so you say you're not gifted to do good works, but you say you're gifted in faith. So you're saying that you have faith because you understand and agree that there's only one God. Ok, great! You're doing well, that's a good start!"

BUT - here comes the punch - BUT Even the demons believe!

Even demonic spirits understand intellectually that God is one - that the God of Israel is God alone - And even demons would agree that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And that's why they shudder! They know that there's judgment to come!

They know who Jesus is and they have to obey his authority - and they even have to obey the authority that Jesus delegated to his apostles - so even they can cast out demons in the name of Jesus! The demons tremble in fear at the name of Jesus.

"But you... you're not even trembling because you think you're saved when there's actually no evidence that points to you having faith, so really... you should be trembling like the demons are!"

Friends, don't miss what James is saying here!

He's taking it up a notch. He's not just saying that faith without works is useless. He's saying that faith without works is demonic!

He's saying that faith without works is no true faith at all, but false faith! This is why it's useless and cannot save you from your sins!

So James is drawing a line here between true faith and false faith...

<pause>

When we think of faith, we can think of it as having 3 elements: (1) understanding, (2) agreement, and (3) trust.

To truly have faith in Christ you need to have all 3 elements (not just the first 2). You can't just intellectually understand who Jesus is and agree with who he is and then stop there (because even the demons do that much). But you have to take that final step of putting your trust in him.

Think of a chair.

- To understand a chair is to know what it is and that it has four legs, it's sturdy, and that you can sit on it.
- To agree with a chair is to say, "yes, I agree that I can sit on it and it'll support me."
- But to trust a chair, then you need to actually sit on it.
- You can't say that you truly trust a chair if you're not willing to sit on it yourself.

And it's the same with our trust in Jesus - is there action to back up our words?

Jesus himself says that not everyone who calls him "Lord, Lord" will be saved. Because some merely understand who he is, and they mistake knowing things about him with having faith in him. That kind of "faith" is not true faith, but is useless faith that cannot save.

<pause>

Friends, do your actions show that your trust is truly in Christ? Or does it show that your trust is actually in something else or someone else? And would others agree with your assessment?

Because the implication from this passage is that there's such a thing as false faith and fake Christians - Those who say that they have faith in Christ, but who really don't.

So please don't assume that you're a Christian just because you grew up in a Christian family or because you've been going to church since Sunday School. Or even if it says "Christian" on your KTP or ID card.

So if you're unsure if you're a Christian or not sure what the Gospel is, please talk to someone around you after our service; we'd love to help you with some next steps.

Because the question you may have now is: then who can help affirm my faith? What we believe is that Jesus Christ gave that authority to his Church... By that I don't mean merely the pastors, but the members who make up a local church - a local church has the authority to affirm someone's faith through church membership and the ordinance of baptism.

<pause>

Church, this passage implies that we're to be wary and prudent in affirming someone's faith. This is one reason why meaningful church membership is so important. This is also why - as a member of our church - your part in affirming and voting-in a new member as an Elder-led and congregationally ruled church is so important.

We don't want to be irresponsible in being too quick in affirming someone's faith or in baptizing someone just because they say that they're a Christian.

But we want to be sure:

- Are we talking about the same Gospel? Not faith plus works, but faith in Jesus' work.
- Are we even talking about the same Jesus? Is the Jesus who you believe in fully man AND fully God?
 - We need to be prudent - Just because someone says "Jesus" doesn't mean we're talking about the same person.
- Do their lives evidence conversion? That they've truly repented of their sins and put their faith in Christ?

It's not easy to discern these things, but it's the church's work to discern these matters. And it'd actually be irresponsible and unloving for us to affirm someone's faith if we're unsure of these things. We'd actually be misleading them and doing them a great disservice if they end up thinking that their salvation is secure when it's actually not. Because if what they have is dead faith, then it's useless in saving them, and that means they're headed towards eternity in Hell.

So it'd be uncomfortable, but the most loving thing for us to do may be to let someone know - with love and gentleness - that we cannot yet affirm their faith at this time... But we'd love to help them understand the Gospel more...

That's why to be prudent, we ask those who like to be members of our church to take our Experiencing Membership classes (which start next Sunday at 2pm), and that's why we also require an interview with one of the pastors. It's so that we can faithfully check for your Gospel understanding. And then we as a whole church will vote at our Members' Meeting to affirm - that to the best of our ability - we believe you understand and believe the right Gospel and your life reflects that.

Please don't feel intimidated about the membership process. Ultimately, our church is here to help you (and we care about your eternal good).

So everyone, let's be wary that there's such a thing as dead faith.

So first, dead faith is useless. Second...

II. Living faith is evidenced (vv. 20-26)

Look at verse 20 - James continues to correct this hypothetical opposition. He asks, Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

So to further solidify his main point, James now gives 2 examples of two believers who showed their faith by their works...

He first points us to Abraham...

In verse 23, James quotes Scripture from Genesis 15 - referring to the time when God made a covenant with Abraham.

God told Abraham that he and his wife, Sarah, would have a son (even in their old age). And that from this son, his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. And Abraham trusted God and believed in His promises. And because Abraham had faith in the Lord... God counted him as righteous.

And many years later, Abraham did have a son. God proved himself to be trustworthy. But how about Abraham? How about his faithfulness? In Genesis 22, God tested Abraham's faith by telling him to now sacrifice his own son, Isaac.

Now this is the moment when Abraham has to sit on that chair (so to speak)... Does Abraham truly trust in God? His action would now prove what kind of faith he truly has.

So what did he do? He took Isaac to the altar (imagine how difficult that must've been for him), he took his knife... And he was truly about to sacrifice his own son... But then the angel of the Lord intervened, saying, "Abraham! 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..."

At that moment, what does Abraham's action communicate to God? His action is like a declaration that says, "*My faith is in you, Lord.*" And by his action, Abraham proved that his faith in the Lord was indeed true and alive.

That's why in verse 22, James says that Abraham's faith was completed (or made whole) by his works.

Because up to that point, even though his faith had been true, it was essentially invisible. But through his now visible obedience of the Lord, we can visibly see just how real and tangible his faith is.

That's why you can say that his faith in the Lord is now made more complete (or more whole) because of his works. What used to be invisible is now visible...

And that's why James says in verse 24 - You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

You can observe and literally see that someone has faith.

<pause>

Now, for those of us who've already put our faith in the Lord, verse 24 may sound jarring.

Because it seems like there's a contradiction here with what James is saying VS. what Apostle Paul says about how we're justified by faith alone in Christ alone. But in actuality, there's no contradiction here.

Because James is actually using the word "justification" differently here than how Paul normally uses that word.

When Paul usually talks about "justification," he's using that word to mean "to declare or to pronounce" - that someone is declared righteous before the sight of God by faith alone. So in that case, "justification" refers to God's declaration.

But depending on the context, that word can have a different meaning. To justify can also mean "to show / to exhibit." And in this context, James is talking about this kind of justification - as in showing (or exhibiting) one's faith. This makes sense because - in context - he was basically saying, "show me your faith! Evidence it, convince me that you have faith."

- In verse 24, he's saying, "You cannot show me that you have faith in the Lord without showing it by your works."

So that's something we should note as we study the Bible - What's the context? And how do the authors use specific words?

So, quick summary to make sure we're clear - What Paul is talking about when he says "justification" is that we're declared as righteous before God by our faith alone. And James would definitely agree with that. He just quoted Scripture from Genesis 15 about how God counted Abraham as righteous because of his faith alone... even before he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice.

What James is talking about is that we're to justify our invisible faith by visible works. And Paul would agree with that as well. What James is calling "works" here, Paul would call it "the Fruit of the Spirit."

So what appears to be a contradiction is no contradiction at all. They're talking about the same thing: Good works as fruit (or as evidence of our faith).

<pause>

And James could've stopped right there. His argument is so good and clear. But he doesn't stop there and gives us one more example.

He knows that some people may still be unconvinced. They may say, *"But James, that's father Abraham! C'mon, the man is like a legend! You can't expect us to work out our faith like Abraham! He's especially gifted in both faith and works, not everyone is like that!"*

James is thinking... ok... one more example...

Look at verse 25 - James now points us to Rahab - someone who's totally different from Abraham.... Because Rahab was an outcast and a prostitute.

Her story is recorded in Joshua 2 & 6. Rahab lived in the city of Jericho. And when the Israelites finally arrived in Canaan, the Promised Land, Joshua sent 2 spies to scout the city of Jericho. And while the spies were there, they met Rahab. Rahab has heard stories about the God of Israel, and she truly believed that the God of Israel is the one true Lord, and that He has indeed given the land of Canaan to the Israelites.

Just like Abraham, her faith was also tested. When the king of Jericho was looking for the spies, she hid them on the roof of her home. And when the king sent his men to her house, this is when her faith was tested. She's in an extremely uncomfortable situation here - She can either: give up the spies and continue living her life as is, OR... trust in God... protect God's people... and trust that they would spare her life when they overtake the city. This is the moment when she needs to sit on the chair - will her faith be proven to be alive or dead?

Rahab chose to protect the 2 spies. And then she sent them out by another way so that they wouldn't get caught. So in the same way as Abraham, her work of faith proved that her faith was genuine.

So James is basically asking his opposition - *Where do you fall between Abraham and Rahab? There's no more excuses. No matter where you fall between Abraham and Rahab, True faith ALWAYS results in good works, there's no exception.*

Look at verse 26 - James concludes his point with a final illustration: Faith without works is as dead as a corpse.

There's literally no life in it.

<pause>

Church, let's remember the context - we know from James 1 that these Christians whom James is writing to are currently going through various trials and temptations. We don't know exactly

what they're going through, but it may be as difficult and uncomfortable as what Abraham and Rahab went through.

What James said in Chapter 1 is that during trials and temptations... when our faith in Christ is tested... that's when it's purified and strengthened. And now, James is saying... Look at the examples of Abraham and Rahab... It's also when our faith is tested amidst difficult trials and uncomfortable situations... That's when our faith is proven to be true living faith, and not dead faith.

Brothers and sisters, are you currently going through a tough time?

If you are, I know it must not be easy for you. But I hope this passage may encourage you. Or even if you're currently not, then I hope that you'd remember this passage in the future and that it'd encourage you during a future hardship.

That when you're going through trial and suffering, it's not meaningless. Because that's when you've been given the opportunity to make visible what is invisible - That's when you can showcase your faith in Christ to the rest of the world.

The world tells us that suffering is meaningless and that there's nothing good about it and that we should brace ourselves and try to get through it as soon as possible.

But what we see here... Is that in your suffering, you have the opportunity to reveal your faith to the rest of the world (just like Abraham and Rahab).

What does Abraham's action say to the world? "My faith in the Lord is more important than my own son."

What does Rahab's action say to the world? "My faith in the Lord is more important than my own country."

What does your action say to the world? "My faith in the Lord is more important than... my most beloved possession, than my success, than my comfort, than getting married, than getting rich."

Church, may our action say, "Lord, our faith is in you. Our trust is in you."

<pause>

And as we put our trust in our Lord.... Our trustworthy God will not fail us.

Just as we're to evidence our faith by our works, God also evidenced His faithfulness by His works.

God proved to be faithful to Abraham - He provided Abraham with a substitute sacrifice - a ram that's stuck in a thicket - so that Isaac's life may be redeemed. So Abraham's faith in the Lord was not in vain.

And God proved to be faithful to Rahab - Rahab's life would be spared and she'd live among God's people. She'd end up marrying an Israelite man from the tribe of Judah. They would have a son (who we're actually familiar with), for their son is Boaz (the one who'd redeem Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi). And Rahab's great-great-grandson is no other than King David. And from his line is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Rahab's trust in the Lord was not in vain.

And God proved to be faithful to us - For He did not spare his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, for our sake. Jesus Christ became our substitute sacrifice on the cross so that our lives may be redeemed - that whoever believes in him... their sins will be forgiven and they may have eternal life. Our trust in the Lord will not be in vain.

Church, do you believe this?

Let's not only say that our faith is in Jesus, but let's live out our faith - and let's give evidence to the world that our faith is indeed alive. May our actions say, "Lord, we love you and we trust you."

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The One Thing

Dead faith is useless, but living faith is evidenced by our works.
