

PLAYING FAITH AGAINST WORKS
JAMES 2:14—26

Introduction:

1. In the passage we will consider today, James makes clear the true nature of Biblical faith. This topic is important because it's a matter of salvation. It's a matter of how a person can be right with God. To help us get going let me invite you to play a little word game.
2. The game is one where you fill in the blank. I will mention a word or two and you fill in what naturally goes with it.
3. Faith and works—that is where we are headed today. The righteous life that God desires is one that **believes and obeys** God's word. Trying to follow James line of thinking the first point he makes is this:

I. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS, IS DEAD (2:14--17)

A. What Are the Answers to These Two Questions?

1. What good is it for a man to claim that he is a Christian—that he is a believer—that he is a follower of Jesus Christ, but he has no deeds/no works? What good is it?—of what value is his faith? What is the answer? It is no good—his faith is of no value!
2. What is the answer to the second question—can such faith save him? Can a faith that is not followed up by deeds save him? I believe the answer is “no, such faith can't save him.”
3. In our daily lives most of us want to do something that “matters”. We aren't interested in just wasting time or taking up space. In our spiritual lives I believe this is true as well. We want our faith to count—to be of value—to be worthwhile—we want to have a faith that will save us.
4. **Faith is a matter of salvation—therefore faith matters.** James makes the point that faith that doesn't lead to deeds is no good and it can't save you.

B. The Illustration

1. This is the 4th time James references the poor—a poor person who is a member of the congregation—a poor person who, for whatever reason, is destitute.
2. The question naturally arises when we speak of the naked and the hungry—how do we treat them? What should be our attitude toward them and their needs? How do we individually or as a church respond to those in need?
3. I'm not sure our response is always the response Christ would like of his followers. We may say—why don't they get a job?—we may quote Paul—if a man doesn't work he shouldn't eat—we may question—why can't they be self sufficient, like the rest of us?

4. Or we may simply say God bless you and I hope you can find something to eat. We may simply not want to engage with the poor—even if it is someone in our church, for a variety of reasons.
5. Again, James asks a question—of what value is it to just pronounce a blessing on him and not actually help him? I believe the answer would be it is of no value, especially to the hungry or naked person, and then in regard to our faith—our faith is of no value, no matter what we claim.
6. It's true that we can make all kinds of verbal claims, but if we don't back them up with some action they are about as useless as a screen door on a submarine. (Video? Rich Mullins)

C. What Is The Nature of Biblical Faith?

1. **v.17** If a person claims to have faith it must be accompanied by an action otherwise it is dead. In Heb. 11 you will find this truth stated and illustrated over and over—by faith Abel offered—by faith Noah built—by faith Abraham when called—obeyed and went . . .
2. Biblical faith acts—biblical faith obeys, otherwise it is dead. A Christian who turns a blind eye to the needy in the church has a faith that is dead . . . and to expand this; how do we individually and corporately as a church try to “do good to all men as we have the opportunity?” per what Paul says.
3. The nature of biblical faith is one that must be accompanied by action!!
4. Transition: However, someone says: **v. 18 a**—an objector raises the idea that . . .

II. FAITH AND DEEDS CAN BE SEPERATED—NOT

A. James Would Say This Is Impossible

1. As Guy Woods explains this he said: “One person has faith, and another works; one emphasizes the faith which he has; the other, the works which he possesses; each is good and effective; and neither should be minimized.” (pg.137)
2. Or someone might object this way: . . . “that one's piety and devotion to God are not always exhibited in the same fashion; one may show his loyalty to God by faith, another by works; yet both be equally pious and devout in God's sight.” And so what say you, James? How will you answer this objection that the two can be separated?
3. **v.18 b, 19** Here is the point—faith is something that can't be seen in another person. I can't look inside your heart and see if you have faith and neither can you look inside my heart to see if I have faith. We each may say—oh I have faith—I am a believer—I am a follower of Christ—I believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God.
4. We may make this claim to have faith, but without the deeds following its an empty claim. Faith and deeds can't be separated.

B. Faith Without Deeds Is A Demon-Kind of Faith

- 1.** In the argument that James is pursuing he compliments faith in the one God. He said it is good that you believe there is one God. However, it does not go far enough.
- 2.** The demons believe in one God. My belief about demons is that they are now wicked angels who fell in with Satan in his pride and rebellion against God. These wicked heavenly, spiritual beings also believe in God and they shudder. Shudder has the idea of terror to the point the hair on your arms stands up.
- 3.** They believe and they are fearful, but it goes no further than this. They know impending judgment is coming, but their faith does not express itself in obedience and therefore it is a dead and useless faith. It is a barren faith—it produces nothing and is therefore useless. **(v. 20)**
- 4.** Transition: Faith and works can't be separated—they are connected at the hip. If faith isn't followed by deeds/works that faith is dead, barren and useless. If we claim to be believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ we had better do something to help the naked and hungry—for sure those in the church. And then more broadly, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and spotless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress”.
- 5.** Transition cont. In order to illustrate the true nature of biblical faith James cites two contrasting characters—two individuals from O.T. History that demonstrate his point, that faith, if it is not accompanied by deeds or works is dead, worthless and of no value. A faith that has no works or deeds is not a faith that will make you right with God—it will not justify you.
- 6.** The two are Abraham—the Father of the faithful and Rahab, a prostitute. One a man—the other a woman—one of God's chosen and the other a pagan, but both, people of faith. James illustrates clearly the way faith played out in the lives of Abraham and Rahab. By considering their lives of faith James further explains...

III. THE TRUE NATURE OF A BIBLICAL FAITH (where James is headed is to verse 24 where he declares that . . .)

A. Faith Alone Will Not Make You Right With God (v. 24)

- 1.** First, James has us consider Abraham. **(2:21—24)** He makes another point by asking this question—was not . . . Abraham considered righteous for what **he did** when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? It's a rhetorical question with the answer being yes.
- 2.** And then we hear the explanation: **his faith and his actions were**

working together—that is the true nature of biblical faith. It wasn't just faith—it wasn't just works—they were working together—his faith and his work of offering up Isaac on the altar were cooperating with each other to produce this result—Abraham's justification.

3. James says his faith was made complete or perfect (KJV) by what he did. His faith was consummated, completed, finished when he began to offer up Isaac. Abraham's faith was incredible as it led him to obey God's command to offer up the child of promise—the child of destiny.

4. James also says that what Abraham did was the fulfillment of scripture as it is stated in Gen 15:6 “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” `You will remember that the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that he would have a son was a long time in coming.

5. In this 15th chapter of Genesis God reaffirmed for him that he would have a son coming from his own body and it was on this occasion he took him outside and told him to count the stars, if indeed he could and then he said to him so shall your offspring be. It is then when it is said that A. believed the LORD and the LORD credited it to him as righteousness.

6. Now the same God who made the promises to Abraham tells A. to offer up his son Isaac as an offering which Abraham headed out to do the next day. When Abraham began to offer up Isaac, his faith was working—his faith was being made complete—his faith and actions were working together to the point that he was made right with God—justified—through his faith and works. According to the Hebrew letter A. believed God could raise Isaac from the dead.

7. Abraham was considered God's friend, because his faith led him to obey God's command.

8. Let me try and make this application. Today, there are churches which teach that people are justified—made right with God—by faith alone—or more specifically at the moment they place their faith in God/Christ—be it on a beach—in a car—riding on a train—walking to the front of the church building and confessing . . . I believe Jesus is the Christ . . .

9. I don't believe this is the correct teaching of scripture. I believe scripture teaches that we are justified by faith when that faith leads us to obedience. If I understand correctly the true nature of biblical faith—it is not just a verbal assent that I believe Jesus is the Son of God. It is that but there is more to it than that. My verbal assent—my faith must lead me to obey God's command to repent and be baptized

if I hope to be justified—to be made right with God.

10. James also describes the prostitute Rahab as a righteous woman . . . “for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction.” Listen to the account of her encounter with the spies and glean what you can about her faith:

Joshua 2: 8—11

11. I believe the most striking part of her faith is stated this way-- “I know that the LORD has given this land to you” (8) . . . and . . . “for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

(11) Hers was a belief based on what she had heard about God's miracles and power and a fear of death at the hands of the Israelites. Her belief led her to give the spies lodging and protection—despite her lies to the kings men. Despite her reputation or livelihood.

12. Her faith led her to action and James would say she was not made right with God simply because of her faith in God, but because of what she did, as well.

13. Let me conclude with **v.26** When my mother and Jolene's mother passed away the spirit that had inhabited both of their lives, went back to the God who gave it (**Eccl. 12:7**). And there they lay—their bodies now just empty shells. Their bodies without their spirits were dead—lifeless. Bodies that would decay—be put in the ground to turn to dust from which they came.

14. A Faith that has no deeds— a faith that doesn't lead to obedience is as lifeless as our mothers dead bodies. It's a pretty useless faith—not much more than demon-type faith.

15. Our faith in God/Christ is more than just a verbal assent to facts about Jesus. Our faith finds its fulfillment in responding to those in need. Each of us will see a variety of needs this week that we have the resources to help with. We can be the good Samaritan or we can be the priest and the Levite. Of this we can be sure our faith must lead us to obedience to some kind of action or our faith is barren—dead—useless.

16. In a very interesting close to the sermon on the mount, Jesus said: **Mt. 7:21—23** being a Christian isn't just about making claims—I'm a believer—I'm a Christian—I'm a follower of Jesus. It's about making that claim—but that claim is proven by our obedience to the Lord's Will.

17. The true nature of a biblical faith is a faith that leads you to obey His Will.