

Genuine Faith - James 2:14-26

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Date: 20 May 2018

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[0 : 00] It's on page 1214, 1214. James chapter 2, starting at verse 14.

Page 1214. Let's read.

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 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.

[1 : 16] 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 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.

[2 : 29] I'm going to ask Jason now. He's going to come and preach this morning. Thanks, Jason. I'm just going to pass around a pen or two.

Anybody like a pen? Well, I want to thank Johnny and the elders for entrusting this responsibility to me this morning.

It is no small thing to entrust somebody with the ministry of the word. And so I hope to serve you well this morning as we look into God's word.

We have been here since this past Wednesday. And we have been staying with the Campbells. And the hospitality here in Ireland is amazing.

We have not only been at their home, but we've been at several other homes. And I think I have eaten more in the last five days than the last five months combined. So thank you so much for your kindness and your hospitality.

[3 : 36] We've been drinking gallons, it seems like, gallons of tea. Or liters, I guess. Is that what I would say here? Liters of tea? But it's just been wonderful. Pints.

A lot. A lot of it. So it has just been wonderful. Thank you so much for your hospitality. As Johnny said, we'll be in James 2 this morning. If you haven't already turned in your copy of the scriptures to James 2, you can do that now.

A couple of years ago, I read a very interesting story about a man named Wolfgang Beltracchi. Perhaps some of you have heard about him.

Wolfgang's paintings brought him millions and millions of dollars during a career that spanned nearly 40 years. His paintings made their way into museums, galleries, and private collections all over the world.

Now, what is most notable about the work of Wolfgang Beltracchi is that all of his paintings are fake. And what makes him an unusual forger is that he didn't copy the paintings of great artists, but he created new works which he imagined some well-known artist might have painted or which might

have gotten lost.

[4 : 58] Here are the closing two sentences of the article that I read. It said, Connoisseurs and dealers acknowledge that Beltracchi is the most successful art forger of our time, perhaps of all time.

Brilliant not only as a painter, but as a con man of epic proportions. Can you imagine what it would feel like to pay millions for a painting only to find out that it's a fake?

No one I've ever known likes to be tricked or deceived. In fact, it makes us feel silly, maybe even ashamed when it happens to us. And of course, deception can bring with it a great cost.

Like those who paid a tremendous sum of money for a work of art that was not what it claimed to be. You see, being fooled can have devastating consequences, can't it?

Now consider this. As awful. As awful as it would be to lose money. There is absolutely nothing more devastating than if you were to find out in the last day that you fooled yourself about the nature of genuine faith in Christ.

[6 : 24] How can you know? How can you know if your faith is genuine? How do you know that you're a true believer and not a fake? How can you determine whether or not you're being fooled by a false or counterfeit faith?

I want to invite you friends to look with me at God's Word. And together, we will find answers to these very important questions. We want to know that our faith in Christ is genuine.

And if you're here this morning and you don't know Christ, you've never turned in repentance and faith to believe in Jesus, trusting in Him alone for the forgiveness of your sins, then I want you to understand what it means to truly believe.

Our text, James 2, 14-26, this text answers two major questions. And here is the first. Question number one.

What is true faith? This is a fundamental and foundational question that we must answer and we must answer it correctly so we go to God's Word.

[7 : 40] Look at verse 14 again. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? So I want you to notice a couple of things here. First is this. True faith, true faith is more than a mere announcement.

That's found in verse 14. James begins this section with two questions and both of them expect the same answer. He asks, does faith without works help a person?

The answer is no. Then he asks, does faith without good works save a person? Again, the answer is no. There is a very important word in verse 14 that you must see.

James writes, if someone claims to have faith. James is not suggesting that this individual actually has faith.

[8 : 46] He's not talking about someone whose faith has been confirmed as genuine. He's simply referring to someone who regularly claims to have faith.

Does simply making a claim of faith without a lifestyle of good works save a person? And the answer is no.

This verse, and really this whole text, has been one of the most controversial and misunderstood in all of Scripture. The question is often asked, is James saying that works save a person?

Or we might ask the question this way, is James disagreeing with the Apostle Paul? Here's a quick sampling of what the Apostle Paul wrote.

You heard some of it already this morning. In Romans chapter 3, verse 28, we find this, for we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

[9 : 48] In Romans chapter 4, verse 5, this is what we find, and to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

And then in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

You can see from these texts why some confusion may exist, but we need to understand the purpose of each writer. Simply put, Paul is writing, Paul is writing about our declaration of faith, and James is writing about our demonstration of faith.

One well-known pastor in the States wrote something very helpful in his commentary on James. This is what he wrote. Listen carefully to this. There is no real contradiction between James and Paul regarding faith.

Paul's teaching about faith and works focuses on the time before conversion, and James' focus is after conversion.

[11:02] Paul was fighting against tradition which promoted a false works salvation. James was fighting against a light or trivial or easy faith which minimized the necessity of works after coming to Christ.

Paul says works cannot bring us to Christ. James says after we come to Christ, they are imperative. In fact, in fact, in fact, in fact, brothers and sisters, the Apostle Paul actually makes the very same point that James is making in the text that Alex read for us earlier.

After Paul wrote those wonderful verses about faith alone as the basis for our salvation in Ephesians chapter 2, he followed it immediately with chapter 2, verse 10.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And so you heard it said already, Paul and James would agree that counterfeit faith makes all kinds of statements and claims, but never, never supports those words with actions.

[12:15] In contrast, true faith is demonstrated by a life of good works. Paul's emphasis on salvation by faith alone was intended to correct our natural desire to earn salvation by means of our own effort and good works.

As Paul came face to face with pharisaical legalism, the teaching that our works affect our standing before God, he emphasized the truth that nothing in us, nothing in us can merit God's favor.

Only Jesus Christ can earn right standing with God for us. And this right standing comes to us through faith alone in Christ alone.

What Paul makes clear in Ephesians chapter 2 is that we are not saved by works, but we are saved to works, or for works.

Works do not contribute a thing to our justification, but works are the result and aim of our justification.

[13:27] Friends, James as well is insisting that genuine faith always produces righteous works. Now, I want to be as clear as I can be, these works, these works do not make us righteous before God, but they demonstrate the reality that we have already been made righteous before God in Jesus Christ.

To summarize this first observation, brothers and sisters, the genuineness of a profession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is evidenced more by what a person does than by what he claims.

So what is true faith? It is more than a mere announcement. And a second observation here, true faith is more than a statement of sympathy.

It's more than a statement of sympathy. Look at verse 15. Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, go in peace, be 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, well, it's dead. As James so often does, he provides a powerful illustration.

[15:03] In preaching through James and studying through James, there are these moments when you're reading and you read an illustration that he offers and at least if you're like me, I go, ouch, that hurts.

I think he's talking about me. Imagine you're sitting in church. Week after week, the same man sits down beside you.

You notice that his clothes are torn. They're really insufficient to keep him warm, dry, clean, and protected. You also notice that as each week goes by, he looks like he's malnourished and he's becoming very unhealthy.

So you begin to wonder, what should I do? Clearly, this man has a need. What should I do? And here is what you decide.

You approach him and you begin to speak and this is what you say. Brother, you're not looking good. It looks like you've fallen upon hard times.

[16:12] You need help. So may God be with you this week. Go. Find some clothes and warm yourself. And then you turn and walk away.

Well, of course, this man would be confused thinking, well, don't you think I would have already clothed myself and fed myself if I could? What if this is all you did, friend?

The expression of the Christian love that you claim to possess has motivated you to do nothing more than offer religious platitudes to someone in obvious need.

If that is your only response, then according to God's Word, how should you interpret your own actions? The answer is in verse 17.

If you offer a sympathetic statement without actually doing anything loving, without actually meeting the need, then your faith is dead.

[17 : 30] And please understand, dead faith is not only lifeless, but it's useless. It serves no purpose.

Oh, friend, this is not what God redeemed you for. Genuine faith is more than feeling compassion for someone in need. The Apostle John challenges us in 1 John 3, but if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, then listen to this expression.

Yet closes his heart against him. How does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

You see, real faith is not seen in statements, but in action. Counterfeit faith stops with a promise to pray.

Real faith starts by not only praying for someone in need, but providing them with a meal as well. Counterfeit faith stops with sympathetic words.

[18 : 50] Real faith suffers to help someone in need. Counterfeit faith stops with empty words of compassion. Real faith starts with loving actions.

I try to explain that to my children all the time. You can say you're sorry to your brother or sister a hundred times, but if you turn around and do the same thing over and over again, your words will ring hollow when you say I love you or I forgive you that needs to be followed by actions that demonstrate the validity of your words.

What is true faith? Well, it's more than a mere announcement. It's more than a statement of sympathy. And then a third observation here. True faith is more than a declaration of doctrine.

Look at verse 18. 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.

[20 : 09] You foolish person. Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? James anticipates an objection we might all have to what he's teaching us.

We might suggest that claiming faith is no different than demonstrating faith. It's like we're saying to James, James, stop looking so closely at what I'm doing.

Don't you know what I believe? You see, a lot of people assume that making a declaration of faith is enough. But friends, genuine faith is more than a declaration even if that declaration includes correct doctrine.

James' next words, verse 19, are a shocking illustration of this truth. Look at verse 19. Do you realize this morning, as you look at this text, do you realize this morning that no demon is an atheist?

Every demon believes in God. Do you realize that no demon is a polytheist? Every demon believes there is one true God.

[21 : 28] It's frightening to think that there are probably questions that you and I would get wrong on a theological exam that demons know. But James is making a point here.

It's a warning. So let me offer this warning to you, brothers and sisters. This, this is a church that believes in the importance of right doctrine and rich theology, theology, which is wonderful.

Most of you care deeply about what the Bible says, and you should. But be careful. A commitment to biblical knowledge alone does not equal true faith.

No amount of biblical knowledge guarantees genuine faith. faith. So I ask you, what are you trusting in for the forgiveness of your sin and for eternal peace with God?

Are you trusting in the depth of your biblical knowledge? Is your confidence in facts you have learned or have you placed your faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone?

[22 : 57] our first major question, what is true faith? And James primarily answers that in this section by telling you what it's not or what it's not limited to.

But then he expounds. Question number two, what does true faith look like? And in explaining this, he defines the nature of saving faith.

Look with me at verse 21. 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.

[24 : 06] 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.

As James continues his discussion of living faith, he provides us with two role models who are very, very different from each other.

The first is a patriarch who shows us what true faith looks like over a lifetime. The second is a prostitute. A prostitute who shows us what true faith looks like in a moment.

The first example, true faith in the life of a patriarch. Abraham was the epitome of faith in God. And James begins with a question about his faith.

And this is what he asks. Wasn't Abraham considered righteous for what he did? The ESV says it this way, wasn't Abraham justified by his works when he offered Isaac.

[25 : 20] Now, there are two meanings for the word justified. It can mean to be declared righteous, and that's probably how you typically think about it. But it can also mean this, to vindicate, to show, to prove righteousness.

So the question becomes, didn't Abraham demonstrate his righteousness by the act of offering Isaac? Or, wasn't Abraham shown to be righteous by this act?

If we were to take the time to turn to Genesis, here is what we would find explained about Abraham, and this is so important. In Genesis 22, God commanded Abraham to take his only son and offer him as a burnt offering.

Abraham's response to God's command will show us whether Abraham truly believes in God, right? His works will demonstrate whether or not his faith is real.

But remember, this command took place nearly 30 years after Abraham was declared righteous by God in Genesis 15.

[26 : 37] The command he has given now to sacrifice his son, well, it went against everything in him. His love for Isaac, his understanding of morality, his common sense, his dreams, but still he obeyed God.

And in so doing, Abraham demonstrated that his faith was genuine or authentic. So, this is how it works. Abraham was declared righteous by faith alone, Genesis 15.

But he was shown to be righteous by his act of faith in Genesis 22. That's precisely what the point is in James.

So, back in James 2, we find that Abraham's life shows the important connections between faith and works. In the first part of verse 22, we find that faith and works were active together.

They were active together. One pastor said it this way, faith isn't shy or timid. It doesn't like to be alone.

[27 : 45] Faith's constant companion is works. Abraham's works supported his faith.

Then we see in the second part of verse 22, faith was brought to maturity through works. God was working. It's interesting, that's in the passive voice.

God was working. God was working to bring Abraham's faith to a certain point of maturity. And he did this through his works.

This is Philippians 1.6. God, who has begun a good work in you, he will bring it to completion.

That's so encouraging.

That we're not only saved by grace, but we're sanctified by grace. Your sanctification is not ultimately dependent upon your own effort, your own creativity, your own ingenuity.

[28 : 50] The God who saved you, who brought life into your spiritual death, is continuing to make you alive to good works which exalt and magnify Jesus Christ.

In verse 23, we see that faith was demonstrated as genuine through works.

Abraham's faith was counted or credited to him as righteousness. Nothing he did made him righteous. That came through faith alone in Jesus Christ, but the reality of his faith was evidenced

through his works.

Yes, Abraham believed God's promise of a son, but it wasn't until he was willing to offer that son on an altar that the genuineness of his faith was demonstrated.

You see this often when someone is suffering. There's a Christian and they give every evidence of joy. And then you find out that they're ill. That there's some illness that will probably lead to death.

[29 : 55] And you see in their suffering a level of joy you could have never imagined. That suffering is proving the genuineness of their faith.

Now look at verse 24. You see that a person is considered righteous or justified by what they do, their works, and not by faith alone.

This statement answers the question posed in verse 14. Can faith without good works save a person? No, the answer is no. Not because works produce righteousness, but because saving faith will always produce righteous works.

Abraham shows us true faith in the life of a patriarch, but the second example is quite different. Isn't it? Verse 25. True faith, not in the life of a patriarch, but in the life of a prostitute.

Look at verse 25 again. 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?

[31 : 22] The example of Rahab continues the same point as the example of Abraham. But it would be difficult, wouldn't it, to put together two people with more striking differences.

Abraham was a patriarch. Rahab was a prostitute. Abraham was moral. Rahab was immoral.

Abraham was a man. Rahab was a woman.

Abraham was a Jew. Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham was respected. Rahab was rejected. I love John Calvin's comment on James' use of these two examples.

Listen to what he says. He designedly put together two persons so different in their character in order more clearly to show that no one, no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation or class in society, no one has ever been counted righteous without good works.

It could be easy for us to dismiss Abraham's example as impossible for us. If you're like me, I tend to think this way.

[32 : 32] I think I could never be like Abraham. He was a friend of God. This passage could therefore lead us to discouragement. We might worry. I haven't done any works of faith in the category of Abraham.

So is there any hope for me? Oh, friends, in Rahab, we are encouraged, aren't we? She was a wretched sinner.

I can identify with that. She has real problems. She wasn't a model of perfection. But according to God's Word, she was a model of faith.

Well, how do we know this? How do we know this? Is it because she told us? Is it because of the great theological work she wrote?

Is it due to the clarity of her doctrinal confession? No. No, it's because Scripture bears testimony to her life.

[33 : 43] Her actions demonstrated real, authentic, genuine, living faith. Her works. Her works. Her works declared louder than her words ever could that she believed God.

When she protected the spies from their pursuers, her faith was revealed as genuine. I'm so encouraged that this is the way God works.

There are those who I'll hear them share the gospel with someone. In fact, we were with our brother Shane in passage the other night and listened to him declare the gospel in a Bible study and I thought, this brother is so gifted.

He's so clear in sharing the gospel. I wish I had that gifting. I wish I had that ability. And yet, I know from texts like this that God in His infinite and sovereign wisdom works in different ways.

You may not have an eloquent testimony where you can share words beautifully with people, but it may be your life and the depth of your faith and your actions of love and kindness and grace to others that will announce to them the glory of the gospel and the transforming grace of Jesus Christ in ways that you would fail to do in the way you want to with your words.

[35 : 13] God works in both ways and we see this reality in our text. God works in both ways and we see this reality in our text. Verse 26 summarizes and illustrates the truth behind the examples of both Abraham and Rahab.

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. A faith that doesn't work is no better than a corpse.

Faith and works, like a body and spirit, are inseparably connected. So in closing, friends, let me offer you two reminders.

And I hope and pray that God's Spirit will work through His Word to open your eyes. If you're being deceived this morning about the genuineness of your faith, I pray you'll see that and turn in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ.

So the first reminder, just quickly, salvation is by faith alone. Salvation is by faith alone. Your works in no way contribute to your standing before God.

[36 : 32] The only way you can be saved is by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ. It's His completed work that is important. So have you ever renounced both your good deeds and your bad deeds and called out to Jesus for mercy?

Oh friend, turn from your sin and receive Jesus Christ by faith this morning and then rest. You can stop running. The effort to be good enough in hopes that someday God will accept you, you can stop.

Jesus has run that race perfectly. He has crossed the finish line and now He will give you everything you need by faith. Remember, salvation is by faith alone.

And then the second reminder, salvation is by a faith that is never alone.

Salvation is by faith alone, but salvation is by a faith that is never alone. True, saving faith always works.

[37 : 48] Genuine faith is demonstrated. Faith in Jesus Christ always results in a changed life. No works of righteousness can ever bring God's favor, but if God's favor has been given to you through faith in Jesus Christ, it will be revealed in your life.

It was Jesus who said, by their fruits you will know them. The reality of your faith will be revealed in your actions. So let me just ask you, is your faith seen in your actions?

Like just think through the last several days. What you believe is seen in how you behave. What is your life revealing about your faith?

How is your faith in Jesus displayed in your marriage? In your parenting? In your place of work?

With your neighbors? Friends, let this text serve as both a warning and an encouragement.

[39 : 02] Be warned that faith without works is dead. But be encouraged. If you see evidence of a living faith in your life, it means that you belong to God.

He has made you new by the Holy Spirit and brought you into union with Jesus Christ and He will now use you in a thousand different ways every single day to glorify His name and point people to the life transforming power of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a divine miracle from beginning to end. Only God can bring a sinner to genuine faith in Christ and only God can produce righteous deeds in those who are redeemed.

Both the initiation of faith and the life of faith is the work of Almighty God. So friends, marvel.

Marvel at the good hand of God as He works in your life and the lives of your brothers and sisters. Recognize God's hand.

[40 : 28] I would have to imagine it would be encouraging if you were to go to a fellow member in this church and to point out to them an evidence of God's grace in their life.

Not as a way of puffing them up or tempting them to become proud or arrogant, but to draw attention to the ongoing work of grace that is happening in the life of every single Christian.

let this text also motivate you. Let it motivate you to pray. Pray that God will rescue your lost friends and family members so they too can experience the joy of genuine faith and eternal rest in Jesus Christ alone.

Will you pray with me? Father, we thank You for Your Word. It seems inadequate to simply thank You and yet in our frailty sometimes we we're left with words that seem inadequate.

We know that Your Word is powerful. We know that when Your Spirit accompanies Your Word miracles happen particularly the miracle of regeneration.

[42 : 15] So we ask You even in this moment, Father if there is someone here who is not yet who is not yet tasted of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ through repentance and faith Holy Spirit grant that to them even now for the person who may be deceiving themselves Holy Spirit give them eyes to see ears to hear and a heart to receive the hard truth that their faith is not genuine but then immediately lead them to the hope that is found in Jesus.

And I pray that my brothers and sisters here would be encouraged as they see evidence of the ongoing work of the Spirit in their life that they wouldn't be discouraged but that they would be encouraged to see that as evidence of genuine faith the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit the continual work of grace that You are doing O triune God in sanctifying us by Your Word and Spirit So Father we do indeed thank You for Your Word and we pray now that Your Spirit would work in ways that only the Spirit can work to bring conviction to bring comfort to bring instruction to bring clarity we pray this all in Jesus' name Amen Amen Thank you Jason We're going to sing now when I survey the wondrous cross that fans