

Faith

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[0 : 00] Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit would move with gentle and deep power upon us this morning. Father, your word told us that you want us to be not just hearers of your word, but doers of your word.

And so, Father, we ask that for us this morning, that you would help us to hear your word well and be doers of your word. We ask that your word would come into our hearts and we give you, Father, full permission.

We invite and give you full permission for your word to speak into our hearts and rule in our hearts. And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.

I fell in love with my wife, but she didn't fall in love with me in the very early days of our relationship. In fact, it was one of those situations where I sort of fell in love with Louise almost from the first moment I saw her, even though I didn't even know her name.

But she didn't have that same experience of me. That's the stuff of romantic comedies and all that other stuff that happens all the time. Eventually, I became her friend.

[1 : 14] But Louise was in love with another man. Nothing wrong with that. We'll call him Bob. And so I sort of became a bit of a friend of Louise and of Bob. And there was this one particular night.

There used to be this thing in Ottawa, way, way, way, way back, called the Hoots. It used to meet in Jack Purcell Community Center on Sunday evening. Sort of a bit of a gathering for people like folk music and those who were sort of connected to the counterculture, as I guess it would have been called back then.

And so there's this one night I go to the Hoots and I happen to come in at the same time that Louise is coming in with Bob. And they invite me to sit with them. And so we take our coats off because I think it was either late, late, late fall or early, early, early spring.

And we take our coats off. And Louise says she'll sit there while Bob and I go and get something from the little place. They sold coffee and different types of things like that.

So I go up there and I order what I'm going to have. And then it's Bob's turn. And Bob orders what he wants to have. And then he says this. He says, I know what Louise would like.

[2 : 25] She'd like this. It was apple cider. And I can't remember the thing that was tea. But she says, I know what Louise would like. She'd like this. Now, that little phrase was like a dagger in my heart.

Because in those little words, I know what Louise would like, it really brought home to me the vast gap between myself and Louise and Louise and this other fellow.

Because it dawned on me that I wouldn't have had the vaguest idea in the world what to buy Louise. I didn't know what she would like. And it was a very depressing evening for me.

I tell you this story. And hopefully, if you just sort of remember it, and I'm going to say a few more comments about it. But if you have this story in the back of your mind, as we read James 2, verses 14 to 26, it'll help you to understand what James is saying and what he's talking about.

This desire that I had to be in a relationship with Louise, the fact that I didn't know much about her, and all that type of stuff. If you just keep that in your mind, it'll really help us as we read this text. So if you have your Bibles, turn in them to James 2, verses 14 to 26.

[3 : 35] If you're a guest here this morning, we're preaching through the book of James. That's what we do most of the time here at Church of the Messiah. And so we've come to this text, and that's what we're looking at.

And some of you might not know this, but this historically, at least for 500 years, has been a very, very, very controversial text in at least certain circles of the Christian church.

In fact, Luther, one of the early reformers, thought that the book shouldn't be in the Bible because it contradicted what the rest of the New Testament said. So it's been a very controversial text, and actually it's because of this text that Luther thought it shouldn't be in the Bible.

And so here's how the text goes. It's James 2, verses 14 to 26. And just by the way, it's just to move to the side here so the camera can see this for a moment.

Maybe you can see it or you can't. Maybe my water's in the way. But it says up there, grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It's a very, very famous Christian saying.

[4 : 39] Grace alone. How am I made right with God? I'm made right with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And so it's very fortuitous that that sign is here because here's what verse 14 says.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? And a bit of a grammar geek moment.

In the time of the text that this was written, there's a verbal form in the original language where they use certain questions. They always imply that the right answer is no. It's not like a real question that they're going to discover.

It's just a way of speaking where they pose a question, but the answer is no. And so basically what he's saying is, what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works, can that faith save him?

And the answer is no. So in other words, the question is, should we take the sign down? Because the sign is wrong.

[5 : 44] That in fact, we're not saved by grace alone through faith alone. We're saved by grace alone through faith and works. And that's the way the text should actually go. So what's going on here in the text?

Well, just as we're starting to get into it, I didn't realize when I was preparing this sermon that the gospel text was going to be John 6. But many, many, many years ago, in the early days of my being a Christian, I had a very funny story connected with John 6.

And so every time I read the text, I smile inwardly when I read it. So I became a Christian. I was sort of connected to the counterculture, more of a wannabe than an actual member of the counterculture.

I was a bit of a wannabe hippie, had long hair, a beard. By long hair, I mean down to my belt, like not just sort of down past my ears, like down to my belt. Anyway, we had this home fellowship, like sort of home church, home Bible study group.

And one day we invited somebody who really was very, very involved in the counterculture. We had somebody, we'd been having talks with him, and he'd gotten to know a little bit about the Christian faith, and he came to one of our Bible studies.

[6 : 50] And the Bible study was John 6. And so we're going along, and we would get into a bit of a discussion about it. And he was one of the very first people who said anything about it. He said, George, that's a wonderful text.

Now I understand what happened. And we were all a bit surprised. He said, yeah, because it says that there was lots of grass in that place. And in the 70s, grass was a way to refer to marijuana. So he said, there's lots of grass in the place. That just means they were all there with Jesus smoking marijuana. Yeah. And because they were smoking marijuana, anyway, he went on and on with this whole thing.

But the fact of the matter is, I mean, the Bible just meant grass as the stuff you mow. But he thought grass meant the stuff that you smoked. And so he fundamentally misunderstood the text.

And so it's actually a very good segue into our text. The text says, what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

[7 : 48] And the question is, well, what's going on here? Works, by the way, is just a sort of a very simple word that refers to what you do. Like, what do you actually do?

And not only what you do with your body physically, but what do you do with your emotions? What do you do with your mind? What do you do with your lips? Like, what do you do? That's just what the word works means in this particular consequence, in this context.

But what does faith mean? Actually, for a lot of people probably, and I was thinking about this, that I was thinking a lot of my non-Christian friends would probably misunderstand the word faith because the word faith is used in a very particular way in our culture.

It's usually used to mean in one of two senses. It either means a type of emotional state or a type of personal power. You'd hear people talk about how you have to have faith.

Faith, it's going to work out, you have to have faith. And the idea there of having faith is that faith is like a type of power that we have. Sort of, I'm not being derogatory, but I'm just trying to illustrate it. [8 : 47] It's almost those of you who remember the Care Bears, when it came to the right time to try to deal with the issue, and they sort of stuck out their chest and stuff. Hearts came out from their chest to deal with the bad guy and shut the bad guy down.

And so for a lot of people in our culture, when they hear the word faith, what they really think of is a type of power. That there's a type of power within you that's called faith. That if you just sort of garnish it and get it together and focus it and project it, that you're able to change the world in a way that's good for you and good for others.

But always good for you, but good for you and good for others. And you just have to have faith. It's a type of power. That's how a lot of people understand faith in our culture. And on the other hand, and the other way that a lot of people understand faith is that it's a type of emotional state where you'll hear people say, well, I have faith this is going to work out.

And what they really mean is that they have a type of emotion connected to it. An emotion of sort of tranquility or happiness or rest that it's all going to work out.

And that's what they mean by it. They have a certain emotional state. So is that what is going on here in the text? Is the text saying that if you don't have this sort of personal power and works, which doesn't really make sense, or if you don't have this type of emotional state and this other stuff, like what's going on there with the text?

[10 : 12] Is that what the word faith means? So some of you might be wondering, why are we even talking about this? Well, one of the things that drives my wife nuts about me, when I go to other churches on my holidays, I make it like a personal goal to not criticize or complain about the sermon because it's always easy to complain about other people and not complain about yourself.

It's a danger for ministers. But it's probably the same for musicians or anybody who's good at anything, to nitpick how other people do it and not look at yourself. But, you know, at the end, after we go to the church, I don't say anything negative.

In fact, if I think the sermon's really bad, this is a suggestion for you as well, by the way, if you think this sermon's tanking, that's an opportunity for you to pray for me in the congregation. And that's what I try to do when I'm visiting another church.

If the sermon is really tanking, I think, okay, now God brought me here today to pray for the pastor and pray for the congregation. But one of the things that, it's amazing how often it happens, that the person supposedly talks on the text, but if he'd actually just read the few verses after the text, he'd realize that everything he said about the text was wrong.

Like, it's astounding how often it happens. Like, one of the preceding sins of Christians and non-Christians when they look at the Bible is they just look at the Bible as if it's just that text. And they go ahead and they talk about it.

[11 : 41] But if you think about it, the text is part of a book. It would be as if you watched one minute of a movie and then went on and on and on about it. But from the one minute in the movie, you might not even know who the good guy or the bad guy is.

Like, you don't know how the movie ends. You don't know how anything happens. You just make this judgment and go on and on about the movie. And if some of you have watched the whole movie and you'd listen to it, you'd go, come on, that's crazy.

That doesn't make any sense. Like, you can't just talk about that. You need to know what happened before and what happened after. So the same thing with reading the Bible. You always have to look at what's going on before and after. And in this particular case, when it says, what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works, can that faith save him?

It's referring to a huge point in the book of James that happened just immediately before it. So I didn't ask people to put this on the screen. It won't be on the screen. If you have your Bibles, you can see it.

Or you just have to trust me that I'm reading it correctly. And what is said immediately before this is this. It's the last four words, the last four words of verse 13.

[12 : 47] Mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy triumphs over judgment. And it's a very, very, very powerful phrase.

It might not jump out of you. Some of you might like the sound of it just hearing it. But the more you understand this text, the more you understand just how big and powerful a word is.

Because what James has done is he unearths something that we all know and sometimes deeply troubles us, but we don't really know what to do about it other than to try harder.

And what James unearths just before this is very bad news is that there's something fundamentally broken about human beings. That even the best human being, there's something that's a bit dark at different parts of their life.

That there's something a bit broken, even in the best person, about different parts of their life. And that if we're all really honest, like really, really honest, the type of honesty that can happen at 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock in the morning or when you're beating yourself up over something, that to realize that there's just something, there is something just broken.

[13:56] Like, why is it to my best friend that I said that? Why is it that to my boss I said that? Why is it that that slipped out? Like, why is it that rather than getting up and helping, I did the opposite?

Like, why is it? And every single human being, if they're even remotely self-aware, and by the way, there was a wonderful line in the newspaper this week talking about somebody.

Self-absorbed, self being, there are many people today who are self-absorbed, but not self-aware. Isn't that a wonderful phrase? Self-absorbed with zero self-awareness.

But if you aren't, if you have any self-awareness, you realize there's something broken. And so what James is talking about is this wonderful thing. It's a four-word summary of what Jesus does for us on the cross.

That God's seen our great need, that Jesus dies on the cross and rises from the dead. And that the way to understand what Jesus does as he's dying upon the cross for you, as he tastes all there is to taste of death for you over the three days, and as he rises from death and defeats death, having vanquished hell, so to speak, is that what we see is mercy triumphing over judgment.

[15:12] That the judgment that God has on you, the judgment that other people have on you, the judgment that you have on yourself, those things you cannot deal with and cannot, you can try to maybe drink it away from your conscience or distract yourself away from your conscience or just pretend that it not happened or isolate yourself from the people that remind you or the situations that remind you that there's these things in your conscience that just cannot be dealt with, that God knowing all, Jesus as God knowing all there is to know, that he had left the glory and splendor of heaven, he takes on our human nature, he lives the life that we could never live, and he dies in your place.

That the judgment of God happens, but there's this wonderful surprise that God's mercy triumphs over that judgment in a way that can make you right with him. And it's this wonderful, powerful, powerful phrase.

In an age where we struggle with hopelessness, this is the profound hope of the gospel. In an age which struggles with anxiety, this is the profound gospel hope in the face of anxiety that God knew every single thing about you with nothing held back.

He knew you perfectly. Still, he loved you, and he loved you so much, and Jesus loved you so much that knowing you absolutely perfectly from the moment of your conception to the moment of your death, still he was willing to die in your place.

In your place condemned he stood. In my place condemned he stood. And that in his death upon the cross and in his resurrection, what you are seeing is God's wonderful provision of grace and mercy, that mercy triumphs over judgment.

[16:55] And that's what James has just shared. So then the question is, how does that, how do I connect to that? How do I get that?

How do I get into that? How do I get included in that? How do I receive it? How does that get in me? Like, what's even the right language? Like, given who he is and what he's done, like, how does that become mine?

How does that become me? How do I get there that there gets to me? And Christians historically have answered, reading the Bible, that the answer is that it's all an act of grace, God's grace alone, that we get into it and it gets into us through faith alone.

And who do you have the faith in? You have the faith in Christ alone. You have, that's who you connect with. The person of Jesus, who's also the promise of God, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, that you connect to Jesus with faith.

And James knows that that's the Christian answer. But he knew that back in his time, just as there is today, there's lots of confusion about what faith is. And that's what he's getting at.

[18:16] So first of all, he says something to shock everybody. But after he shocked everybody by saying, what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works, can that faith save him?

What he does is he unearths four different misconceptions about what faith is so that we can understand what faith really is and what it isn't. And so that for those of us who might have been very, very confused, can realize that maybe we aren't as, maybe, maybe what's going on in us doesn't suck after all and isn't as terrible or missing the point as we thought.

Or otherwise, say, you know what, I just thought it was those other things. And today's the day that you can say, now that as James starts to give you these examples of what it is and what it isn't, that you say, I want that, Lord.

Jesus, be my Savior, be my Lord. Like, mercy triumphs over judgment, yes. Like, let that be in me and let me be in that. Yes, yes, yes.

So how does he do it? Well, just actually, I'm going to give you the big idea of the text before we get into the text and read the rest of his things. And I don't know if it's going to be on the screen or not because I sent it very late to the poor tech team.

[19:40] Faith is humbly connecting to the triune God from your heart so that he changes the real you in your real life. Faith is humbly connecting to the triune God from your heart so that he changes the real you in your real life.

I'm going to say it other times during the service. And just to sort of give you a bit of a high view of what that means, and I'll talk about it a little bit more in the words to come. By saying that faith is humbly connecting the triune God to the triune God from your heart, it's saying that it's personal. That it's from your heart. It's from the very center of you. Like, if somebody, if you met somebody who had that type of deep affection and love and personal connection to their lawnmower, you'd think they were weird.

And you'd be right. If you had somebody who didn't have any type of warmth or connection to their husband or their wife, you'd think that's not right. And so, what it's saying is that the faith is something personal.

It comes from, it involves your heart, the very center of who you are. And I'm using the word heart in the biblical way, not the modern way. In the biblical way, the heart is the very center of who you are. And from your heart, the heart, like in modern world, heart refers to emotions.

[20:59] But in the biblical world, and that's the way I'm using the word, the heart is the center of who you are and out of your heart flows your imagination, your mind, your will, your emotion, your affections.

Like all of these things that we sort of have different words for have one source, which is the very center of who we are. So when I say that faith is humbly connecting to the triune God from your heart, sort of it changes the real you and your real life.

It's talking about, it's a personal knowing of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You know Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus is the one who makes you know the Father.

And it involves the emotion, the imagination, the will, the mind, everything. It's saying that this is something which is deeply human, which I'll talk about more in a moment.

It's human because it's based on the Trinity as well, by the way. I mean, actually I'll say something about this right now. You know, from a long time I've thought that there's a lot of stuff in evolutionary theory that just doesn't make any sense.

[22:10] Because if Darwinian theory is true and it's all about the survival of the fittest, the fittest thing to survive would be something that it can just propagate itself and doesn't need another person and doesn't need a community.

if you just think about it for a second, like what a weird way, like how is it better that for the human being to, human race to continue, that there has to be both a husband and a wife, like a man and a woman, and that it even takes more than two people to survive, that, you know, like even the earliest records of any type of human life, there's always a tribe.

It's not just that you have to have one man and one woman, like not two men, like why? Like really, the best way, if you really want to have ultimate survival, it should just be that I'm like an amoeba type blob, and at the right time I just sort of something oozes out of me, and another human being

that doesn't mean any other human beings just goes on and on and on.

It's a really crazy way, like that doesn't really make any sense in terms of if it's all about the survival of the fittest, it's all about evolutionary development that helps the propagation of species, like that doesn't make any sense, but, and it also makes no sense if you think about it, that personhood comes out of the impersonal, I mean, that's at the heart of evolutionary theory as well, is that somehow or another the impersonal, an impersonal world somehow or another creates persons, well how can that be?

Like we don't see that ever happening anywhere around us, we don't see lawn mowers developing into persons, we don't see calculators turning into persons, persons, so how could that be?

[23 : 51] But, you know, it makes sense if the one who has ultimately created all things and sustains all things has made human beings in particular to be different on one level part of the created order but different than everything else in the created order because human beings bear the image of God and from all eternity the real God, and that's one of the reasons by the way I use the word triune God, I use the word triune God because I as a Christian do not believe in the God that most Canadians believe in.

I believe in the triune God which is not what most Canadians believe and in fact one of the funny moments with an atheist or somebody who's given up on faith and they no longer believe in God and if you ask them what do you mean by God and they tell you and you say well actually you and I are at one, I don't believe that God either, I don't believe that God exists, sort of catches them by surprise, what like, thought you should be a Christian, yeah, yeah, I'm a Christian but I don't believe in that God, like if I were you I wouldn't believe in that God either, but if from all eternity there's the person of the Father loving the person of the Son and the person of the Holy Spirit, then the idea that we are made for a personal connection and personal relationship because we are made in God's image makes complete and utter perfect sense.

And I'll say, yeah, and so, you know, it's personal, it is of the heart, it is human, it is Trinitarian, it has boundaries in terms of, like faith has boundaries or, in other words, it's connected to the object. Faith changes you in all areas of your life, it moves towards a particular end, and just as, you see, and this is where it goes back to the story that I had with Louise.

you see, at all times, faith is a type of personal knowing where you open yourself up to the other in the hope that the other opens themselves up to you.

[25 : 53] That's at the end of the day what it is. And that, you know, it's appropriate, like if Louise had gone on to marry Bob, and if by chance we had been friends, I might continue to know her, but I could only know her as a friend, obviously, otherwise it would transgress the marital relationship.

And you know your wife or your husband in a different way than you know your friend, and in a different way than you know your child, and in a different way that you know somebody else. The object is important, there's a type of a fitness between the object and the person where you don't want to transgress it.

But in the case of Louise, I desire to have a deeper relationship, a different type of relationship with her. I desired that I would know how to open myself up to her and have her open herself up to me in a way that would move to a deeper type of relationship and a different type of relationship.

But at the end of the day, and as it turned out by the providence of God, her and Bob came to an end and I was able to marry her and we'd been married a long time and I'm very, very, very, very grateful for it.

But the fact of the matter is, is this ability to connect in a relationship with another human being doesn't depend upon IQ, doesn't depend upon how much you can know in school, it doesn't depend upon how powerful your emotions is, it's fundamentally deeply human.

[27 : 24] and that's one of the wonderful things is that God doesn't call us to get into what he's done for us in the person of Jesus where mercy triumphs over judgment. He doesn't do something that means that we have to be really, really smart and be able to figure out theology really well or that we have to have the type of willpower that's described in our culture that we can just sort of really, really use our willpower to connect to God or he doesn't call us to be the type of person who always has lots of really positive types of emotions so that we have these positive emotions about God.

No, the way we connect is through faith and if you think about it, a little baby, a little baby, just nursing with its mother, the baby knows the mother.

The mother has a relationship with the baby and the baby has a relationship with the mother. The baby has a different relationship with the mother than the father does.

But it's just the fundamental nature of the human being that human beings can do that connecting with other human beings in a personal way. It's how God designed us.

It's fundamentally human. A handicapped, a severely handicapped adult or child can have a relationship with another human being. A very, very elderly person, just before they get lost in dementia, can have still a personal relationship with somebody.

[28 : 58] And that's why God, the way that we connect with Jesus is something which is fundamentally connected to who we are that does not depend upon us having strength of will, strength of mind, extensive education, great verbal dexterity and clarity or any of these types of things.

it's a personal connecting, a personal connecting that can grow with knowledge about the person. Over time, maybe now I would know how to go up to the thing.

Louise would say I'm a very slow learner and she would be right. I am a very slow learner when it comes to my relationship with her. But I know how to order for her, like I would have known that a long time ago.

I know lots about her and about how she is and how she works and who she is and how I am and the knowledge grows. And that's what faith is. You see, it's because mercy triumphs over judgment isn't just an abstraction, it's not just a slogan, it's a summary of what Jesus does for us with his life, his death upon the cross, and his resurrection, and it's a knowing of him.

And just as to know any human being, you get involved in their life, what they say, what they don't say, what they're like, what they've done, what they haven't done, what they will do, you get involved in all of those types of things.

[30 : 19] But at the same when you know Jesus, you can't know Jesus without knowing who he is and what he says and what he doesn't say and what pleases him and what doesn't please him and what he's accomplished for you and what he will accomplish for you and what he's continuing to accomplish for you and in your life.

And that's who you know. And it's summarized with this profound truth that every moment in your Christian walk, mercy triumphs over judgment. Struggling with anxiety, mercy triumphs over judgment.

Struggling with hopelessness, mercy triumphs over judgment. Feeling you are an absolutely crappy Christian and maybe you are, but you know the comfort? Mercy triumphs over judgment.

That describes who he is and what he's done. Let's just read the text very quickly. I got out of my notes, by the way.

We need to read the rest. So how's how you unpack it? Look at verses 15, 16, and 17. For brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warm and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body.

[31 : 35] What good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. One of the things that's so wonderful about James is he tells you what he thinks.

What do you think, James? It's dead. It's completely worthless. So what's he describing? He's describing what the normal way is for faith. He's going to describe as wrong the two normal mistakes that people make about faith.

You see, what happens to this particular person? They're just caught up with themselves. They're just caught up with their own world. What they're concerned with is making a posture type statement.

What they're concerned with is saying the right word. What they're concerned with is having the right emotion about the person. In terms of virtue signaling, it might even be that they leave and they just feel so good about themselves that they've said something like this.

Don't I really care about the poor? It's just like when I saw that Black Lives Matter demonstration, all those people, I thought, all you folks, I mean, there's a real problem. I'm not denying the problem.

[32 : 36] But gosh, if you wanted to get a whole range of Pharisees and virtue signaling, and if I've offended you, then that's life. That's what it was. Virtue signaling.

Powerful emotions that did nothing. Did nothing. It's the secular equivalent of go your way, do well. you see how it's a problem and we don't even necessarily realize it? And I don't know, maybe I'm going to get some angry emails because I compare this text to Black Lives Matter demonstrations in

Canada.

I can't comment as much about the states. But it's all about emotion. You know, one of the big things I had as a problem in my early Christian days, I became Christians through charismatics, and I'd go to these worship services and all, and everybody, there'd be all these times in the service closing their eyes, their arms are up, you can just feel all the emotion.

And I think to myself, gosh, I'm a crappy Christian. I suck. But then it's so, you know, and then you realize after they go right from that to get drunk.

[33 : 49] And you go, like some people just like emotional displays. Some people just like to mouth the right words.

And what James says, is that faith? No, it's dead. Complete dead end. Now, now that we more reformed, restrained, Anglican types, where very few of us are much in danger of being in a worship service where we're jumping up and down and waving our arms, so we can say, yeah, I'm really glad James nailed those persons.

Now he nails us. that's what he does next. Look what he says immediately after that. Verse 18, but someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Basically, what's behind that is it's as if he knows what's going to be written in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 where there's the gift of faith and the gift of works of mercy and compassion.

And it's sort of as if the person said, well, you know, there's different strokes for different folks, you know, you know, whatever. And James says, show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works, by what I do.

You believe that God is one? You do well. And then, boom, even the demons believe and shudder. And that's for us more reformed or evangelical types who might be able to recite the entire 39 articles, the entire Westminster Shorter Catechism, Luther's Shorter Catechism, for Roman Catholics who can quote verbatim the entire big fat book of the Catholic Catechism of the Christian faith.

[35 : 28] But that's just mere not, it's just things in your head. And if it isn't that personal relationship that involves a change in your life, what does James say it is?

It's like demons who know perfect, I mean, what he's saying here is, this is so crazy, every demon has a better, a more pure theology than every single, any one of us here in the room.

And so if it's just a matter of the Christian faith is all about perfecting your theology, it's going to be hard to beat a demon, human, but it's completely useless.

It would be as if I merely studied Louise from a distance and got to know her perfectly and perfectly and perfectly, but never actually said hello to her. And not only hello, but then talk to her for an extra couple of moments and then maybe have coffee with her and then have it develop.

And those are the classic two big mistakes. And then he points us in a better direction. Remember I said that faith is humbly connecting to the triune God from your heart so that he changes the real you in your real life.

[36 : 56] That's the heart of all relationships. Having a child changes you. If it doesn't change you, there's something wrong. Having a friend changes you. If it doesn't change you, there's something wrong.

Being married changes you. If it doesn't change you, there's something wrong. That's how relationships work. And so James now points us in terms of a more positive direction.

Verses 20 to 24. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works, in other words, faith apart from your life being changed, faith apart from your life being changed is useless. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son on Isaac on the altar.

You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works 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.

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. What he's just saying here is that faith is active. It was active in terms of Abraham, that it's active, that it involves such things as it grows.

[38 : 16] What he actually does here is he connects, if you go back and you read it, he connects the life of Abraham from Genesis 15 to Genesis 22. So there's eight chapters there and he texts something from the beginning of Abraham's walk with God and towards the end of Abraham's walk with God.

And he takes a 25 year span of Abraham's life and he connects it. He shows that there was this active aspect and growing aspect and developmental aspect of Abraham's faith in the personal God.

Remember, faith is humbly connecting to the triune God from your heart so that it changes the real you in your real life. And it culminates in this particular story, which I don't have time to go into right now.

Which has to do with his son Isaac. That in a sense there's always a type of a fulfillment. There's always a moving towards something greater, a goal. That a better friendship, a better marriage, a better relationship with your kids, a better relationship with your boss, a better relationship.

That there's always this sense that there's always something more that you can do. Not in a way that crushes you or kills you, but in a sense that you know that it's just natural, that bothers you if your relationship with your child or your spouse or your friend is going in the wrong direction.

[39 : 33] Wrong direction means that you have a basic idea that there's an end, a telos, something that should be going towards, that you're off track and you want to get back to it. And once again, if we understand that faith is humbly connecting to the triune God from your heart so that it changes the real you and your real life, then you realize that there's this direction that that connection will continue to go, which is continue to get you closer and closer to God.

And when it says that faith is active, what it is there in the original language, it says faith is active and works, and the images of a boss and co-workers doing something together, that's the image in the original language.

In other words, what happens first and foremost is the boss making the decision, but then the boss makes a decision and everything works towards it. You know, it would be the same thing that, in a sense, what really begins a relationship with me and Louise is entering into a relationship, and then certain actions follow.

The actions don't go before or separate from a relationship. I mean, that would just be weird, wouldn't it? Like, she would view it as stalking. If I just sort of kept coming up, refused, she refuses all my advantages, I just keep buying her coffee or doing other types of things, that wouldn't, she'd think I was stalking her.

That's a definition of a creep. But it's not, if it begins with a relationship and then out of the relationship certain actions follow, like, that you don't, you know, you don't dominate, you know, husbands don't dominate your wives.

[41 : 07] Don't mistake dominating your wives for whatever the biblical text is you think you're quoting. You're just misquoting the Bible. It's the wrong, it's not the right telos. It's not moving the right way.

That's what's going on here in the text. The relationship, in a sense, guides and makes sense of the actions. And then the next thing which he does in verses 25 to 26 is, 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?

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. And I originally, I got, I spent more, anyway, I didn't manage my time in the sermon, well.

Hopefully it's all in the providence of God, it's all worked well. The interesting thing about going from Abraham to Rahab is that Abraham is a hero of the faith, and so a lot of us could say, well, that leaves me out.

I'm not a hero of the faith. I'm not Billy Graham. You know, I'm not St. Francis of Assisi. I'm not Calvin. You know, I'm not Corrie Ten Boom. I'm not like that.

[42 : 15] And so he uses the example of a woman who was a pagan and a prostitute. And whereas Abraham's story is a story of 25 years of development and growth, Rahab's is of a moment when she has to make a particular decision, then act out of it, and it completely changes her life.

And so he takes man to woman, high prestige to no prestige, long period of time to sudden. And in both cases, he says, you see in here there's the beginning of a connecting to the triune God in a way which changes you, the real you in your real life.

life. I just want to close with two things. I'm an evangelical.

I believe that it's appropriate for me to tell people about Jesus and say, if you haven't given your life to Jesus, there's no better time now than to get in on the most spectacular, wonderful, real thing that's ever happened in the real world, which is that mercy triumphs over judgment.

And if you didn't know that until now, I'm telling you now, and I'm telling you that he did it for you. There's no single person who's so bad, so screwed up, so psychologically damaged, so much a failure, who's so much rejected by the world, whose life is so screwed up that this is not in fact an invitation to you, that you can take place that even though your life is a mess upon a mess upon a mess upon a mess, as Jesus lived this life that he lived and died his death upon the cross and rose from the dead, he was thinking of you in the hope that you would say to him, Jesus, be my Savior and Lord.

[44 : 00] Help me to get into that and please get into me. I'm an evangelical. I believe that. And I've just said it to you again. But here's what I also want to tell you.

There's three different ways that people get into that. I know people, and in fact, I know people who are for the fulfillment of what every Christian prays.

There's beautiful young children here. I can tell you this right now. If the parent is a Christian, none of them is saying, I sure hope that my child becomes a witch and a drug addict and then joins a biker gang for eight years so they can have a dramatic sudden conversion.

What does every Christian pray? They pray, I'm going to read stories to the, I'm going to read Bible stories to my kids. I'm going to bring them to church. I'm going to pray for them every day. Why? Because every parent wants their child to, in a sense, be able to say when they're 20, you know what, I don't know if there ever was a time in my life I didn't believe and trust in Jesus.

And just as a baby doesn't have to have amnesia for 20 years and all of a sudden discover its mother, you can have a real relationship with Jesus that begins from infancy that you don't know the moment to change but the relationship is real.

[45 : 20] And there's others who can't tell you a moment they came to trust in Jesus. They could say that on, you know, March 15, 2020, I wasn't a Christian and March 15, 2021, I became, I know I'm a Christian and where that moment came where I went from one to the other, I can't tell you where it happened but you know what I can tell you?

I can tell you that Jesus is my Savior and my only hope is that mercy triumphs over judgment. And then there's others of us who can say, yeah, you know, there was a moment, George or some other person or my neighbor told me about this and I realized it was time for me to lay down my arm or open the drawbridge and get down on my knees and look at Jesus and say, Jesus be my Savior, I want mercy to triumph over judgment in my life.

And God is so shameless because it's a personal thing. He accepts all three. He accepts all three. Please stand.

Let's just pray. Father, some of us here, some of us here as maybe adults don't really know that there was a time that we ever, we've just always believed in Jesus.

And Father, we give you thanks and praise that because to be with Jesus is about having a relationship with him and just as a child can have a relationship with its mother from the moment of birth and even from the moment of conception so we can have a moment, a relationship with Jesus that we don't know the beginning.

[46 : 55] Father, we give you thanks and praise for Christian families, for moms and dads who read the Bible to their children and pray for their children and sing Christian songs and love them and bring them to church and other types of things to grow their faith.

And Father, for everyone here who that describes, we are so grateful for the parents and we are so grateful that they know Jesus and did not have to go through some of the messes the rest of us had to go through before we became Christians.

And Father, there are some here who have given their lives to Jesus and they can say the moment. There's others who can say, well, I wasn't one now, then and now I am and I don't know more.

Father, we give you thanks and praise that you use that means as well to bring people to a trusting connection with you, with Jesus that changes our life and changes our real life and our real destiny, our real end.

And Father, we thank you for that work of the Holy Spirit that brought us to Jesus. And Father, if there are any here who have not yet given their lives to Jesus, I ask that the Holy Spirit would move deeply in their lives, if they feel, Father, a type of a pressure to surrender and say yes, that they would stop fighting that pressure and that they would just turn to Jesus and say, Jesus, be my Savior and Lord.

I want it to be the case not of how good a person I am or thinking I'm too bad a person, but that the song and story of my life will be mercy triumphs over judgment because I have received Jesus as

my Savior and my Lord.

[48 : 26] And Father, for all of us, we ask that you help us to be more and more and more gripped with the wonder of the gospel, that mercy triumphs over judgment, that that might be the ground by which we understand our lives, understand our past, understand our present, understand our future, that mercy triumphs over judgment, that Jesus would be the one as that truth is brought deeper to our heart, that propels us to live, that draws us to live, that grounds how we live, that becomes the lens by which we see ourselves in our past and our future, and motivates us to live.

And Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do that wonderful, continuing, saving, sanctifying work until that day when either you have returned Jesus or we die and see you face to face, and we enter into glory all along, not you weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses.

Father, we thank you for Jesus. Grip us with the gospel, and all God's people said, Amen.