

'Faith that works'

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[0:00] I want to begin with the question right at the top. And that is the question, How do you know that someone is a Christian?!

Secondly, is it someone who has ticked Christian on the latest census? You've done your census, Delaney? Maybe your parents did it for you.

Or is it someone who is baptized and has publicly confessed their faith? Or someone who confesses Jesus as Lord, that is, confessed was past tense, confesses is now.

Or someone who lives like Jesus. Or maybe you think all of the above, which often is the answer, yes. Or there may be others that I have not put on the list.

Have a think. Now I want to ask a slightly different question, but with the same list of options. Okay, on the next slide. What makes someone a Christian?

[1:21] Okay, difference. First one is, how do you know someone is a Christian versus what is... what is the thing that makes someone a Christian? Same list.

Same options. Perhaps others as well. So, just take a few minutes. Not a few minutes, that's too long. A few seconds to have a think. Don't have to tell anyone next to you, but I want you to lock in an answer in your own head, okay?

Okay? Okay, and lock it in and don't forget. Okay? All right. I'm going to hold off answering the question, but I want you to keep that question in mind, because as we look through the passage, it would hopefully clarify for you what the Bible does say, and therefore what the right answer should be.

Because today's text, as King Lee has already introduced, is all about faith and works, all good deeds, right? Faith, sorry, works, good deeds, same thing.

And by good deeds, I mean anything that constitutes doing what is good. And if we've been following along in James, it's the things that James has already been talking about.

[2:35] Controlling our tongue, not polluting ourselves with the filth in this world, the moral filth, hearing God's Word and doing it. Good deeds are things that involve both action, as well as words, all right?

So deeds, but also speech. And to begin with, James starts with a number of questions, and they're mostly rhetorical, which means that the answer actually should be obvious to us.

So follow along in verse 14 and see what you think the answer should be. James says, What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? Or to put the question another way, can someone with faith but no deeds really be a Christian? Well, the answer, in case you're wondering, is no.

But in case you're not convinced, James goes on with a scenario. 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, and does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

[3:45] In the same way, faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead. Now, I said earlier that good deeds involve speech and words. Well, in this case, even nice and comforting words are not enough.

And that's because, for this person, genuine care requires practical help. The need is physical. And so, to really care, therefore, is to give this person clothes or food.

And so, James calls it dead faith, which means it's not alive. It's fake. It's false. Now, when something is fake, you know, it actually tries to pretend to be real.

It may look alive, even when it's not. So, for example, the artificial flowers. Can you tell whether that's real or fake?

I don't know. I haven't gone close enough to tell. But you have to go and touch it sometimes, isn't it, to see whether it's made of plastic or cloth. Otherwise, it could be real.

[4:51] And so, likewise, fake faith may look real. It may look like weekly church attendance, singing hymns and praises, like we just did, saying all the right things, you know, amen, using the right religious phrases, if the Lord wills, whatever.

Yet there is no follow through. And sometimes it can even be so deceiving that you're not just deceiving others, you've deceived yourself into thinking that you have real faith.

Now, James says in verse 18, if someone will say, but someone will say, you have faith, I have deeds, well, show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith in my deeds.

You believe that there is one God, well, good. Even the demons believe that. And shudder. And so, James is challenging someone who thinks faith is all you need, well, don't kid yourself.

Because even the demons believe that. And they shudder at the thought of that. So, likewise, our mental assent to the fact that God exists, or that Jesus is the Son of God, is a good and necessary beginning, but if there are no deeds to back it up, then our faith is no better than the demons.

[6:19] Faith and deeds, therefore, cannot be divorced or separated. They go hand in hand. Otherwise, someone can come along and say, well, you have faith but no deeds.

Well, I have deeds without faith. Meaning, if your faith is valid without deeds, then, well, my deeds are also valid without faith. Both of which, in case you're still wondering, is impossible.

Instead, James says, I will show you my faith by my deeds. That is, my deeds will back up the genuineness of my faith. My deeds done in response to my faith will distinguish me from the demons.

Now, we'll go on later in the second section, if you look at the outline, to define a bit more clearly the relationship between faith and good works and how that determines salvation.

But the point here that James is making is simply that it's not possible to have true faith without good deeds. Where true faith exists, good deeds will follow.

[7:26] Otherwise, that faith is fake. It's dead. It's not real. It does not reflect a genuine belief in God. But then he goes on to make the next point in the second half of the passage, and that is, faith without good deeds is also useless because it does not achieve God's purpose for us.

And he shows this by giving us two examples of heroes of the faith in the Old Testament. Abraham and Rahab. Verse 20. 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 that his faith was made complete by what he did.

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God and 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 even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and set them off in a different direction. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

[8:46] Now, firstly, we need to look closely at a few key phrases. So, Abraham, it says there, was not made righteous by what he did, but considered righteous by what he did.

That means he was already righteous beforehand, but what he did showed that he was. For James goes on to say that his faith was made complete by what he did.

And that doesn't mean that it was Abraham's good deeds that were needed to save him. Rather, it's the idea that his faith reached its logical fulfillment, conclusion.

It is completed. It is the right response to his faith. A fitting end point. Hence, James then quotes from Scripture saying, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

And we have to kind of realize when this crediting of righteousness occurred, because it did not occur in that reading that we just heard in Genesis 22, when Isaac was being offered as a sacrifice.

[10:00] Instead, this very verse actually comes 30 years earlier in Genesis chapter 15. At that time, Abraham was still childless.

And, you know, he was looking around, and there was a servant of his called Eliezer of Damascus, and he was wondering whether this might be his heir. But God promised that, no, Abraham will have a son, his own flesh and blood.

And that's when Abraham believed, and it was credited to him, there and then, as righteousness. Genesis 15 verse 6.

Now, at this point, which was about 30 years earlier, to Genesis 22, no action or choice was required of Abraham. He simply believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

That is, he was saved by faith alone at this point. But later in Genesis 22, this faith was then tested after Isaac's birth, because now Isaac was a son that was deeply loved by Abraham.

[11:12] So when you go to Genesis chapter 22 and verse 2, what God said was this, take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the region of Moriah.

Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain, I will show you. And it was at this point, with the testing of his faith, that Abraham responded with obedience.

So the same faith that credited him with righteousness in Genesis 15 is now being exercised here in Genesis 22. And if you were listening carefully to that story, you will see different points in that story where you actually see clues of Abraham's faith.

So for example, in verse 5, when they got near to the mountain, Abraham said to his servants, stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there.

And then notice what he says, we will worship, and then we, not I, but we will come back to you, right? So Abraham actually believed that Isaac would return with him one way or another.

[12:24] And then as they got nearer, Isaac said, the fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? Well, Abraham answered, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.

Now, many people would say, Abraham was just being, you know, he's just being protective of Isaac. You know, he's not going to say, you're the offering, right? So, but if you read Hebrews 11, verse 19, we actually told what was in Abraham's mind.

And it was that Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead. And so in a manner of speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. In other words, Abraham believed that God, one way or another, would save Isaac before he actually offered the sacrifice.

And actually, this morning, as it was being read, I noticed as well that the name of the place that it was called is God Will Provide, isn't it? Abraham did not name the place God has provided, as though, oh, okay, I realize God has provided.

No, he named it God Will Provide because he knew, he believed that God Will Provide. And that's why that's the name of the place rather than God has provided. And so this is the same faith that Abraham had in Genesis 15.

[13:45] Only now it was being tested and he had to demonstrate it with his response. Now, the same goes for Rahab, even though, you know, we wouldn't have time to go into the story at length, but she sheltered the spies from Israel at risk to her own life.

And again, when you look at Hebrews 11, verse 31, it says, by faith, the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

It doesn't say wasn't killed with those who were rebellious or those who were kind of, I don't know, ignorant, but it says those who were disobedient.

in contrast to Rahab, who was obedient to what God had promised. But in both instances, it was the testing of their faith that allowed God to achieve his purposes through them, not only in their lives, but actually for Israel and the world as well.

Because God actually said to Abraham afterwards, because you were obedient, I will bless you and the nations will be blessed because you obeyed me. So what God did was that in the testing of Abraham's faith, because he was obedient, God was able to achieve his purposes through his faith and obedience.

[15:12] And that's the same with us. God gives us faith with the view to test it, that it would be tested, and God's purpose for doing that, his ultimate goal, is our maturity.

That's why we saw at the very start in James 3 to 1 where James says, consider it all joy when you face trials of many kinds because the testing of your faith produces perseverance, which goes on then to make you mature, right?

Faith is given with the view of being tested. Now, we often think of faith, you know, love, and patience as sort of virtues that are kind of similar.

They are in some sense, but I want you to notice that actually when you talk about love and patience, these are virtues that we should be exercising all the time, right? Whatever the

circumstance.

God doesn't say, oh, you know, pick and choose who you like to love and love. No, love is something that you show indiscriminately. Same with patience. You know, don't be patient only in some times but not others.

[16:23] But when it comes to faith, faith is actually a quality that we exercise wisely. That is, some of the time only, depending on the object of the faith, right?

So, for instance, if a scammer calls you, please don't put your faith in him, right? That's the worst thing to do, all right?

Why? Because the object of faith is not good. Now, on the other hand, it may be appropriate and hopefully it is often appropriate to put your faith in your leaders.

But we should do it cautiously, right? Because leaders can let us down. It can be misplaced. But when it comes to God and his son, then what we're told to do is to put our faith fully in God all the time without holding back.

Why? Because the object of our faith, God, Jesus, is always trustworthy. He will not let us down. But my point is that it is not just faith, but the object of our faith that is important.

[17:34] And so sometimes you say, I have faith. Well, good. But actually, you need to have the faith in the right person. You need to have faith in Jesus. Having faith generically actually is not very useful.

And God's aim in testing our faith is so that we learn more and more to put our reliance on him. And when we do that, that is actually the mark of Christian maturity, right?

It's not like one day we become so mature that we outgrow our need for faith. No. When we grow in maturity, we actually grow in faith so that we become fully reliant on him such that in times of suffering and temptation, we will be unmoved, but we will persevere to do what's right.

Faith grows, in other words, as we mature. And our maturity never replaces our need for faith in God. And so if faith does not translate into good deeds, where we're doing simply what God tells us to do to trust him, then his purpose cannot be achieved in our lives.

Our faith isn't put to God's intended use and therefore is useless. So really, in summary, the passage just says that faith without works is dead and therefore is useless.

[19:05] We may say we believe in God, but if it doesn't translate into life-giving obedience, then there is no use. True faith works by obeying and doing what is good.

So that's the passage, but in light of what King Lee raised about the fact that, you know, Paul talks about faith alone, and here James is talking about faith and good deeds, we need to then understand, in our second point of the outline, what the relationship then is between faith and good deeds.

And so I want to define and summarize this relationship. Now, if you were here at the very start of our series, you would have seen this slide where I said that it is faith alone that saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.

And why is it not alone? Well, it is because it needs to be accompanied by good deeds. So, what then is the place of good deeds if it does not save?

Well, as we've seen in our passage today, and if you look at our outline, there are three points there. The first point is that good deeds are the inevitable evidence of faith.

[20:18] As we saw with Abraham and Rahab, when faith is tested, good deeds are the demonstration that this faith is real, is genuine. But good deeds, then, aren't the basis of salvation, the second point.

That is, because God doesn't save you because of your good deeds, God saves you by your faith in Jesus. Or rather, God has already saved you because Jesus died for you, and what you need to do is to put your faith or trust in Jesus as a response.

It is His death on the cross that saves you, that takes away the penalty of your sins so that you know, longer need to pay for it. That is the basis of your salvation. Good works is not the basis of your salvation.

And that doesn't change no matter how many good deeds you do or how mature you are. You are always reliant on the fact of Jesus dying for you and believing in Him that saves you.

However, good deeds are the fruit of salvation because having been saved, you now have the Holy Spirit in you, there is new life, the life of Christ in you and God is therefore working in and through you to do all the good works.

[21:34] It is the fruit, it is the result of you being saved. You don't need to do good deeds to earn God's favour and forgiveness, rather you do the good deeds in response of thanksgiving to the grace that you've already received.

Which therefore also follows that good deeds are not the assurance of your salvation. You know, sometimes you may think, oh, I don't know, my life is, Christian life is hard, you know, I'm discouraged.

I don't know how much I've really kind of grown as a Christian. And so your faith does start to flag. And what you don't need to do and what you mustn't do is to look to your good deeds as assurance of your salvation.

And don't think that, oh, I need to do more good deeds in order to be assured of my salvation. Rather, your assurance of salvation always goes back to the cross, to what Jesus has done for you. That is the only sure foundation that you're saved. And so whenever you're discouraged, whenever you think, oh, I don't know how well I'm going as a Christian, then what you need to do is actually remember again that Jesus died for you, that you are saved, that your sins are forgiven.

[22:56] Put your assurance in that, put your faith in that, and that will then allow you to grow. And from that, good works and good deeds will follow.

Now, of course, as your faith does grow and you become more consistent in your walk, what your good deeds do is to confirm the genuineness of your faith.

Alright, there's a difference. Can you see it? You're not being assured of your salvation by your good works, but your good works confirms to you that the faith that you have in Jesus is a real faith. So if you're struggling to understand this, let me give you an example with a fruit tree, right? I've got a picture there. I'm sure some of you would love to pluck it and eat it.

It's plump, yes, it's juicy. This is a healthy fruit, right? Probably it's got pesticides, that's why it looks so perfect, but anyway, still a healthy fruit.

[24:00] Now, let me ask you, do you get healthy fruit from a healthy tree or a healthy, or a diseased tree? Thank you, Edith.

And that is the right answer, right? You cannot get a disease, sorry, you cannot get a healthy fruit from a diseased tree, right? And so likewise, our good deeds are the fruit, not the tree, right? Your good deeds are not the substitute for faith. The tree is the faith, if you like. When your faith is healthy, when your faith is real, then what you have is good fruit, good deeds, all right?

But you don't say that the good deeds are the tree itself. It needs to spring from the tree that is healthy. And so your faith is the thing that needs to be healthy, and then your good fruit will show that your faith is for real.

And so we need to therefore get our motivation for doing good right, is it not? Because if we're doing good because we're responding in trust to God, being thankful for our salvation, then the fruit of good deeds is evidence of true faith.

[25:13] But if we're doing good because we think somehow it shows our worth before God, or qualifies us for God's kingdom, then the good deeds are no longer seen by us as the fruit, is it?

It's substituting for our faith. Instead of faith, what we're developing is legalism, which is not good. It's salvation by good works, which the Bible says does not happen.

All right, hopefully I begin to show you what the relationship is between faith and good deeds. And so, coming back to the original two questions that we had at the start, perhaps now you can answer the question, what makes someone a Christian?

And the answer is faith in Jesus. Okay, I think it wasn't probably even one of the options on that, but it is faith in Jesus that enables someone to be safe and belong to the kingdom of God.

But to that very first question, how do you know someone is a Christian? Well, the answer is that, in part, we know by the good deeds that arise from faith.

[26:28] Okay, can you see the difference? Something that makes someone a Christian and something that helps you know that someone is a Christian. It's a different thing, right? Now, we cannot see in the hearts of people, so I don't know if Edith is serving the Lord, doing a lot of good deeds, but I can't tell what's in her heart, whether that's true faith or not.

But I can tell from her fruit that it's more than likely that it springs from a genuine faith. At the end of the day, she will have to answer to God about what's in her heart.

But, as far as we go, we look around and we see people doing good deeds, obeying the Lord, trusting in Him, making choices that reflect that trust, then we can say, oh, well, okay, it is evidence

that there is a genuine faith in there.

But ultimately, it's not those good deeds that save, it's what they have in their own heart that saves them, their faith in Jesus. So, really, there are really three scenarios which I want to conclude with, and I want you to ask yourself, which is the one that best fits you.

So, scenario one describes the person who says they have faith but has no works. So, as I said earlier, they may attend church, they may be baptized even as they were infants, you know, they might even get a buzz singing the hymns at church.

[27:51] They might even, and I know this is a rather popular one here at HTD, they might even enjoy the theological debates that happens during Bible studies, and they go each week faithfully to have those debates.

Now, a lot of you as well might be helping out in certain ministries and things, but if deep down the desire is not to tackle sin, it's not a commitment to love others, to obey God's Word, to share the good news of Jesus because you believe in it, then you have to ask, what may be the cause of this? Why say you believe but not follow through with good works? Is it because you're not convinced yourself of your own sin or the need for grace and the gospel?

Or is it because you do believe but you're being distracted by the world, by the things that offer you success apart from God and the applause of others in the world?

So that's scenario one, someone who has faith but not good works that follows, or say they have faith but not good works. The second scenario is someone who has works but not faith.

[29:06] And so this is a bit like, you know, Martha, Mary and Martha, someone who's really busy, wanting to serve anywhere and everywhere. Okay? And yet, deep down, it does not spring from faith.

They can't remember the last time they prayed to God to depend on him for what they do. They may read the Bible but it has no effect on them because it's not responding to what God's saying by faith.

And often, as a result, the people who do a lot of this kind of serving, they get resentful because other people are not doing enough. Or they get judgmental because they are doing more and other people are doing less.

Now, again, the question is, what might this be a reflection of? Perhaps they have forgotten the grace of the gospel. Maybe they have lost their first love for God.

They've forgotten that they are saved by the blood of Jesus and not by their good works. Finally, scenario three is a Christian who has a faith that works.

[30:14] And hopefully that's the one that we all aspire to be. Here is a person who has joy and peace that comes from believing in Jesus, a true thankfulness for their faith in Christ, and yet they are not content to just sit there and be happy with that.

They want to then serve, to be like Jesus, to grow, to develop the fruit of the Spirit, to do all that God has commanded them in the Word. Now, I think all of us would love to be the person in scenario three, right?

The question then is, how do we nurture this? Why is it sometimes so hard? Well, part of it is, as James has already said, I know we missed that sermon from King Lee, it is to hear and do the Word of God.

That is, allow the implanted Word to so transform us that it motivates us and pushes us to want to serve, to want to do God's will. But second, I think we can nurture this by doing so together as a community of believers.

Because as we spend time together, it's iron sharpening iron. We can spur one another on to love and good deeds. As we read God's Word together, as we pray, we gather because it's important for us to do so.

[31:37] It's helpful for us to do so. But we have to be intentional when we gather, don't we? That is, we are coming for the purpose of allowing God's Word to shape us and help us to do good works.

We need to be humble so that when we hear God's Word and we're being asked to repent and change our lives, we'll actually receive that Word of Truth with joy and put it into practice.

Well, three scenarios there. Where might you think you are at the moment? Are you satisfied with where you are?

And if you're not, what might you do to change? So let me just pause and give you a minute and then I'll pray to finish. Father, we ask that you fan our faith so that it may abound in good works, done not for our own glory but yours and your Son alone.

help us to see that our life that you've given to us, the life we live, is new life in Christ and has been given to us because of the price of his sacrifice for which we are credited by faith with his righteousness.

[33 : 15] May the good works in our life be a demonstration of the gift of faith that Christ has bestowed freely on us. in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.