

Real Faith Works

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 June 2014

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Keep your Bibles open at James chapter 2. This should also be an outline in your kit of goodies that you can follow along with as well.

Well, Gillian's already prayed, so let's get into it. Often in life, people want the real thing, don't they? Certainly true for the customers of Ronald Cole, who owned an art gallery in Sydney.

A couple of years ago, he was named the biggest Australian art fraud. I think we've got a picture of him on the next slide. He sold paintings that were fakes, and naturally, people were upset because they wanted the real thing.

What's more, he also said that he was an art broker who took money from people to buy paintings, but instead, he kept the money for himself. So not only were the paintings he sold fakes, but he himself was a fake.

Obviously, it didn't take long for things to catch up with him, but by the time they managed to work out what was happening, he took off with \$30 million in cash and art.

[1 : 13] He even took off with \$1 million which a bike gang gave him to buy art. So on the Sydney Morning Herald website, bikers want to have a chat about their \$1 million.

What would bikers want with artwork? Like \$1 million worth of artwork? Can you imagine them sitting around in their leather jackets, drinking beer and saying, yeah, I love the way he's used colours there? It doesn't quite work, does it?

Anyway, that was what happened a couple of years ago, in 2009 actually. And we want the real thing in life too, don't we? Anyway, Coca-Cola, one of their catchphrases or slogans was always the real thing.

Or take coffee. Once upon a time, people were happy. People were happy with international roast. Okay? Not now. Never. Okay?

In fact, I had a friend come around and I offered them a coffee and he kind of looked around my kitchen and went, is it a real coffee? People want the real thing. And when we come to James chapter 2 tonight, to our passage, James wants us to have the real thing too when it comes to faith.

[2 : 21] Faith in Christ. You see, because there's only real or genuine faith that works, that saves. Now, just to be clear, the words faith and trust and believe, they all mean the same thing.

To trust someone is to have faith in them, to believe them. They all mean the same thing. And James begins with a question, which brings us to point one of your outlines in verse 14.

He asks, What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save them, he says.

Now, what do you think his answer is? It's a no. In fact, in the Greek text, it actually even gives you the word no. So you know what the answer is. And James is saying that someone who simply claims to have faith but doesn't show it, doesn't back it up, well, such a faith cannot save.

It's not a genuine faith. It's no good. And then he gives a concrete example to show us why it's no good. So verse 15 and 16, he says, Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

[3 : 31] If one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and well fed, but then does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it, he says.

Now, do you notice, by the way, the type of example James uses here? It refers to mistreating a poor person. Now, why do you think he chose that example? I take it it's because of what he was being talking about last week in the first part of chapter 2.

Do you remember last week, the first part of chapter 2, James had a go at his readers for showing favoritism to the rich and mistreating or not loving the poor. And so I think he deliberately chooses this kind of example here because of how his readers were treating the poor amongst them.

But that aside, you see James' point. He is saying, What good is it to say something but then do nothing about it? What benefit is there to say something but then do nothing?
And James says, You know, when you see a Christian brother or sister in need and you say, Look, I really hope someone gives you something to wear or to eat. But I'm going. See you later.
[4 : 42] What benefit is that to them, he asks. What good is it? And the answer? None. It is no good. There is no benefit. That kind of faith that simply says something then but does nothing is no good, he is saying.

I once heard a story of a man in England a few centuries ago who came across a farmer whose horse had died. The farmer was distraught because this horse was his livelihood. It helped him to farm and helped him to grow crops and so on. Now the farmer at the time was surrounded by other travellers who were trying to comfort him. And as this man walked up and approached the farmer to see what was happening, he heard the other travellers saying, I'm terribly sorry your horse has died.

Yes, me too. I'm sorry. Oh yes, I'm sorry too if there's anything I can do. And so on. And the man who just arrived pushed past the other travellers, walked up to the farmer, opened his wallet and said, well I'm sorry ten pounds worth.

How sorry are the rest of you? Do you see his point? James is saying real faith puts your money where your mouth is. But the kind of faith that simply says something yet does nothing, it's no good.
[5 : 57] In fact it's dead. See verse 17? In the same way, faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead. It's pretty clear, isn't it?

If we just claim to have faith, if we claim to be a Christian but never live in a way that shows we're Christian, never live out our faith, then James is saying it's not a real faith. It's a fake faith. In fact, it's a dead faith. And so it cannot save at all. You see, faith and works go together. Which brings us to point two in verse 18. He says, But someone will say, You have faith and I have deeds. Well, show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. Now verse 18 is a little confusing, but basically, someone is suggesting that one person can have faith, and another person can have deeds.

You've got to pick and choose. But you don't have to have them both. But James is saying, Actually, you do. Real faith that works is faith that will show itself by works, by action.

[7 : 03] For James, they go together. In fact, James says, Try and show or prove your faith without deeds. And you can't. But then he says, I can show you my faith with deeds alone, without saying anything.

Let me see if I can illustrate. I'll need two random volunteers. So, Mark and Jeff. Come on down the front. These strapping young lads.

Alright, Jeff. Here we go. Do you believe you can do a push-up? Just one push-up? Do you believe you can do a push-up? I believe I can.

Great. Now, prove it without doing anything. That's it, isn't it?

You can't prove what you believe without doing anything, can you? Okay, your turn, Mark. Mark, do you believe you can do a push-up? Oh, give it a clap.

[8 : 14] Take a seat. But that's a shameless point, you see. You can believe, but you show what you believe by what you do.

And in fact, by doing something shows you what you believe. We cannot prove or show our faith without doing something. And doing something shows or proves that we genuinely believe. You see, we can say that we believe until the cows come home, but to show our faith, to prove it real, means that we will have to do something. We will have to live it out. And James' point is that real faith will lead to action, to works, to deeds.

just saying we believe doesn't mean our faith is real. And in the end, just saying you believe is no better than the demons. Have a look at verse 19. He says, you believe that there is one God? Good. Even the demons believe that and shudder. You see, even demons have an orthodox faith. They believe in one God, just like every good Jew would believe.

[9 : 20] But they don't live it out, do they? They don't follow God as God. They don't serve God as God, which is why they shudder in fear, because they know God will judge them for it.

But James is saying, if you just say you believe and then don't live it out, then you're no better than the demons who believe and don't live it out. I was at youth group one night at my old church, and one of the kids was being hassled by his sister.

His sister was calling him, you know, a Jesus freak and that kind of thing. And the reason his sister was calling him that was because he heard his sister swear and he said, you know you shouldn't do that.

And she replied, well, I still believe in God. It doesn't matter. I can do what I want. But that's what the demons do. They believe there is one God and then do what they want. You'd be glad to know I didn't suggest to the young boy that he should call his sister a demon.

But James is saying that if you just say you believe, but then don't live it out, then you know better than the demons who believe in one God but don't live it out. Now this is a real slap in the face, isn't it?

[10:29] Actually, James has a habit of doing that in this letter. He doesn't pull any punches. He's quite blunt. But that's because he's keen for his readers to have a genuine or real faith because only a real faith works.

Only a real faith saves. A fake faith is useless, which brings us to point three in verse 20. He says, You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

He says. By the way, the word for foolish here also means empty. For James, faith without works is empty. Makes the person empty and useless.

And to make this point, he gives us two examples. The first is Abraham. He was the hero of the Jews. And so if James can make his case with Abraham, then it carries great weight. Because remember, he's writing to a Jewish audience.

And so verse 21, he says, 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.

[11:35] 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.

Now here, James is actually referring to two events in Abraham's life. The first event is from Genesis chapter 15 where God told him that he would have descendants.

He would have a child and he would have a great number of descendants. You see, Abraham was pretty old at the time and he was worried that he would have no descendants. And so God says to him on the next slide, he says, Genesis 15, look up to the heavens and count the stars if indeed you can count them.

Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be. And Abraham believed the Lord and it was counted or credited to him as righteousness. You see, because Abraham believed God or had faith in God, then God says, you're now right with me.

You're justified, which just means made right. With God. And so Abraham is God's friend. But the question is, how do we know that that faith was a genuine faith?

[12:48] How do we know it was real? I mean, he could have just said, yeah, God, I believe you. Well, we know it because of the second event in Abraham's life. Some 20 years later, God gave Abraham a son called Isaac, just as he promised.

But when Isaac was a little bit older, God told Abraham to sacrifice his son to kill him. And Abraham believed or trusted God so much so that he obeyed. And so he took his son Isaac up to a hill and just as he was about to kill his son, God called out this, as you can see on the slide, do not lay a hand on the boy, he said.

Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God. In other words, Abraham showed his faith was real. He really did trust God and he proved it by obeying God, even when it meant doing something that he didn't understand or didn't want to do.

And so James put these two events from Abraham's life together. And he says the faith that he had in Genesis 15 was proved genuine by Genesis 22, by what he did.

See verse 22 again? You see that his faith and his actions, Genesis 15, Genesis 22, were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did.

[14:11] And so the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. Our kids will occasionally do something wrong.

Occasionally. I'm being nice. No, they're too bad. They're not too bad. And when they do, they'll often say, sorry, sorry, sorry. But do you know how long it takes them to do that same thing again? Seconds. And so we've started saying to them, don't just say sorry, show us your sorry by not doing it again, at least for a minute. And then we'll know that your apology is sincere.

It's real. And it's the same here with Abraham's faith. His faith is made complete or it's shown to be sincere, real, by his actions. Now before I move on to the last example there, verse 24 has often given people a lot of trouble because it sounds like it contradicts what Paul says in other parts of the Bible.

See, Paul says that people are saved by faith alone in Jesus. It is Jesus who has died for us. It is Jesus who brings forgiveness. And so it is Jesus who saves us.

[15:28] We cannot save ourselves by doing things or abiding the law. We'll never be perfect enough. We simply believe. In fact, on the next slide from Romans chapter 3, verse 28, Paul says, we hold that one is justified by faith without work.

of the law. But then you read verse 24 in James and it says, you see that a person is considered righteous by what they do, their works, and not by faith alone.

So it kind of sounds like they're at odds, doesn't it? So should we, along with Martin Luther, rip James out of the Bible because of this verse? Well, no.

Rather, we need to understand that James and Paul are asking two different questions, which are on the next slide. You see, Paul is asking, how are we saved? And his answer is, by faith alone in Jesus.

Whereas James is asking, what type of faith in Jesus is real? And his answer, one that leads to action.

[16:34] You see, if we ask James how we are saved, then he'd say the same thing as Paul. In fact, back in chapter 1, verse 18, James has already said that we are given new birth or new life through the word of truth, the message about Jesus.

It's by believing the gospel of Jesus that we are given new birth. All James wants to do is to highlight what real faith in Jesus looks like.

And he says that real faith in Jesus will show itself in action, just like it did for the great man Abraham, and just like it did for Rahab, the prostitute. See verse 25?

He says, 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?

Now, we've heard the story of Rahab tonight. She heard about God and how God had parted the Red Sea and brought Israel out of Egypt. And so, she says that a great fear has gone over them all.

[17:40] In fact, she then says to the spies in Joshua 2 verse 11, the Lord your God, he is God in heavens above and on the earth beneath.

See, that's what she now believes about Israel's God. That he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. And then she proved her belief was real or genuine by turning her back on her city and risking her life to hide the spies and then sending them off in a different direction.

You see, her faith was proved genuine or real by what she did. And it was this real faith in God that saved her when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down. And so, James concludes in verse 26 by saying, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

It's pretty clear, isn't it? Just as a body without a spirit is useless and dead, so our faith without works, without deeds is useless and dead. Because in the end, if we never live at our faith, then it's not a real faith.

It's a fake faith and it won't save. Instead, it's useless and dead. Let me close tonight with a story. Some of you may have heard this story.

[19:04] It's about the events of June 30, 1859, when a large crowd gathered at Niagara Falls to see for themselves the amazing man walk across 330 metre tightrope, strung across the falls.

The falls. The falls. The man was French-born Jean Francis, also known as Charles Blondin. And I think we've got the pictures up there. Now, Blondin not only walked the tightrope, but he also balanced a chair on the tightrope and then he stood on top of that chair balanced on the tightrope.

He also, one time, took a small portable cooker out onto the tightrope and then cooked himself a meal on the tightrope. He went out on a potato sack and in a wheelbarrow and even stilts.

A year later, the crowds gathered again for Blondin promised to carry someone across the falls this time on the tightrope. And everyone was buzzing with excitement.

And as he called out, he says, do you want to see me carry someone across the falls? And the crowd yelled back, yes! And then he says, do you believe I can carry someone across the falls?

[20:10] And the crowd yelled back, yes! And he says, well, who is going to volunteer for me to carry across the falls? And silence. You see, the crowd's belief that Blondin could do this was not

real.

A real faith would have led to action. They would have went, yeah! Sign me up! And then jumped on Blondin's back and entrusted their life to him. See, that's the kind of faith that works.

The kind of faith James wants us to have when it comes to Jesus. A faith that will follow him, that will entrust our whole lives to him in obedience and action. Even if we don't understand why, even if it's something we don't want to do like in the case of Abraham, that's the kind of faith that James wants his readers to have because that is not dead, that is not useless, that is the faith that saves. So let's pray that we might have that faith. Let's pray. Gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you that we are saved by Jesus and faith alone in him.

But Father, we pray that you would help us to have a faith that is real and genuine, a faith that we live out in action. And Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake.

[21 : 32] Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.