

Faith that Saves

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[0 : 00] Well, if you're participating in our current Bible study that's titled The Whole Christ, you'd be very familiar with the word antinomianism.

! Although antinomianism sounds like an intimidating word if you're hearing it for the first time, it simply means to be against law.

And from a biblical perspective, it simply means to be against God's law, to believe that God's law really has no meaningful place in our lives today.

And that would be people who make a whole lot out of having faith for salvation, but they make very little out of obedience to God's law.

They maximize faith and they minimize obedience. And people with such views and such lifestyles are called antinomians. The opposite of antinomianism is legalism.

[1 : 08] Legalism is the view that we can be saved by keeping God's law and obeying God's rules.

So it describes people who make very much about keeping the law and very little about saving faith. And so legalists will maximize obedient works and they will minimize saving faith.

And what we find is that the New Testament both are addressed and corrected. Both antinomianism and legalism are addressed and they are corrected.

And this morning as we continue our sermon series in the letter of James, we come to one of those places where antinomianism is corrected.

And so if you have not yet done so, please turn your Bible to the letter of James, chapter 2. And this morning our attention will be directed to verses 14 through 26.

[2 : 15] James, chapter 2, 14 through 26. James writes, Can that faith save him?

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, You have faith and I have works.

Show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one? You do well. Even the demons believe and shudder.

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

[3 : 51] You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works. And the scripture is 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, not by faith alone. 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.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the privilege of having your word to read it and hear it.

[4 : 56] And I pray this morning that you would speak to all of our hearts through the preaching of your word. Lord, I have nothing to say unless you give it.

And I pray that you would truly give me words this morning that I would feed your people. And Lord, would you cause all of us to hear as we ought to hear and obey as we ought to obey.

But we trust you in this moment to superintend the preaching of your word. And we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

So how does James address antinomians, those who maximize their faith and minimize their obedience? How does he do that?

Well, he addresses them by hammering home a very simple but important point, which is this. The lives we live for Christ should give evidence to the faith we profess in Christ.

[6 : 14] The lives we live for Christ should give evidence to the faith we profess in Christ. To put it another way, if the faith that you and I claim to have in Christ is not accompanied by lifestyle evidence of salvation, which is obedience to God and his word, our faith is not saving faith.

It's dead faith. In the words of Pastor Jim Eliff, it is wasted faith. In this passage, James talks about two kinds of faith.

And in our remaining time, I want us to consider them. The first kind that he talks about is dead faith. And what he tells us in verses 14 through 19 is that dead faith reveals itself in the absence of works.

Notice that James begins in verse 14 by asking two questions. What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can that faith save him? And I emphasize that because it's important to see what James is talking about. James is not talking about faith in a vacuum, how people say, well, I'm a man of faith, I'm a woman of faith, I can do this.

[7 : 45] He's not talking about that. He's talking about saving faith. And that's why he says, he asks this question, can that faith save him? Not can that faith do stuff for him?

Can that faith save him? James is talking about saving faith, the faith that salvation is based upon. Now, although James asked two questions, James is really making one statement.

And his statement simply is that faith that's not accompanied by works is of no value. It's dead faith. It is wasted faith.

In other words, he's saying faith that claims to be faith in Jesus, faith for salvation, that doesn't have accompanying salvific work, work that is evidence of salvation, he says it's wasted.

It is dead faith. He says that faith can't save you. And he goes on to illustrate the point.

[8 : 51] He illustrates his point in verses 15 and 16. And what he says is pretty much imagine that a brother or sister, and let's think about it in this way, in this church, who is in need, they need food, they need clothes, and one of us goes to that person, and what we say to that person is, be warmed and be filled, and we let them go.

James says, what good is that? He says, how could you say that you have faith if you do that?

His exact words are verse 14. He says, if one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

It's of no, it's of no value. And I want you to think about that for a moment. Just really imagine that that literally happens. And here, recognize that James is making some assumptions, and his assumptions are correct.

I can guarantee you right now that every single person in, every adult person, I would say, in this room this morning will go home after this gathering and have some meal of some kind.

[10 : 35] And therefore, if a brother or sister comes to us and they say, or we can see they need food, they need clothing, minimum we can share a meal with them.

We can do something for them. And so to say to that person, be warmed and be filled and go on your way, James is saying, you lack the faith that is saving faith.

Now, it's easy to miss the point that James is making and think that James is talking about faith, this generic kind of faith. He's not talking about that.

In essence, what James is really saying is that if there's one of us who professes to know Jesus Christ, who is able to help a brother or sister to some degree of a need that they present and we are able to say to them, be warmed and be filled and go on your way and do nothing for them, James says, you don't have saving faith.

You don't have saving faith. if you just pray for them or you prophesy over them or whatever you do, he says, you don't have saving faith.

[11 : 54] And here, at this point, James is not alone. He's not alone. This is the witness of Scripture. For example, the Apostle John says the same thing in 1 John 3, 16 and 17.

He writes, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, 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. The point is that saving faith produces a transformed heart that is evidenced by compassion for others and especially those who

are brothers and sisters in Christ.

James, James is a master illustrator. He doesn't use a stranger. see, because the stranger you may not know and you may think, well, I don't know about this stranger, but he says a brother or sister. Someone who we profess to belong to Christ with. Friends, if we have the heart to do that, he says, the faith you profess is not manifesting the work of what salvation should look like in that particular situation.

[13 : 31] James continues his argument by introducing an imaginary person in verse 18. Imagining the person who is objecting.

Or maybe he's aware that some have already objected and they say this. And notice, James is quoting them in verse 18. He says, some will say, quote, you have faith and I have works. Now James answers them. And what does James say? James says, okay, you have faith. You say, you have faith and I have works. Well then, show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works.

What James is saying is that faith in itself, if a person just says, well, I have faith, he says, okay, you have faith? Show me your faith. Prove your faith to me.

And the point is, faith in a vacuum without some accompanying evidence that's consistent with that faith, that kind of faith, saving faith, is of no value.

[14 : 42] But he says, but I can show you my faith by my works, by what I actually do. And so, think of it this way.

Let's just say that there's someone who comes, this person is needy, they're hungry, children are in need, and you say to the person, I've deposited \$500 on your bank account.

And the person doesn't go online to check, they don't go to the bank to check, they just continue in their same condition. The person has no evidence to show that they really believe that you did what you said you did.

Evidence of believing that would be making some effort to go to check, to verify that, acting upon it. That's what James is, James is making the point, that when you, when you see some action, you can link it back to faith.

When you see some fruit, you can link it back to faith. But faith on its own, without any action, really, is just suspended in thin air.

[15 : 53] And so his point is clear. A life that bears the fruit of salvation points to saving faith, but a life that only is a profession of faith and has nothing as evidence is dead faith.

It's not genuine faith. James makes the point in verse 19 with a second illustration where he shows the tragedy and the danger of relying on an empty confession that one has saving faith with no supporting evidence in your life, no fruit in your life of salvation.

Verse 19, he says, you believe that God is one, you do well. Even demons believe and shudder. And so James is making the point that demons believe they're not saved and demons don't just believe.

Demons demonstrate a certain kind of awareness of God but they're not saved. And he says we're contrasting the demons who, that shuddering, recognizing some fear of the Lord for this person who's indifferent saying that he or she has faith in God but is indifferent, is a mere professor of faith. And James seems to be making the point that you know what, the demons even do better, the demons fear the Lord, you don't. Your conviction is shallow. And one of the things he seems to be pointing out is that another characteristic of dead faith is shallow conviction.

[17 : 39] James' point could not be clearer. Mere profession of faith in Jesus Christ is worthless. But James doesn't leave us here.

He doesn't leave us at this dreadful point. He goes on to explain for us saving faith which is my second and final point. James addresses saving faith for us in verses 20 through 26.

And what he tells us is that saving faith reveals itself with the presence of works and then he points to two Old Testament examples to prove what he is actually saying.

The first example is Abraham. Verses 20 through 22. James writes, Do you want to be shown you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works.

[18 : 48] Now verse 22 shows very clearly that James is not proposing works as the basis of salvation because he's explaining that in the act of Abraham offering up Isaac on the altar,

Abraham's faith was active with his works and his faith was completed by his works.

So James is holding the two together. He's not just focusing on works, he's holding both faith and works together. Now hopefully you see that but if you don't, just hold on a moment more and I believe it'll become clearer.

Again, let's look at what James says, starting in verse 21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

you see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works. And the scripture is fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness and he was called a friend of God.

James is saying that in offering up Isaac, Abraham fulfilled the scripture, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

[20 : 13] Now, James is referring to two particular events that happened in the life of Abraham, two very critical events. The first one is in Genesis 15.

Before his name was Abraham, his name was simply Abram. And in Genesis 15, Abram was discouraged. he was discouraged because God had given him this promise that he was going to have a son and he didn't have this son.

And so one night as he is so discouraged the Lord comes to him and the Lord affirms the promise to him and he says, but Lord, what have you given to me as proof that you're going to do that? He says, this slave who's in my house, Eliezer, he's going to be my heir. And the Lord said to him, he's not going to be your heir. He says, your own son, a son from your own loins, is going to be your heir.

And God takes Abraham, well, Abram at the time, he takes him outside. He says, Abram, look at the sky. He says, and number the stars if you can.

[21 : 30] You go ahead and number the stars if you can. Then he says these words to him. He says, so shall your offspring be. So shall your offspring be.

This man was discouraged that God hasn't given him one child. God now says to him, you know what? I'm going to give you offspring that can be counted. If you could count the stars, you go ahead and count them.

Your offspring is going to be like that. God. Now, when you look at that account, what is the evidence that Abram believed God? There is none.

Scripture is silent on it. All Scripture says, and he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. The Bible doesn't tell us that Abram said anything or Abram did anything.

All it says, in verse 6 of chapter 15, Abram believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

[22 : 33] righteousness. What James does is James then connects another significant event to this moment to show that Abram's faith wasn't just dead faith.

It wasn't yawning and saying, okay, yeah, you can give me stars, children like stars. It wasn't that. What he does is he links another significant moment in now Abraham's life.

Many years later, some 35 to 40 years later, Isaac had been born and Isaac would be around 14 or 15. This is recorded in Genesis chapter 2, chapter 22, sorry, and the Lord said to Abram, Abraham at the time, I want you to go to Mount Moriah, one of the mountains I'm going to point out, and I want you to sacrifice your son.

The one son that God told him he was going to give him, through which he was going to bless all the nations, God says, you go, you offer him on the altar.

And it's a moving account to read what happened in Genesis 22. Abram set out and he was obeying the Lord to the moment and as he was about to put the knife in Isaac who was tied on wood and laid on an altar, the angel of the Lord stopped him.

[24 : 17] And what James is doing is James is helping us to see that this act of Abraham was the evidence that he really believed God.

See, think about it. The reason that Abraham was able to be ready to kill his son is because he believed God, not Isaac.

His faith was not in Isaac. His faith was not that Isaac was going to bring to him this offspring that God promised. His faith was in God and so he was able to willingly offer up his son.

No doubt he didn't understand it. But he knew God spoke to him. And so he was obeying. So now when you consider that notice again how James puts it.

James puts it this way in verse 23. And the scripture was fulfilled. that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

[25 : 28] So that's when the evidence really came. That is when the proof came that Abraham really had faith in God that God counted to him as righteousness.

So when we read the whole text again what James is saying is this was not our father Abraham justified by works when he offered up Isaac on the altar.

You see that his faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works. His faith was completed when he did what God told him to do.

But really up until that point we have no specific evidence to say this is how we know Abraham believed God. James tells us the way we know it was he offered up his son.

And so then he says in verse 23 and the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and was counted to him as righteousness.

[26 : 30] And then James concludes in verse 24 you see that a person is justified by works not by faith alone.

Now notice he doesn't say justified by works not by faith he's saying justified by works not by faith alone. We see those two events in Abraham's life believing God in chapter 15 and then willingly offering his son it was in his heart and trust me as far as Abraham was concerned Isaac was dead Isaac was dead for three days because he was obeying!

God in his faith and his works that's genuine faith that's the evidence of biblical faith.

The second example that he gives us the second illustration is the example of Rahab the prostitute in verse 25 he writes and in the same way was not Rahab the prostitute justified when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way now here James is referencing Joshua chapter 2 again another wonderful story of the grace of God that came to the most unlikely woman one of the most unlikely persons in Jericho she was a prostitute she was no doubt as they are seen today among the worst of sinners and God graciously opened Rahab's heart and although she was a citizen of Jericho and she saw what everybody else saw she came to believe that God was the true God and she came to believe that this group of people these wilderness wanderers this ragtag band with children and cattle in tow that they were going to overthrow this fortified city the wall was so thick they say that two chariots can go side by side on the wall and

Rahab believed God is going to destroy Jericho and she believed the God of heaven and it's clear that Rahab believed that because she knew she was taking her life in her own hands not just her life but her family's life as well!

[28 : 59] If she didn't believe! that she would not have hidden the spies and she hid them she believed it and her work of doing this saving these spies was evidence that she really believed what she said she believed and the words of James she was justified by works just like Abraham and so the reference that James is making is to her faith and the accompanying works that she did in hiding the spies notice again how he says that in verse 25 in the same way meaning just like Abraham 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 so James concludes in verse 26 and he says for as the body apart from the spirit is dead so also faith apart from works is dead James is telling us that in the same way the body apart from the spirit is dead and the body of the spirit need to be united to make a whole person faith and evidential works need to be united if the faith is going to be saving faith separated the dead separated the wasted of no value!

Now again James is not elevating works over faith faith is preeminent faith is what possesses works works don't possess faith possesses the works works testify to the genuineness of our faith but our works are subordinate to our faith our works stem from our faith and so the unconverted person who merely does good works is just practicing another kind of futility it's good work and no doubt it benefits the lives of people but it doesn't have any saving value in it it is still dead in terms of faith and so one of the things I want to remind us about this morning as we consider this is that praying a prayer to receive Jesus into your heart is no proof of genuine salvation a life that has lived in obedience to

God's word and obedience to God when joined with that profession will be evidence of saving faith and the reason is that only those who have experienced regeneration by the Holy Spirit only those who have been regained by the Spirit of God have been given new life in Christ and have saving faith that will in time be evidenced by fruit the fruit of salvation which is an obedient life lived unto

the Lord and so when we think about salvation and how we are saved we can say and this is time tested by many others not original with me we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone but saving faith is never alone it will always be accompanied by credible works not necessarily immediately but eventually it's kind of like a seed when you take a seed and you put that seed in the ground you don't expect it to spring up right away but if it's a good seed in time it's going to spring up and depending on the kind of seed it will have some time variation now I know that when we hear a sermon like this one of the easiest things to do is to leave thinking about Abraham leave thinking about Rahab leave thinking about the faith of Abraham leave thinking about the faith of Rahab but it's very interesting one that God chose Abraham and chose Rahab and it's interesting that James would select them to hold them out to us when you think about Abraham God goes into this land where people worship the moon and of all the people that he could have chosen that he is going to make this covenant with he chooses an old man who had a wife who it was a settled issue that she could not have children it was a settled issue that in her young years she could God chooses that man and that woman to make a covenant with and he does it for one reason he does it for one reason he calls

[34 : 28] Abraham for one reason not because Abraham was holy and spiritual but he calls him because of his electing grace his electing grace goes into Urb the Chaldeans and calls one man and his wife and when we think about Abraham again we see this man who so discouraged one night crying out to God and God comes to him and God says okay I'm going to do more than the one son I'm going to give you offspring that you can't number now think about it how does Abraham move from doubting God over one son to believe in God over offspring that you can't number how does he move from that point does he just pull himself up by his faith bootstraps and start to believe I tell you no God enables him to believe God enables him to believe and we think of

Rahab the most unlikely person to believe in in any God I would think God goes in Jericho and he takes this unlikely woman this prostitute and while all the others around her are not taking any heed about the fear of this group of people who are coming through and their God is destroying nation after nation after nation she actually says in her testimony she says when we heard our hearts melted how is it that all their hearts melted and only this one woman would believe is she special no she wasn't special it was God's electing grace upon Rahab and God enabled her to believe that he was going to destroy Jericho and if she would believe she would be saved brothers and sisters I pray that we leave today not thinking about Abraham not thinking about Rahab and their great faith but thinking about a merciful God a God who showed electing grace and mercy in this man Abraham and in this woman Rahab and gave them faith faith that was saving faith faith that was evidenced by their works and by the things that they did if you hear this morning and well first of all for us who have come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord our story is no different our story is no different we believe not because we're special we believe because God had mercy and grace on us and gave us faith to believe and brought us to himself and if he had taken a hands off approach we would be on our way to hell and so we should rejoice this morning that

God has been merciful to us by giving us saving faith to believe but if you are here this morning and you don't know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord James holds out two examples!

unsuspecting people the least deserving people and God chose them and he gave them grace to believe his promises saving faith was their portion because of the grace of God that really came to them and so I encourage you today hear the word of God if you don't know Jesus Christ repent turn away from sin trust in the Lord Jesus Christ come to him he is faithful to save to the autumns all those who come to him let's pray together Lord thank you for your word this morning thank you for reminding us that saving faith is never alone I pray that you would help us all to come to saving faith and may none of us have dead faith wasted faith but may we trust in you and may we in our living give evidence that our faith is genuine thank you for the amazing grace that you give to undeserving sinners like us in Jesus name amen let's stand for our closing song to the undeserving you give your grace to a moon worshiper like

[39 : 48] Abraham you give your grace to a prostitute like Rahab and then Lord you give your grace to all manner of sinners like we are would you help us to live with hearts of gratitude for the amazing grace that you have given to us that you have given us the gift of faith and you have enabled us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and because you have given us saving faith we are able to live lives in obedience to your word all of it for the glory of your name as we leave today let us remember to be submissive to rulers and to the authorities to be obedient and to be ready for

every good work let us speak evil of no one let us avoid quarreling let us be gentle and show perfect courtesy to all people let us remember that we were once foolish disobedient led astray slaves to various passions and pleasures passing our days in malice and envy hated by others and hating one another but when the goodness and the loving kindness of God our Savior appeared he saved us not by any works of righteousness done by us but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration!

and renewal people of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life may we as we leave today remember these things and in turn live our lives for the glory of God through our Lord Jesus Christ amen amen amen