

James 2:14-26

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[0 : 0 0] this on. I figured we didn't need all that little comments before. So anyway, welcome again. We are studying the book of James, a great book in the scriptures. And it's a book that's out of the New Testament. It's called a wisdom book. It's not really like the other books. It only mentions Jesus twice. It doesn't present the gospel, but it's full of just really good advice on how to live the Christian life. It talks about money. It talks about controlling what you say. It talks about controlling your temper. It talks about how to get along with other people. It just goes into so much practical advice. And so today we're going to continue that. And let's begin first with prayer. Father, it's our joy and our privilege, our blessing to come now and look into the word of God. Lord, as we studied, was it last week or the week before, that your word is like a mirror. And we see as we look into it, the things about ourselves that need to change. Help us now to be hearers and doers that we will attempt to make those changes as you speak to our hearts. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So now we're in James chapter 2. And since I don't have the scriptures up there, and in fact, this is such a long scripture anyway, probably just better to read it from your Bible.

James 2. We're going to read from 14 to 26. I think mine is the new international version. But whatever version you have, we'll be able to follow along. That's another big change in church since I was a kid. When I was a kid, turning your Bible to James 2, 14 through 26, everybody in there would pull out the King James and everybody's scripture said the same thing. Now it's a little more interesting. We're reading a little differently. Okay.

You got that. Here we go. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs? What good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. Tell you what, let's just stop right there for a minute then and talk about this first part. I kind of see two sermons here. This first one is a real simple, straightforward sermon. If you are a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ, and you see somebody with a need, and it's within your means to help them, then duh, help them. End of that sermon. Okay.

[3 : 1 6] That's all that James is saying there. What good is it to go around saying, God bless you, hope everything works out, and you could be helping and you don't. What good is that?

And so he's encouraging us. And by the way, the church will never get enough recognition, I guess, until we get to heaven. The first hospitals were started by Christians. The first schools were started by Christians. The first writing in contemporary world and wanting to publish was driven by the desire to publish scriptures. The drive to translate or to put all languages of the world into writing has been driven by Christians. The first shelters for the homeless, the first food, soup kitchens, they were all started by Christians. Why do you think the red cross has a cross in it? It was started by Christians. The Y, your little exercise place. Y, M, C, I don't know how to do that.

Elias, would you come up here and demonstrate? You won't do that. He knows how to do it. Oh, his sisters will do it. Okay. Well, you know, that was originally, now they just call it the Y, and it's just a gym. It used to be the Y.

M-C-A, and the C stood for what? Christian. It started as somebody was concerned that young teenagers on the street were getting in trouble, and they, led by Christ, opened up a little place where they could come and have activities and be encouraged to live a better life, and they would teach them also that Jesus Christ loved them.

And so it was the Young Men's Christian Association. And over time, oh well, things change. Was there also the YWCA?

[5 : 19] Yeah, there was a women's Christian Association. Started with the men's group, and then somebody realized, hey, the women need this too. And so now these things happen. But you know, I could go on and on.

The Christian church, based on scriptures like, if you see somebody in need, help them. We, as a church, have done so much good in the world by obeying the words of Jesus and the words of his brother, James.

Okay, well, that's the end of the first sermon. Let's go into the second sermon. And that begins with verse 18. Let's back up to verse 17.

And we're in James 2. In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, you have faith, I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

[6 : 30] You believe that there is one God? Good. Even the demons believe that and shudder. Do you see the sarcasm in that question and everything?

You know, here, you've got to understand, you can miss it just reading it. Here's James saying, oh, are you so glad that you believe in God? Well, big deal. The demons believe there's a God, and they shudder for it.

He says, it's not enough just to say, oh, I believe in God. How does that affect your life is what he's asking. So James threw in a little sarcasm. He'd be at home in the 21st century that we're in.

So, 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 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.

[7 : 46] 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 a lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

As the body without the spirit is dead, so your faith without any works or deeds or action is dead. So now, the second sermon has been a point greatly debated ever since James was writing this.

In fact, in my Sunday school class this morning, we had come to the part in the book of Acts where they were arguing over this very point. They were saying to Paul, how can you tell the Gentiles that they only need to trust in Christ?

They have to follow all the laws of Moses. They have to stop eating pork. They have to do absolutely nothing on Saturdays, the Sabbath. They have to, you know, all of these laws, this is important.

And Paul was arguing, no, it's by faith you are saying. And they were arguing, no, it's by the law combined with faith. And there was a huge disagreement.

[9 : 11] So the argument of what is more important, your faith or your works, has been going on since the book of Acts. So the whole history of the church has had this debate somewhat entangled in it.

And we're going to try to delve into it and see what we can do to help us to sort this out. What's more important? Your faith or your deeds as a Christian.

Which is more important? Well, now, I'll back up and tell you a story. I don't know if Becky will remember this or not, but way back when your brother's son, Michael, was only about three years old.

We were visiting with them somewhere at Christmas or something. And your brother, Will, says, let me show you my trained dog. I said, you brought your dog?

Sure. Michael, come here, boy. And so Michael gets down on all fours. And he comes running over there to his dad on all fours.

[10 : 14] He's like about three years old. And Will picked up some kind of little toy. And he says, here you go, Michael. Here you go. Here you go. Throws it and says, fetch. And this little Michael, he goes running on all fours across the room, picks up that toy with his mouth, comes running back over, hands it to his daddy and goes, ha, ha, ha, ha.

And then he says, okay, sit. And he sits back and says, shake hands. He puts his hand out. Okay, play dead. And the little kid fell down. Roll over.

He did all that. Now speak. And the little boy went, ha, ha, ha. So, you know, it was just cute as it could be. And he said, so, Matt, how you like my trained dog?

I said, that's an incredibly smart little dog you got there. Well, I'll tell you that story to ask you a question. I'm going to ask you to Elias.

Did you hear the story about the trained dog? When little Michael was doing that, did that turn him into a dog? Was he a dog? What was he? He was still human.

[11 : 22] He was still human. So acting like a dog didn't make him a dog. Think about, for those of you that have a dog, if you could train your dog to climb trees and to meow and to ignore human beings, would that turn your dog into a cat?

No. No. Why not? Because they are a dog. So I bring these up to say, there is a difference between who and what you are and how you behave.

There is a difference. Who and what you are is one thing. And how you behave is another. And this relates to faith versus works.

Faith relates very much to who and what you are. And works or actions, that is very much related to how you act.

So how does a creature become a dog or a cat or a human being? How do you get to be a human being, somebody?

[12 : 38] You are born that way. That was not the \$64,000 question. So hopefully that is very obvious. Well, guess what?

There is only one way to become a Christian. Jesus said, you must be born again. Now that was a good question, a good answer. You must be born again.

As you can only become a human being by birth, you can only become a Christian by rebirth. Now here is our problem. And I have to come here and talk to my young folks on this one.

How you doing, Fiona? How you doing, Fiona? Yes. All right. Hello, everybody. Welcome from the West Coast, Brooklyn. Brooklyn is Jordan's sister.

Brooke. Brooke. Hey. So last week we baptized Brooklyn, so I'm going to be welcome. So, where was I going with this?

[13 : 42] The young ones. The young ones. Talk to the young ones. Okay, listen. Dogs have puppies. I worked in eight.

This morning John was teasing me. And he was saying, I hope your Christmas story this year has a dog in it. I said, why? He said, I want to see you doing something. Okay.

So, cats have kittens. I said, kitten. I'm a sinner. Sinners give birth to sinners.

Sinners. So, your dad is a sinner because his daddy gave birth to him. And what does that make you?

You too are sinners. It is called being born of a sinful nature. We inherited it from the first people and every generation of people. We inherit a sinful nature.

[14 : 45] But I'm not just a sinner because I was born one. I'm also a sinner because, doggone it, I chose to be one. I disobeyed my parents from the time I was that high.

And once I began to understand what God wanted, I would often choose to ignore it. So, I didn't love God with all of my heart. So, I was a sinner by birth and a sinner by my actions.

I'm a double sinner. So, how can I become a Christian if I have to be born one? I was born a sinner. I must be born again.

And then, how can I be born again? This is where I really wish I had my slides working. Because then I can also cheat and they're up there on that screen and I can make sure I did it right.

But how can I be born again? First of all, I have to realize I am a sinner. If you don't realize you're a lost sinner, I had a good young...

[15 : 44] Steve and Cheryl, way back when I was a new believer, I went to the same church he went to. We didn't even know it. I mean, I was in my 20s. They were too, or they were younger.

But, Preacher Payne was his name. He was a fantastic preacher. And I can remember he used to say, Before we can get you saved, we've got to get you lost.

And what he meant was, if you don't realize you're lost, And you don't see your need for a Savior, Then you're hopeless.

So the first thing is you have to realize that you are a lost sinner. And that as such, you deserve all the punishment of God, And anger, and disappointment, and wrath, For all of eternity.

It's a terrible thing. And we ought to be... Yes, as the demons shudder, we read, We should all be shuddering. But God does not get into the story.

[16 : 43] Once we realize we are lost, We realize, who can save me? And so God sent His only Son into the world To die for our sins.

Amen. And He came as a Savior. And I need a Savior. And so, I simply have to, by faith, Believe in Him.

Believe He took my place. Believe He paid the price. And receive Christ into my heart. And turn from my sins. What does that word repent mean?

To turn. I'm living for myself and only myself. I'm sorry about you. It's all about me. I don't care about God either.

And then when I realize how lost I am, I repent. And I turn back to God. And I say, now Lord, I will walk with You. Please forgive me.

[17 : 40] Please come into my heart. Forgive me. And let me walk with You forever. And I am forgiven. And on that day, I am born again. Now, I'm a new puppy in Jesus Christ.

I'm a new creature. And all the old things have passed away. That's how you become a believer. But then James gets into a part here that begins to give us trouble.

He says in verse 26, that faith without works is dead. And he says, can your faith alone save you? And this has caused so much trouble in the church that when Martin Luther, in 1517, who was one of the great leaders of the Protestant Reformation, when he was reading the book of James, he got so upset over it that he wrote and said, I'm not sure that it ought to be in the Bible.

And this is the part that troubled him. You see, he had been raised Catholic like everybody back then. They were all Catholics.

And the Catholic Church at that time, I'm not talking about today's Catholic Church. I'll let them speak for themselves. But back at that time, the Catholic Church said, the only way to get to heaven is by works.

[19 : 02] You have to obey the Ten Commandments and go to Mass and be baptized as a baby and take the Holy Communion every time you come to church.

And these are the ways to be saved. And if you don't do these things, do these things, you're lost. And then if you're wealthy enough, you can also buy your way into heaven because we're trying to build a cathedral over here.

And so if you'll come and pitch enough coins in the money pot, we'll guarantee you access to heaven. The Catholic Church, you might say, got way off track back then.

And so along came some guys like Luther. And Luther himself was reading through the book of Romans. He was a Catholic priest. And he was reading it in the original language of Greek.

And he got to the parts about Abraham believed God. And God credited it to him as righteousness.

[20 : 05] He went, what, what? He read that again. Abraham simply believed the promises of God. And God said, you are righteous.

You are forgiven. And as he began to continue studying the books that Paul had written, Ephesians, it is by grace that you are saved.

Not of works. No one can boast. And Luther finally began to realize, oh my goodness, we had it totally wrong.

God just wants us to have faith and to believe. And he will forgive us and consider us to be righteous. And all of what we've been telling people for the last 200 years in the church has misled them.

And so that's what he began to preach. And today we have the Lutherans and the Methodists and the Baptists and the Pentecostals and everybody.

[21 : 10] All the Protestant churches. Because many people at that time, many leaders, Luther being a leading one, realized faith is how you come to Christ.

But I think that Luther should have given James a little break here. I think he should have kind of considered, what is James really trying to say?

Because James himself quotes this very scripture that touched Luther's heart. In James 2, 23, James is quoting from Genesis 15, 6.

And he says, Abraham believed in God. The Amplified Version says, he trusted in God. He relied on God. It's not like believe, like, do you believe in Santa Claus?

Do you believe it's going to rain? It's not that kind of belief. It's a belief that says, do you rely on him? Do you trust in him? Have you placed your dependence upon him? That's true belief.

[22 : 09] That's saving faith. And so, Abraham had that kind of faith. And it was credited to his account as righteousness.

Credited as that Abraham is no longer a sinner. He is now an innocent man before God. He is holy before God. James clearly sees that.

So then James says, here's all I'm trying to say. He kind of backs up. You can back up to verse 18. If you'll show me your faith without any deeds, I'll show you my faith by what I do.

And then he gives Abraham as his example. He says, how do we know Abraham believed? Oh, when he did. When God said to Abraham, sacrifice your only son to me.

Hebrews explains it this way. Hebrews says, Abraham knew God had promised. Isaac is the chosen one and I will bless the nations through him.

[23 : 16] And now he's saying, sacrificing. And Hebrews says, Abraham believed that God could raise him from the dead if he needed to.

And so he obeyed. We know that Abraham had faith because he took the action of obeying. But he had the faith first.

And he was already saved. He was already a follower of God. He was already counted righteous. And that's why he took the action of obedience. Now, of course, if you don't know that story, I want to make this clear.

God did not want human sacrifice. And God said, stop. Do not lay a hand on the boy. And God provided the sacrifice. Which was a prophetic moment to say that one day God would provide Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for all of our sins.

For those who have faith. And then you get Rahab. I won't repeat that example. But she had faith. Well, I said I'm going to repeat it. I'm going to do it after all. Rahab had faith that Israel was going to come in and capture everything.

[24 : 29] She was so sure of it. How do we know? Because she hid the spies. And said, remember me. Remember me. She had faith first.

Or she wouldn't have hidden them. Faith comes before action. And I think that that's really what James is trying to say. James is just trying to say, look. What good does it do for you to go around and say God bless you all the time?

Or I'll pray for you all the time. And it hasn't changed your behavior in any way whatsoever. What good does it do? He's saying, put your money where your mouth is.

He's saying the proof is in the pudding. And so as a believer, you should begin to act as a believer. Now, let's go back to our dog example.

I've got to get back to my dog example so Elias will pay attention. How you doing, buddy? You doing all right? Good. All right, Elias. Did you know that Miss Renee is the cutest little dog in the whole world?

[25 : 39] Have you ever seen a little dog? What's that dog's name? Maggie. Maggie. Yeah. This little dog is more human than dog. She never gets dirty.

She's about this big little fluff ball. And she's always clean. I think she thinks she's a human. So, but if she would hang out with other dogs and learn how to roll around in the dirt and learn how to bark at squirrels and run through the woods, she'd become more and more like a dog.

And a little puppy, if it's fed well and exercises, it'll act more and more like a dog.

Now, there's some dogs that'll bark louder. And there's some dogs that can hunt better. And there's some dogs that can dig faster. And there's some dogs that can make a mess better. That's Hunter, no, Ranger.

That's Mark's dog. He can make a mess better. He can chew up stuff if he, whatever. So, some dogs are more dog-like than others. Say, Matt, where are you going with this?

[26 : 53] Some Christians are more Christ-like than others. Some Christians are able to witness more powerfully. Some have memorized more scripture.

Some are more involved in good works of helping people and so forth. But if, as you grow from being a baby puppy Christian, and if you hang out with other Christians and eat the right spiritual food, which means that you read your Bible and you pray and you come to worship service, and you partake of the sacred meal and realize that Christ died for you, and you practice these things, you will grow more and more.

And just like a little puppy will grow to be more and more like his breed, as a believer, as you practice, as you let your works and your actions grow.

Your faith grows, and you become more and more like your breed, and your breed is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. That's your destiny.

That's what you were born to be, like the Lord Jesus Christ. And that breed will grow in you as you hang out with God's other dogs in this place.

[28 : 17] Amen. Well, I'm going to close with something that I've found. Elias, I need your help. Feel it out?

I need your help. Start handing these out to people. You go down on one side, and you go down the other side. This is something. How many of you were around now?

One per person. I think there's enough. Oh, we're missing Miss Brenda. So, yeah, keep passing. There you go. Let me tell you where I got this.

As you're seeing, it's already written on there. Wally Jenkins. How many of y'all remember Wally Jenkins? It's been a while. Half of us. He was a deacon in this church, and a great guy.

His mother was like a matriarch in this church. He was hilariously fun to be around. And he died young. Anyway, at his funeral, I borrowed his Bible to help prepare his funeral.

[29 : 17] And I found what I've given you in his Bible. And I just hung on to it. Because it is. I don't know. While he didn't write it, I mean, it was clipped out.

Something he had seen somewhere. He had cut it out and stuck it in his Bible. And it is a very good summary on what are the works of a Christian. What is the Christian life like?

You become a Christian by faith. But now, what works should you have? So, did everybody get a slip of paper, or did we run out? You didn't get one?

You can share one. Okay. Where are you going? Ella? Afiana? Oh, okay. I thought you were wandering out the door there. Come on back. Okay. Now listen.

This is a very good short summary of what your life ought to be like as a Christian. James would be very happy if we were trying to follow this. More important, Christ himself.

[30 : 17] Here it is. Attempt to do the following with all of your ability. Know God and do his will. Accept gratefully whatever God sends to you.

Do faithfully whatever God asks of you. Pray as you would talk with a friend. When you cannot understand, simply trust him.

Always believe that God is kind even when you hurt. Avoid sin. Give to the needs of others. Hate no one and love even the unlikely.

Be true even when others are false. Be brave even when others are cowards. Be kind in return for injuries.

Have pity on your enemies. Enjoy your friends. Attempt to be like Jesus in love, life, service, and sacrifice. That's the Christian lifestyle.

[31 : 26] It's the ideal toward which the book of books leads us. It's the ideal of the Bible. And I read through this list carefully last night this week and I thought, gee, the only one of these that I'm pretty good at is enjoy your friends.

I enjoy you people. I enjoy you. So, may God help us all. Now, that was in Wally's Bible. Guess what? You can stick that in your Bible and one day at your funeral they'll find it and they'll say, what a great guy this person was.

Look what was in his or her Bible. Well, let's go to the Lord in prayer and then we're going to observe the Lord's Supper before our last song. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word this morning.

By faith, we are saved. by faith alone in the sacrifice of Christ. But now, Lord, help us to live based on that faith, good works and good deeds that will be a blessing to the world and that will please you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Brother John. I need a couple of vegans.

[33 : 04] And you know, this is another one of those fits where his sermon is. I've been in churches where they do the Lord's Supper and it's just a ritual.

The Lord's Supper gets up and says, okay, we're going to have the bread. He says, a short prayer and we pass it out and everybody needs it. Okay, we're going to have the cup. And they say, a short prayer and we pass it out and they're all right.