

A Case Study on Nature of Genuine Faith

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[0 : 0 0] James chapter 2 at verse 20. 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?! And so on. Now we'll notice as we moved into chapter 2 of this letter that we are looking at the display of authentic faith in the lives of the people of God.

And following on the theme that James has here, the fact that we may claim to have faith, and as we read through this section, we may claim to have a faith that is nothing more than intellectual faith.

It's something that we think and believe in our minds, but at the same time, it doesn't produce fruit in our lives. And when I read this section of chapter 2, it does appear that the people whom James is writing, that we see at the beginning of the letter, they are scattered across various areas near Antioch.

And we understand that they have been confused by a perversion of the Pauline viewpoint of justification by faith.

[1 : 2 1] And when we read what James is saying here, we need to understand that he is addressing a misunderstanding in their minds with regard to what justification by faith means, and the place of faith means, and the place of faith means, and the place of faith means, and the place of works in the lives of the people of God.

So we bear in mind as we look at these verses that James is writing in a different context to the context that Paul was writing in, and therefore what you read here has to be understood in the light of that distinction.

When we move on to these verses as well, we see the way in which there is a real connection between what James has referred to as the implanted word in chapter 2, and the way in which they must be doers of the word as well as hearers, and understanding that those who actually are doers of the word, that they are blessed in their doing.

And into this section here, there is the real sense of judgment. And in the previous section, there's looking at the perfect law of liberty, and recognizing what we see in the mirror of the word, and adjusting your behavior in the light of that.

And it seems in this section that those who look to the perfect law of liberty, in the mirror that they are now to be judged by that same law, by that same word of God.

[2 : 4 6] But bearing in mind the distinction between Paul and James in the writings, we want to think this evening of a case study on the nature of genuine faith.

And I want to think first of all of the case study and the declaration. And we're reading the version number 14. What good is it, my brothers, that someone says he has faith but does not have works?

James comes right into the essence of the discussion, and speaks of the person who possesses faith but does not have works.

And the works in particular are works that we think are works in obedience to God's law, in serving the word of God, and in serving God himself.

They are actions carried out in obedience to God. And here is James asking the question, what good is it, what benefit is it, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

[3 : 54] And adding to that the important question that he does ask, can that faith save him? And we think of genuine faith, we think of the faith that brings salvation.

And the question here that James is asking is with regard to not salvation that we enjoy now, and the grace that brings salvation to us in the day of our conversion, and the grace that brings salvation.

And the question here that we think of salvation is that we are saved at last, and that we are saved at last out of the world into the glory of the new heavens and the new earth.

So the question is, can the person who has faith but does not have works, can they expect it to be saved at last at the end of time, placing the whole discussion into the context of the end time judgment of God?

And adding to that, he gives an illustration with regard to the brother, he says there is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food. And the one who says to them, go in peace, be warned and filled without giving them the things needed for the body.

[5 : 10] What good is that? So it is saying the right thing, but doing nothing. Faith is intellectual. It is verbal, but it's not practical and it is not active.

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. And it's James pushing them to think of the possibility that they may claim to have a faith and that that faith does not have works.

And therefore that faith is dead. And the difference between being alive and dead, as we read through the Bible and think of the grace of God, it is to have that fruit bearing sense of the spirit of God being in our hearts.

We are alive to God. We are alive to the Lord Jesus Christ and that life bears fruit. But if we have this kind of faith that says the right things, but that does not do the right things in obedience to God, then James is saying that that faith is dead.

And it is a powerful statement. It's powerful coming to ourselves together this evening. That there is this possibility.

[6 : 32] It's searching. It makes us ask the question. It makes us scrutinise where we are. And it's really important that we always do that. To examine ourselves and as Paul says, to prove our own selves that we are in the faith.

And there is the focus, the declaration then of the case study in version number 18. And there is a question that we have in the Bible. 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. There has to be a visible aspect to faith. That visible aspect is the works that faith must have.

And here is the challenge. I will show you my faith by my works. In other words, this faith, which is the gift of God, that is a faith that is living.

And it is evident out of its works, we could say. So I have faith and I cling to a faith. And if it is genuine faith, out of that faith, I see that the visible evidence of the life that there is in faith, and that cannot be hidden in the world.

[7 : 48] And that's the declaration of the case study that here is a fact. Genuine faith is a faith that is living.

It's a faith that shows itself by the works that we do in obedience to God. It is not simply something intellectual. It is something that's hugely practical.

It is something that leaves us serving God as we journey on through life. The case study and the declaration. Secondly, I want us to think of the case study and definitions.

And I want us to think about this because of the confusion between what James is saying here and what Paul is saying in the likes of Romans and Galatians. And the definition is around the whole idea of justification.

And in version number 21, where it was not Abraham a father justified by works. Justification.

[8 : 55] Justification. To be just, to be righteous, is the person who conforms to the norms of the kingdom of God. And I want us to understand that in our definitions, there are three ways in which we can understand the whole idea of being justified.

And only one of these applies to what James is saying. And the first sense of being justified or being righteous is something that describes our behavior.

We see Simeon in the temple, when the child Jesus was in, Simeon was righteous and devout. He lived his life conformed to the norms of the kingdom.

He was waiting, expecting the Messiah to come. And he rejoiced on his birth, on his appearance in the temple. To be righteous describes the way in which we live our lives.

Secondly, to be righteous can be a declaration. And that's the Pauline idea of being justified.

[10 : 07] It's having and being granted the status of being innocent before God. And in most of the letters that Paul writes, he is defending that case firmly.

He has no patience with any idea of justification on the basis of works. We are justified freely by the grace of God as a gift. And no one is justified by the works of the law.

We are justified by believing in him who justifies the ungodly. So there is the righteousness that belongs to Simeon because he lives his life.

Showing outwardly that he is conforming to the norms of the kingdom, waiting for the promises of God. And that is the righteousness that Paul speaks of.

It's God's declaration being justified by faith, apart from works. Works have nothing to do with it. It's a declaration. But the third way in which we can understand righteous and being justified is that it refers to God's vindication in the day of judgment.

[11 : 22] That the day will come in the day of judgment when God will judge all that we have done. Our works, our behavior, our conduct.

Our work, our conduct. And in that day of judgment that we will be justified if we have done the works of the kingdom of God as those who have faith.

And Jesus speaks with regard to that in Matthew chapter 12. I tell you, on the day of judgment, people give account for every careless word.

For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned. There's the vindication of God, the justification of God that is based on our works, that is based on what we have done.

And these are the three ways in which we can understand it in the light of what James is here to ensure that we have the right definition and to ensure that we're clear on what James is saying.

[12 : 26] And clearly James is using the idea of justification in the sense of being judged according to our works. In parallel with the way in which Jesus speaks in the gospel of Matthew.

Justification for James is God's judgment of us when we arrive in the last judgment. And bearing these things in mind then, we have a declaration of the case study, we have definitions for the case study, and I want us now to think of the case study and the demonstration, the practical explanation of how things do actually work.

And where would we expect James to go? We would expect him to go to the person who is the father of the faithful. We would expect him to go to Abraham who is the friend of God.

We would expect him to go to the same Abraham that Paul uses in his own argument. He goes to speak about the life of Abraham. Was not Abraham our father justified by works?

And then he refers to the special occasion in which we're going to understand and learn what James means here.

[13 : 52] And that special occasion is when he offered up his son Isaac. And the headline in that story is that we read in Genesis 22.

The headline is that after these things, God tested Abraham. And in every day that we open our eyes on the face of this earth as the children of God who have faith in God and his promises, that headline hangs above our heads.

After these things, on this day, God is testing you and he's testing me. The same way as he did Abraham. And we ought to remember the way in which that headline is at the beginning of every day that we open our eyes as the children of God.

And against that headline, we see that the test was take your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, take him to Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on the mountain that I will show you.

Here is the test. Here is the test. Here is the test. Here is the test. Here is the test. Here is the test. Abraham who has faith, who has intellectually accepted what God has said in Genesis 15.

[15 : 13] What does faith do under this headline on this morning? Abraham rose early and went to the place.

Where do we see the works of Abraham on this great day of God's testing? He got out of his bed. He didn't argue with God. He didn't sleep in or sleep on.

He rose early. There was faith. There was a test. And the response of faith is to move as soon as possible in obedience to God's command.

There is the movement of faith. And we have read through the story. And there is that headline hanging over Abraham.

And he goes off on that journey to that mountain. And at each stage he is conscious of where he has come from. He is conscious of Isaac with him. He is conscious of the place that God has shown him.

[16 : 16] And at the appropriate time he leaves the group behind. And he and Isaac and all the gear for the sacrifice. They go to Mount Moriah. And he binds his son.

And he lays him on the altar. And whereas we begin the day with the headline of God's testing. We arrive in this moment at this high point with a heavenly voice.

And he says, As Abraham takes the knife and is ready to sacrifice his son. The angel of the Lord cried out. Do not lay your hand upon the lad.

Why not? Because Abraham has passed the test.

What is the test? The test is that God wants to know that Abraham's faith is working. And once he comes to Mount Moriah, what does God say to him?

[17 : 17] Why does he? Why does the angel of the Lord not want him to put the knife into his son? For now I know the vindication, the assessment, the judgment of God.

For now I know that you fear God. We could say, Now I know that you love God. The whole idea of fearing God and loving God are close to being interchangeable.

I fear God because I love God. I love God and I fear God. Now I know that you fear God. Seeing you have not withheld your son from me.

And so the outcome of this whole testing process in the experience of Abraham is that he has passed the test.

And God has seen the works of his faith. Not to add to his faith, but as evidence of his faith. And there, Abraham is justified, says James.

[18 : 26] And we look back to the first chapter in this letter. And we see the headline in the chapter in this book itself.

Verse number three. Verse number two in chapter one. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various trials of various kinds.

For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Here it produces works. The headline is at the beginning of the letter.

It is here over the example of faith justified by works into the life of Abraham. And for ourselves this evening, it invites the question.

When I open my eyes in the morning, and here is the headline. Today God is testing me in my faith. How will my faith show itself on this day?

[19 : 36] In my obedience to God's word. In my relationships with other people. As well as in my relationship with God. In my service of God in his kingdom and his church.

In my service of God outside of his kingdom. In my faithful discipleship. In this example of social activity and helping those who are in need.

As Jesus himself said, I was hungry and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. There's such a long list of the works to be done in obedience to God's word.

That evidence of a living faith in our hearts. And we're asked to think this evening at the end of this day.

What is the outcome? What's the journey been like? Have we risen early like Abraham did? Not hesitating and going on in obedience to God?

[20 : 38] Have we gone through the day observing carefully. Everything that God has required us to do. Have we arrived at this moment.

And is God enabling us now to bring our works. As James referred to earlier on. To come to the mirror of God's word.

And to wait. Not to be given the status of being innocent and righteous. But to hear God's assessment.

Has my faith been working? Is my possession of living genuine faith.

Has that shown itself in my activities throughout of the day? I ask myself the same question that I'm asking you. But it is the question that this passage in the book of James leads us to ask together this evening.

[21 : 39] It's a challenging question. Here is the example. And how do we measure up to what James is being before us here.

And the example of Abraham. James goes on to show the importance of these practical works.

And the importance is that without them. Faith has not reached its intended goal. That's what we read in verse number 22.

You see that faith was active along with his works. So I've got the picture of two people working together.

Two identities working together. They are co-workers. They are engaged in the same thing. But they serve together. Together. And they serve together together because the one grows out of the other.

[22 : 44] And the one is active because of the other. And the works are there because of the living relationship of my faith with my Savior. And the way into which that life is revealed in my works.

Faith active along with works. It's a powerful dynamic force through which my faith works in life as a journey on through life.

And James goes on to say. Faith was completed by works. Faith was completed by works.

Not in the sense that faith wasn't complete. Faith as the gift of God. The gift of the grace of God. The gift of God in the day of grace.

That faith in itself is perfect. But it cannot be separate from me as the passion that I am. As the child of God. And that faith. The faith that is working.

[23 : 45] Not the one that doesn't have the works. And that faith. Is. Completed by his works. And it is completed in the sense.

Of reaching its intended goal. It's the whole idea of. Of maturity. And. Qualification. That Paul speaks of.

that Paul speaks of. He speaks in Philippians 3 of him not having already attained or being made perfect. In other words, he hadn't reached the intended goal of salvation.

John speaks about those who love one another. And when they do so, the love of God is perfected in us. God's love reaches its intended goal when the children of God love God and love the people of God.

And so here, faith is completed by works. And in any kind of project, whether it's a building project, any other kind of project, that remains unfinished.

[25 : 05] It's an embarrassment to the person who has begun the project and hasn't been able to complete it. Whatever the reasons are, it's an embarrassment to see an unfinished project.

And we see it in different areas of life. Great ideas, a great beginning, and yet things just peter out and don't reach the perfection and the completion that was in the original design.

And James is telling us here this evening that our faith should never be like that. A faith that we find so easy to express and to show itself in the very beginnings of our Christian experience.

And so often afterwards, we find ourselves toiling. And at the least sense of testing, at the least sense of opposition, our faith begins to waver and to wane, and it comes close to being inoperative.

And it becomes the faith that is nothing more than an intellectual faith, where I'm taking things in my mind, where I'm learning the word of God, and where I isolate my faith in that sense.

[26 : 32] I separate it from the works which it should be showing. And as we close this evening, let's think together of the fact that there is nothing more important than our faith, and of course, we know that.

But Paul reminds the church in Galatia that there is neither circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything.

Only faith working through love. And if my faith is accompanied by love in my heart, as it is with faith, hope and love, then my faith is one that is working and is doing so through love.

And because I love my Saviour in whom I trust, and in whom I trust as my Saviour, then my love for him will, instead of causing my faith to wane and to falter, my love for him will increase more and more.

And so will my works of love increase more and more. And so that as my faith grows stronger in the challenges of life, so there are greater evidences of the work of faith.

[27 : 59] They are co-workers. They grow together. And the greater my faith, the greater the evidence of the works of faith, visible to others in obedience to God and in the service of Christ's kingdom.

So let's remember the declaration, first of all, that he wants to make clear that it is only the faith that is accompanied by works which is genuine. Let's remember the distinctions.

And let's remember that James is here focusing on a justification that's an assessment of the work that we have done or not done. And let's be encouraged and challenged to think of our love for our Saviour, our faith in him, and to think of how our love can be increased more and more and learning more and more about our Saviour and so that these works, that confirmation of faith, will show themselves in the kingdom of God, in the church of Christ, and in the community in which we live.

May God bless these thoughts to us. So we're now going to close by singing in Psalm number 37 in the Scottish Psalter.