

James - Fake Faith
Sign Title: Fake Faith

July 10, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. This summer, we are studying the book of James.

If you could ask God anything, what would it be? I am sure we would ask God questions about the great mysteries of the universe, such as how God fashioned creation; how God balances the gravitational forces to keep the planets spinning in perfect alignment like cosmic clock, and of course, some of us would ask questions of greater mysteries still, like why can a woman never make up her mind.

Now in all seriousness, if we had sufficient time, I believe we would eventually all ask God the same question. It is a question that dominates the subconscious mind of every person on the planet. We would ask, *What will happen to me after I die?* Will I meet my relatives and those I love? Will I be ushered into a place of torment, or will I be brought to a place of peace?

This one question motivates billions of people to do *something* in the name of religion. Some go to a church, others go to mosque, some go to temple, some pray to Buddha, some pray to Allah, others pray to Jesus. In the back of every mind is the question of what will happen to us in eternity.

As Christians, we believe God has made a way for us to know what will happen when we die. There is eternal life with God available to everyone through Jesus. It is available to anyone who places their faith in God's Son and His work on the cross, who died in our place for our sins.

According to the Bible, faith is the conduit between salvation being made available by God and salvation being actualized in our life for our eternity. No faith in Jesus, no forgiveness, no eternal life.

The logical conclusion, that millions have reached is that what keeps people from being saved is simply a lack of faith. If people would just have faith in Jesus, they would be saved. Those who have faith in Jesus will be saved. Those who die apart from faith in Jesus will be eternally condemned. Isn't that what we believe? *(pause)*

James totally disagrees. The question is not whether we have faith in Jesus or don't have faith in Jesus. The question is *what kind of faith do we have?* Do you have the kind of faith that saves? There are many today who have faith in Jesus but it is not a kind of faith that will save them. So as we turn to our text, I put that question before you. Ask yourself, do I know for sure that the faith I have in Jesus is the kind that will save?

James 2:14-19

This whole section from verse 14 to 26 is dedicated to answering two questions. They are... *What kind of faith saves? How can I know if I have it?* We will begin to answer the questions this week, then finish up next week.

Faith without works doesn't save anybody.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? James 2:14 (ESV)

In the passage we read this morning, James asks two questions. What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save

him? The Greek grammatical construction of these questions make it clear the implied answer is a resounding “**NO!**”, it will not.

So the question is not whether we have faith or don't have it. Many people have faith in a variety of things. Michael Bolton can sing, “You got to have faith” all day long but it won't do him a bit of good if it isn't the right faith. The question is not even, do you have faith in Jesus as the savior or not. James says the question is, “Do I have the kind of faith in Jesus that is saving faith?” In other words, there is a kind of faith in Jesus that saves and a kind of faith in Jesus that doesn't. Let's look at what this means by taking an outside way of answering that question by looking at Paul.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

This verse has created much confusion with James 2. Most of the New Testament is trying to convince people who historically trusted their good works, that good works don't save anyone. As Christians, we spend a good deal of time trying to convince people that all they need to do is trust in what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross. He died in our place for our sins. We can not *behave* our way into heaven, we can only *believe* in what Christ has done for us.

Think of it this way. Salvation is about what *Christ has done*, not about *what we must do*. That is the gospel message that was preached by Paul and continues to be preached today. That is what we believe and teach at Faith Church. But there is a problem. What do we do with these verses in James when you hold them next to the ones in Paul? Paul says we are saved by faith

and not works, James says faith without works doesn't save anybody. Who are we to believe? Martin Luther didn't know what to do with this. In fact, his least favorite book of the Bible was James because of this verse. Are we saved by grace through faith or works?

The key to understanding this is realizing Paul and James are not talking about the same thing when they talk about *works*. Paul was writing to people who were trusting in their good works to save them. They thought their good works helped them earn their way to heaven. Paul was writing to people about the role our works play *before we come to Christ*. James was writing to people about the role our works play *after we come to Christ*. In life, we all tend to overcorrect and this is what the Jewish Christians James wrote to were doing. They understood they weren't saved by their good works but they ended up jettisoning good works all together. Why do anything? They reasoned they just needed to know the truth of Christ in their heads. James was writing to people who were trusting in Christ but they thought it then didn't matter how they lived.

Paul says that good works apart from faith in Christ can't save you.
James says that saving faith in Christ is never apart from good works. Paul is addressing *the root or means of salvation*. James is addressing *the fruit or proof that saving faith is real*. Let me illustrate this for you with an example.

As I spend time in the community at baseball games and in the gym, people discover I am your pastor. As I get to know people, I love inviting them to church. The problem is, they think I am inviting them because I am desperate to get people in the door, that isn't the truth. I honestly want my new friends to

come to Faith Church, worship with us and hear about Jesus. It is the highlight of my week to worship Jesus with you and getting the chance to study his Word together.

Invariably, people have creative ways of trying to blow me off when I invite them. They usually tell me they attend another church in town. When I ask about it, I usually discover they haven't been there in weeks or even months, but they assure me their faith is important to them. Sometimes, if I am letting my New York side come out, I push the conversation a bit more and ask them if they trusted in Christ to forgive their sins. Of course, they assure me they have. Sometimes, they mention they trusted Christ at summer camp when they were a kid. At that point, I usually back off.

As I continue to hang out with them, I usually discover they are struggling. Their marriages are on the rocks. When they drop a weight on their toe, language gets colorful. They have no appetite for the Bible, no hunger for holiness or passion or purity.

If I was to suggest they were not spiritually healthy, I am sure they would cuss me out. Why are they so confident? Because they have faith in Jesus. They placed their faith in Jesus years ago when they were a child.

Of course, none of us, myself included, is in a position to judge the state of anyones heart. But we are called to examine the evidence, especially in light of what James says in this verse. As you know, James gets much of this book from the teachings of Jesus and Jesus warned us many people are living under the delusion they have saving faith, when in fact, they do not.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Matthew 7:18–23 (ESV)

There will be people who stand before Jesus on the Day of Judgment and list their spiritual resume (prophesied, drove out demons, performed miracles).

That sounds pretty good, yet Jesus says, “Away from me, I never knew you.”

What is the determining factor? *Obedience is always the fruit of saving faith.*

I am burdened by this for our congregation. I don’t want anybody thinking the evidence they are saved is a date scribbled in the front of a Bible years ago at summer camp. That may be the beginning of their faith but *the evidence of saving faith is always a changed life.*

Before anyone swings to the opposite extreme and thinks they have to live a perfect life to be saved, the Bible is also clear that we can’t and won’t. James says we all sin in many ways. *It’s not the perfection of my life but the direction of my life that matters.* When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in a heart, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, that person will become a new creation. The Holy Spirit will transform the directions and desires of a life. Now James gives us some example of what fake faith looks like. Next week, we will come back and examine what saving faith looks like.

What does fake faith look like?

Faith without mercy doesn’t save.

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, James 2:15 (ESV)

James is describing a situation where a brother or sister, a fellow Christian, comes up to you and he doesn't have proper clothing to keep himself warm and he doesn't have enough food to keep himself fed. The Greek words here are not saying the brother is in starvation mode or stark naked but things are tight. The family is hungry. The kids are struggling to keep warm in the winter and their boots are leaking because mom and dad can't afford new ones.

The need is obvious. Can you see it? This fellow Christian is at your front door. What will you do?

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? James 2:16 (ESV)

Go, I wish you well or *Go in peace* was the common goodbye of the day. We might say, "God bless you!" or "Hope it works out, I'll pray for you." The phrase "be warm and filled" is the equivalent of saying, "God will take care of you." It is the same as sitting with a brother in need and saying to them, "Trust me, God provides in these situations." We can pray for them all day long but God wants us to help them! Here is a hungry brother and you have a napkin tucked into your shirt because you have a Turkey dinner in the oven and 3 deer in the deep freeze but you don't do anything.

James says, "What good is faith like that?" That is faith without mercy. It is faith without compassion. It is fake faith. Now would giving the brother food save you? No! But not giving food to him suggests that whatever kind of faith in Jesus I have is not the kind that saves.

Dead faith doesn't save.

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:17 (ESV)

James brings up death as another picture of non-saving faith. How do you know if a body is dead? You check for vital signs. Is there breath? Is there a pulse? Is there movement? These are the vitals signs of life. If there are no vital signs, there is no life. Faith has vital signs. They are *actions done in love and obedience to God*. They are the actions that say, this will cost me, but I know it is the right thing to do before God. I am going to help a brother financially. I am going to change the channel. I am going to get up early to spend time in the word. I am going to put a stop to that kind of level of intimacy with those I date. If there are no vital signs of faith, there is no reason to believe there is saving faith in a life.

Have you ever been in a Christian setting where you struggle to see vital signs of spiritual life? I went to a Christian college. There were many great Christians there, but in other ways, it wasn't much different than a secular university. What went on just was more hidden. The missionary kid down the hall was growing marijuana in a flower pot in his window. The girl with the long blonde hair had a fake ID to get into bars and dance clubs. Even though everyone in the school had signed a statement promising they wouldn't go dancing while enrolled, many still did it. It is not that I am against dancing, it is the fact we signed our name to a paper promising we wouldn't.

As part of the application process, everyone in the school signed a document saying they trusted in Christ as their savior, but for many, the evidence of their life showed their faith was dead. There were no vital signs. Almost everyone in the school claimed they prayed a prayer of salvation when they were

kids. They were even taking mandatory Bible classes. It's just that their faith was dead because it had no vital signs of life.

This doesn't just happen in Christian colleges but it happens in churches. Lots of people like the Sunday experience. Good worship songs are like an emotional back-rub. They makes you feel good. For others, the Sunday experience is a tradition; it is the way they were raised. Still others want the Sunday experience because they want a little religion for their kids. They claim to have faith, but the vital signs of joyful sacrifice, obedience, and compassion are absent. Friend, I need to ask you. Do you have dead faith? If you do, I am sorry to disappoint you but dead faith isn't saving faith.

Demonic faith doesn't save.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! James 2:19 (ESV)

Who is the best theologian on the planet? Satan. Who is the best biblical scholar? Satan. Running a close second would be his demonic hordes. Satan is very orthodox in his theology. In fact, there is really nothing wrong with Satan's theological belief system. He aces Bible jeopardy every time he plays. What's the problem with Satan? It is his heart. He knows doctrine in his head, but he is unwilling to let it change his actions.

James illustrates this by referring to Judaism's most sacred theological truth. It is know as the *Shema*

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV)

There is one God. A pious Jew would recite the *Shema* every morning and evening for his entire life. The knowledge was pounded into his head.

James is just blunt. He says, “You believe there is one God? Congratulations, even the demons believe that! But their theology is better than yours because they know they are destined for hell and it makes them shudder when they say it. Satan and his demons have great theology. It just doesn’t connect with their life. That is why they are condemned to Hell.

Demonic faith is common in second and third generation Christians. They can quote verses. They know their Bible stories. They can spend nights wrestling over the merits of Calvinism vs. Arminianism with their friends. When it comes time for the pastor to preach, they are always begging for more Bible information,... yet their lives tell a different story. When faith cramps the style of their life, that is going too far. It is taking faith too seriously.

Demonic faith is faith that gets stuck in the head but never makes it to the heart.

Conclusion

My friends, millions of people believe we are saved by faith alone. That is true, but it is not all of the picture. We are saved by faith alone, but **saving faith is never alone**. There will always be the evidence of a changed life.



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