

James - The Real Deal
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Good morning Faith Church! My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. We are studying the book of James, and this morning we finish up the second portion of the book's four-part division. This morning, we complete the section entitled, *Practical Christianity: Hearing and Doing*. For the next two weeks, I will be on vacation. Pastor Greg and Pastor Leland will fill the pulpit in my absence. When I return, we will pick up with the third portion of the book called *Practical Christianity: Speaking and Thinking*.

Last week, I began the message by saying that if God allowed us to ask him one question, if we thought about it long enough, we would probably all ask the same one. *God, what will happen to me when I die?* The Bible gives us part of that answer. Essentially, the deciding factor about what happens to us after we die is our response to Jesus. John 3:16 says Jesus came that we might have eternal life. The question is, how do we take hold of the eternal life offered to us by Jesus? The Bible is very clear that we can't buy it; we can't earn it; our parents can't give it to us; we can only receive it as a gift from God by placing our faith in Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. Millions of us believe that those who die with faith in Jesus Christ will be with him in heaven, while those who die without him will be separated from Christ eternally in Hell. Isn't that what we believe?

Last week, James told us it isn't that easy. Not everyone who places their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved. There's such a thing as non-saving faith in Jesus. This was a shocker for many of us. This is a big issue. It is a massive

blind spot in the American church. Some people who place their faith in Jesus will be surprised in eternity because they will spend it apart from Jesus; and they never saw it coming.

Many of us are well prepared for the important events in our life. For example, when going on vacation, I know that we have a congregation full of people who check the pressure in their tires before the trip. We make sure the engine oil is topped off. We make sure the house is locked and the post-office is holding our mail. We even make sure our life insurance is paid up. But when it comes to checking our faith, to make sure it is saving faith, not a fake imitation that won't help us in the end, when was the last time you did that? The results of fake faith, rather than saving faith, are eternally devastating.

Let's recap from last week. We learned three kinds of faith that won't save us.

- Faith without mercy doesn't save anybody. (2:14)
- Faith without obedience is dead faith. (2:15-16)
- Faith that is all about theological information and no life transformation is demonic faith. (2:19)

Each of these is similar. They leave faith as an intellectual game in the head and don't connect it to everyday life. It is like revving the engine of your car in the driveway. It makes a lot of noise and smoke, but all that noise doesn't mean anything if you don't have it in gear. While last week, we looked at examples of faith that won't save; this week, James gives us two examples of what faith that will save looks like.

Abraham the Hero

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; and the Scripture was 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 and not by faith alone. James 2:20–24 (ESV)

Abraham is our first example. He is the father of the nation of Israel and one of the greatest men in the Old Testament. There is no question Abraham is in heaven because, Jesus told us so in Matthew 22:32. He is considered a hero of the faith. Let’s see what can we learn about saving faith from his life. Since not everyone is familiar with his story, let me give a brief biographical recap.

Abraham lived in the city of Ur, the Chicago of its day. In Genesis 12, God spoke to Abraham and told him to leave Ur and go to a land God would show him. God gave him three promises. He would bless him, give him land to call his own, and out of him God would make a great nation. Sounds like a great deal.

So Abraham and Sarah packed the family mini-van (it was a Caravan) and off they went. Eventually they arrived in Palestine, which was the Promised Land. Lots of stuff happened to Abraham along the way, but the big news is what *didn’t* happen. Sarah was not getting pregnant. I am sure, it wasn’t for lack of trying on Abraham’s part. That is a problem when your descendants are to be a great nation. If you don’t have a child, you are not making progress toward seeing that promise fulfilled.

Abraham starts to think God won't be able to come through so Abraham tries to help God keep his promise, which incidentally, was not a good idea. God doesn't need our help to keep his word. Fast forward to Genesis 15.

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15:4–6 (ESV)

How was Abraham declared righteous before God? This time Abraham believed God would keep His promise, no matter how long the odds. It was that faith that declared him righteous before God. He was saved by faith, like everyone else in the Old Testament and everyone else in the New Testament and everyone who trusts in Christ is saved today...by faith that God will keep his promises.

Fast forward the story. Still no child. Abraham is 99, and he puts his teeth in a glass every night. Sarah is not much better. She is 90. By this time, it looks like all hope is lost. You know, there is a reason they don't have a maternity ward in the nursing home. People don't get pregnant at that age.

What is God doing? As He often does, God is waiting until all hope is lost and we are left trusting in nothing but God's promise to provide, that God does provide. That way we know it is God who provides, and he stamps his signature all over the provision. Another reason God waits to the last minute to provide is because most of all, he is interested in building our faith. The only way he can do that is if we have nothing left to hold on to but our faith in God. That way we

know it is the very hand of God in action providing for our needs and we have faith that God can, and will, keep his word.

Fast forward the story a little more, against all odds, 90-year-old Sarah becomes pregnant. She names her son Isaac, which in the Hebrew means laughter. Laughter is exactly what happens when a 90-year-old woman shows up for Lemaze child birth techniques and La Leche league meetings.

Fast forward to Genesis 22. Isaac is a teenager. All is well and everything is peachy-keen with the long awaited son until God shocks Abraham.

He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." Genesis 22:2 (ESV)

Can you imagine this? Talk about a favored kid? Talk about someone loved by Abraham even more than life itself. Abraham waited so long for Isaac. Abraham is so old. Now he is to sacrifice his long-awaited son? What would you do? Look what Abraham did.

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. Genesis 22:3 (ESV)

Abraham obeyed God, even when obedience seemed like it was something that only an idiot would do. I have to summarize what happened. At the last minute, God spared Isaac and provided a ram.

While Isaac survived, the question remains, "Why did God tell Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in the first place?" This was a *test* of Abraham's faith. Would Abraham obey, when obedience to God seemed like something only an idiot would do? Are you living in a Genesis 22 test right now? Is God testing your

faith by making you wait a long time for something you desperately want and need? There are ways you can cut corners and try to help God keep his promise. Don't do it! God is testing you! Will you obey him when it seems like something only an idiot would do?

James takes these two events from Abraham's life and puts them together. In Genesis 15, Abraham was justified by faith alone, but in Genesis 22, we see that Abraham's faith was completed by his obedience. Get this! Abraham had faith and works!

You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works. James 2:22 (ESV)

Faith and actions go hand in hand. Faith precedes our obedience, and it is what enables righteous actions. Righteous actions are always found when saving faith is present. Now let's look at someone completely different.

Rahab the whore.

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? James 2:25 (ESV)

It is ironic that Rahab is held up as a model. Talk about opposites. Rahab was a Canaanite woman prostitute. Abraham was a Jewish male hero. Yet James says, Rahab the prostitute is a model of faith! If a Canaanite prostitute can be saved, then there's hope for all of us! Here's her story: Rahab lived in Jericho, which was one of the greatest military fortresses of its day. In the city, she ran a type of "Bed and Breakfast" with benefits, that provided for all of her traveler's desires. In Canaan, which was a very wicked place, prostitution was a common thing. Meanwhile, Moses led Israel out of Egypt with miracles like the

ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea. Word has gotten around the countryside that the God of Israel is the real-deal and he is squishing anybody that gets in the way of his chosen peoples like a bug hitting the windshield. Israel is within a few miles of Jericho and is preparing for an attack. The whole city of Jericho is shaking in their sandals.

Joshua sends two spies into Canaan. Guess what they did? They spied! They spied out Jericho and spent the night at Rahab's B 'n B. The king of Jericho hears there are spies in town so he sends the Jericho gestapo to Rahab's house. She lies to them and says the gestapo hit squad just missed the spies who left town. In reality, they were hiding on the roof. Then Rahab says,

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof... And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Joshua 2:8, 11 (ESV)

This was Rahab's profession of faith in the God of Israel. James is not commending her lying. He is not recommending her profession. He is saying that her help to the spies at the risk of her own life showed she had saving faith. She showed her faith by the good she did to assist God's people. Everyone in Jericho knew the information about what God had done for Israel in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. That is why everyone's hearts were melting. From this text, doesn't it sound like everyone in the city believed that the God of Israel was the true God of all the earth, the real deal? But there was only one person from the city of Jericho who survived. Who was it? Rahab. Why did she survive? It was because she not only had faith that the God of Israel was the

real deal, but she is the only one who did something about it. It was what she did about it that made all the difference.

The point of the hero and the whore is that our story must be like theirs. We are all saved the same way, by faith. Once we are saved, the reality of our faith will show itself in the shape and texture of our lives. A person is justified by what he does, not by faith alone.

I explained this last week, but since not everyone was here and it is such an important point, I will explain it again. Let's look at what is an apparent conflict between James and Paul.

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Romans 3:28 (ESV)

Then James says...

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. James 2:24 (ESV)

They sound like they are not in contradiction, but if you look a little closer, you will see they are not. Paul is talking about how someone gets saved; James is talking about what happens when a person is saved. Paul is saying we can't behave our way to being saved. It is a gift of God through Christ that we can only receive through faith. James is saying that a person who is justified by faith will reveal that inner faith in the way they live and the choices they make.

James is addressing a major problem in the church of his day and our day. That is, people who profess faith in Christ, but their faith doesn't make a difference. Now, in saying this, realize James is not saying we have to live perfect lives. In fact, in James 3:2, he says we all stumble in many ways. We all

have many things we do after coming to Christ that we will regret. James is not talking about perfect but that there will be a change in direction.

At the same time, we can't ignore what he is saying. If faith isn't shaping my life and how I live and think, then my faith is dead faith and it is not saving faith. I fear that many people who think they have saving faith...don't. James is telling us to reach into our hearts and to feel our faith. See if it is connected to and guiding the choices of our life. If our faith is not shaping our day, we may have fake faith, a cheap imitation that will not save.

Some of you are going to freak out and are going to get all worried after this sermon that your faith may not be saving faith. You are not the ones that concern me. I am more concerned with the people listening today that don't give the difference between fake faith and saving faith a second thought.

Complacency about faith is the sign that your faith is not a saving faith, because fake faith won't want to do the work of checking your life.

Faith and Fire

Saving faith will always be accompanied by righteous works, just like fire always has heat. Heat is a byproduct of fire, just like righteous works are a byproduct of faith. Heat is not the source of the fire, it is the result of the fire. You will never find a heatless fire. Faith is very similar to fire. It begins with belief in the



gospel about Jesus and his death, burial and resurrection for our sins. A change takes place called repentance and I take my first steps of obedience to Christ as

my desires begin shifting toward living in a way that will please my Savior. New desires start to change old habits and ways of thinking. The flame begins to rise in me and the heat of obedience increases. People start saying things like,...

Dude, what's gotten into you? People feel the heat of the fire of faith in a life.

What would James say about people who claim to have fire, but there's no heat? Those who claim to have fire but have no heat will protest. "I most certainly do have fire! My fire started many years ago!" But there's no heat. "I know all the things it takes to start a fire. I can quote fire starting verses. I majored in fire. I went to a fire starting college. My daddy is a professional fire starter. I must have fire!" But friends, if you have no heat, you have no fire.

James wants us to get it out of our head that we can separate heat from flame. He wants us to feel our profession of faith and see if there's heat. Now, if this morning, you are realizing you have a cold flame, don't run out and try and do a bunch of good works to add heat to what you think is fire in your heart. That is the wrong idea. Come to Christ, and in faith trust in Jesus to save you from all your sin. Ask him to be the king of your life and then you will see the change that happens when the heat starts to come from the fire of faith in your heart. That is how faith and works go together

What does saving faith look like?

Obedience

Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. John 14:23–24 (ESV)

Faith obeys God. Not always. Not perfectly, but that is the direction of life and when we deviate, our heart is broken and repentant. Ask yourself...Is your desire to be obedient to God in every area of your life? Do you take God's Word seriously? Is God's will the determining factor in your choices? If we love him, we will obey him.

Mercy and Compassion

James has made this clear earlier in our series. If we see a brother or sister in need and do nothing, how can that faith save us? Now just because you can remember a time you drove by a broken down car and didn't stop to help doesn't mean you are going to hell. It is the deeper issue. Do you have mercy and compassion for others in your life? Do people sense it? Are you quick to judge and become angry or quick to ignore other's needs?

Love

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35 (ESV)

By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 1 John 3:10–11 (ESV)

Perseverance

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Hebrews 3:14 (ESV)

The ultimate evidence that we have saving faith is our perseverance in that faith until the end. Many people can drum up obedience for a while or be merciful for a while but because their nature is not changed on the inside by God,

it won't last. But when our nature is changed by God, he will carry us through to the end. The work God has begun in us, he will complete.

Conclusion

James didn't write with the goal of condemning anyone. He wrote with the goal of making sure we didn't buy into the subtle lie of Satan, that there is fire without heat and there is a saving faith without works. As we close, let me pray for us.



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