

FAITH THAT WORKS // A Genuine Faith

James 2:14-26

In the longest recorded prayer in the bible, Jesus speaking to His heavenly Father said this:

John 17:4, "I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave me to do."

Every single person in this room, every single person on the planet has God ordained work to do. All of us. Every single one of us has opportunities to fulfill the work God has given us to do every single day.

Whether that's a conversation over a cup of coffee, spending time with someone who is struggling right now, serving someone in need, encouraging a discouraged coworker, praying over a major business decision, or being sacrificially generous, God has prepared good works for us to walk in every single day.

And unfortunately, if we're not aware or engaged in the good works God has for us, there can be this sense within the church "I believe in Jesus, I show up to a service once a week, or once a month... I give a couple bucks here and there and that's basically what Christianity is all about. I just need to fulfill some minimum standard requirement to make God happy... to make sure I get home to heaven one day."

I need every one of you to hear me today, God not only has a sobering warning for us today, but He has made you for SO MUCH MORE for you than this.

In welding, metal is being formed and fashioned in a way that gives it purpose. The metal is placed under intense scorching heat, and it's through its own transformation, the welder gives that piece of metal a purpose greater than itself. If you're here and you've settled for a life absent of trial and transformation, purpose and meaning, significance and sacrifice, God's invitation to all of us today is to discover again what it means to live with a genuine faith that not only works in us, but a faith the works through us.

James 2:14-26, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? 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? 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. 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."

A DEAD FAITH

James 2:14-26, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"

Throughout the history of the church, there have been many different camps or approaches to how the church or how Christians relate to and engage with the world.

1. **Separate** from the world.

- a. This is the person whose primary goal is to isolate from the evil world out there. They won't engage in relationship with anyone who doesn't already believe what they believe for fear that the world might rub off on them. Their primary concern is purity and personal morality, and as a result, they never really engage in the mission or the purpose God has for them to do.

2. **Against** the world.

- a. This is the person who is always seeking to wage war with the outside world. Their primary approach to the outsiders is fear and condemnation, while remaining at a safe enough distance to maintain their preconceived ideas and stereotypes. It's the culture wars. It's a church

that publicly rails on people for not living up to a standard that they never claimed to hold for themselves.

“Whatever it be that makes us trust in ourselves that we are comparatively wise or good, so as to treat those with contempt who do not subscribe to our doctrines, or follow our party, is a proof and fruit of a self-righteous spirit”

- John Newton

Within this person or church is a spirit of contempt for anyone other than themselves.

3. **Of** the world.

- a. This is a church without any real distinction from the world. They're so fixated on earning favor with people that are far from God that there ceases to be anything different or compelling about their life that might draw someone toward Christ. This happens under the guise of and in the name of grace and love.

So, the Christian or the church that gives into progressivism, eventually becomes indistinguishable from the world.

4. **For** the world.

- a. It's the person that seeks to serve and bless those that are from God without compromising the truth of God. It's the church that seeks the welfare of all people, not just "their" people.

That's why James writes...

James 2:15-17, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food..."

- Someone in your neighborhood that's going through a hard time. A friend whose marriage is in shambles... a coworker that's struggling to make ends meet...
- When you see people in need...

...and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,'

- *"God bless you, don't worry when God closes one door, he'll open another one. I'm sure things will work out for you in the end. Be blessed, trust God, I'll pray for you, bless your cute little heart."*
 - See, the problem with a dead faith. Is that it says a LOT, but it doesn't do SQUAT!
- *"I'm sure God will provide the meals you need in His perfect timing..."*
 - God IS providing the meal they need, it's in YOUR pantry! Go cook it and bring it to them! God is providing the clothing or coaching, or help and guidance they need and He's providing it through you!

...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."

You know what a dead faith does? Nothing. It doesn't produce anything. It's not living, it's not active. It's a professing faith, but not a practicing faith. And according to James, if you have a profession of faith without a practicing faith, you have a dead faith. It's worthless, useless, pointless, and powerless.

Now, the other type of faith James describes here is what we'll call a detached faith.

A DETACHED FAITH

James 2:19, *"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"*

Demons believe in Jesus too! You know what that means? It means we can have good theology, we can have the right doctrines, we can recite all the scriptures, talk the Christian talk, we can "believe in Jesus," just like the demons do, and it doesn't mean anything! It's a useless faith!

We can say, "well I believe in God and I'm a pretty good person. I have morals, and attend church services. I mean, what else does God expect me to do?"

If that's us, our faith is no different than the demons. Why? Because it acknowledges truths ABOUT God without AFFECTION FOR God.

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

To shudder means to tremble out of disgust toward God. He is repulsive to them. You know what that means? The demons know who God is. They believe. But they don't love. It's knowledge without knowing. It's recognition without relationship.

A detached faith, it pays lip-service to God without love for God. There's no gratitude, there's no awe or wonder about who God is or what He's done. Often, this kind of faith masquerades itself as genuine. It looks very similar to a vibrant faith. We could all spend the day together, and it would be really hard to tell the difference.

In my backyard, there's a line of trees. Some of the trees are living, and there's a few large dead trees. And during certain times of the year, it's impossible to tell the difference between the living trees and the dead ones.

So, how can we make sure our faith is living and active? What does it mean to have a devoted faith?

A DEVOTED FAITH

James 2:18, "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."

See, some people will take this passage and say, "James is contradicting Paul. Paul said we're saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest any man should boast. James says faith without works won't save you!"

James, admittedly, is being a bit provocative here, but what James is not doing is saying that "to be saved, you have to earn it! You have to work harder, run faster, accomplish more for God and hope that one day, you'll have done enough to prove to God that you're worthy of heaven."

Not possible. We could never do enough.

Isaiah 64:6, "...all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment."

Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

We've all missed the mark; we've all fallen short—not a single exception. Not one.

So, what *IS* James saying?

James 2:20-26, "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. 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."

Abraham and Rahab... James reference their deeds and says, "*See! Because of what they DID, because their faith was ACTIVE, it justified, it proved, it revealed a righteousness with God that was already present in their life.*"

Here's what James is saying:

Works don't earn salvation, they validate it.

Good works, righteous deeds, they legitimize the genuineness of our faith.

"Our faith is revealed by our works (James 2:18), our creeds are revealed by our deeds (Luke 6:46), and our love for Him is revealed by our love for others (1 John 4:20). He makes it very hard for us to fake it."

- Jon Bloom

Now, some of us hear this and we think, "Oh no! I'm a Christian and I'm not doing anything! I better get involved in the church! Where can I serve, how do I sign up? I better prove that my faith is real! I better do something, or else God won't love me! I better serve! I better just get crazy generous with my finances or else I'm not a real Christian, maybe my faith isn't genuine..."

And I would love for you to do all those things. But let me stop you for a second. Think with me...If you let that thought pattern drive you to action, what's the motive behind your serving, doing, giving? Fear. You're shuddering just like the demons in

our passage. See, works driven by fear is evidence of dead or detached faith. It's dead, empty religion. But let me ask you, what's the opposite of fear? It's not courage. The opposite of fear is LOVE.

1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

If we serve God because we're afraid of God, that just proves that we don't really know God. Only when you see and experience the LOVE of God for YOU, will you be compelled to act, to good works, not out of fear, or self-preservation, but out of gratitude. Only when we see, *"God you did not spare your own son... you didn't withhold your own Son, whom you love, from me... how could I ever, ever doubt your love for me."* Only when there's trust, and friendship with God, only when we see the beauty of God, what Jonathan Edwards calls the loveliness of God... only then can we move from a dead or detached faith to a genuinely grateful, devoted faith. And that faith is proven, revealed evidence by our works. By our love for people in need. For people far from God. To love and serve the world with no strings attached because Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.

Here's my question for you... what is God saying to you today? When you think about serving someone in need, or loving someone who is far from God right now, who is God bringing to mind? Here's the good work I think God has for you this week. Pray for them and connect with them. Love them. Serve them. Go out of your way to be kind and generous to them, and don't expect a single thing in return. Love them with no strings attached and see what God might do as we combine our faith and works this week.