

Jas14 – The Demons Believe James 2:19-26

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Open your Bibles. Turn them to James. Title of the message, “The Demons Believe.” James 2 verses 19-26.

Before we get started, I’ve just gotta tell you something. I have finally figured out how to really grow our church. It’s taken me a long time, but I think I’ve finally got it. Let me run it by you. All we need to do is let people know that in this church nothing in your life actually needs to change. All you have to do is just acknowledge that God exists and acknowledge that he is who he says he is and you can go on living your own life however you want, doing whatever you want. I’m thinking about calling it “Church Lite.” What do you think? All of the blessings with none of the commitments. You come to our church and you just acknowledge that God exists, and you still get to go to heaven, you still get all the blessings of God, and you don’t actually have to change anything in your life. Live like you want, do what you want. Just acknowledge that God is who he says he is and here at our church, you’re going to be okay. What do you think of that as a church growth plan?

Let’s pray. God forbid it. God as much as we recognize that in our flesh that we would be drawn to such an empty promise, that by some mere intellectual assent of you, of your existence, that we would receive all of your blessings and forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God forbid it. And we pray Lord for that slow deceptive crumbling of the universal church, especially in our culture, that would insinuate this very thing. That we’re okay if we only believe. And that how we act, and the choices we make and how we live don’t matter. Pierce us, Lord. Strengthen us, convict us, break us and heal us and restore us and empower us, Lord. Let the scales fall from our eyes, crush the self deception, and give us true faith today, we pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

Some of you know my cynical description of “Church Lite” and that church growth plan is not that far from true in some areas of our culture. The Bible will have no such thing! It is anathema. It is a curse. Even though our culture is embracing it. The Bible never okays a belief that has zero impact on a life. Never. I told you why last message. This is just part two of the same message. Last message we made it clear, *true faith shows*.

Do you realize the demons believe? Every demon believes who God is! Every demon believes who Jesus Christ is! Every demon believes who the Holy Spirit is. And it causes them to shudder in fear.

James 2:19 (ESV)

19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

The word shudder is what a cat does when it's afraid and it hunches its back and the hair on its neck stands up. That cat believes. He believes he is in real danger and that's what this verse says about the demons – they believe!

And look closely at the beginning of verse 19, what is it that they believe? They believe that God is one. This is a clear reference to the great SHEMA which is the statement of faith for the Jews. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV)

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

The SHEMA is the Jewish doctrinal “statement of belief” and remember James is writing to Jewish Christians. So they saying, “You think you’re okay because you believe the ‘doctrinally correct’ truth about God?”

That is exactly the same as James is saying to us. You think you’re okay because you believe Jesus is the son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a perfect life, died on the cross was resurrected and is coming back again to judge this world? You think you’re okay because you believe all that? The demons believe all that, every bit of it. The demons believe all of WHO Jesus Christ IS and they shudder with fear.

When Jesus was passing through the area of the Gadarenes we read the following in Matthew 8:28-29.

Matthew 8:28–29 (ESV)

28 . . . two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.

29 And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?”

These demons knew exactly who Jesus was, and they knew he would be their eternal judge. But that belief was not going to save them and that same level of belief is not going to save us.

As is often the case, the problem is in the definition of the word “believe.” I believe in this music stand. I believe in the sense that it does exist and it does what it’s supposed to do. However, my belief in this music stand is not going to impact my actions in any way.

And if someone says they believe in God and it does not impact their action in any way, then they may believe in God the same way I believe in this music stand.

How can the demons believe and are eternally judged and we believe and are eternally saved? Because we are talking about two different meanings (definitions) of the word “believe.”

First there is what we call the *intellectual assent*. To assent means “to agree with what has been proposed.” If I say to you, this music stand exists and its purpose is to hold my notes, and you say “I believe that, “you have given your intellectual assent to that truth. And that is the level of belief the demons have. I would not suggest that you talk to a demon, but if you did, you could recite all the Apostle’s Creed, all the facts of what the Bible says about God and that demon would say, “Oh I believe all that, because I’ve seen it all.” That is intellectual assent – *I believe that is true* – and if your belief stops there, then you have the same belief as the demons.

But, a belief in God, the Bible calls *saving faith*, is far from intellectual assent. It’s far from just believing God exists and far from just believing he *is* who he says he is.

The definition of the belief that saves us is: **a belief that causes you to put your full faith and trust in something or someone.**

The formal definition is (Louw-Nida): **to believe to the extent of complete trust and reliance.**

To believe to the extent of
putting your full trust in God,
fully relying on God,
having complete confidence in God.

That is a far cry from *merely believing God is who he says he is*.

So, the big question is this... how do we know the demons do not have a saving belief? We know by their actions. And how do we know if we do have a saving belief? By our actions.

How do we know that we have
put our full trust in God,
are fully relying on God,
put our complete confidence in God?

Because that level of belief shows in our actions!

When you put your full trust in Jesus Christ- it shows!
When you are fully relying on Jesus Christ – it shows!
When you have complete confidence in Jesus Christ – it shows!

This is what James has been trying to get across to us. *If we have true faith it will show in our actions, and if it doesn't, then we don't.*

The cry of Reformation was salvation by faith alone, and next to Martin Luther the name most associated with the later development of the Reformation is John Calvin.

John Calvin - Institutes of The Christian Religion

Those who are justified by true faith prove their justification by obedience and good works, not by a bare and imaginary semblance of faith . . . And as Paul contends that men are justified without the aid of works, so James will not allow any to be regarded as justified who are destitute of good works.

We have to keep clear faith and works go together and the teaching of Paul and James go together

I heard it said this week:

Paul deals with the *root* of salvation – faith

James deal with the *fruit* of salvation – action.

And since we are teaching James, the point today is, true faith absolutely will show in our actions.

And you might say, Dave. We get it. Can we move on? And I'd have to say, No, because James isn't ready to move on. So let's continue in James 2:20.

James 2:20 (ESV)

20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

The phrase “*do you want to be shown*” is a grammatical way of saying “*Hey, PAL - Pay ATTENTION to THIS.*” And then just for emphasis James adds *you foolish person.*”

“Foolish” means – you seriously lack understanding. James is trying to make his point with a serious impact. That faith apart from action is a corpse.

And so he's going to give us two great examples from opposite end of the Jewish respect scale. James is going to use the Father of the Jewish faith and then a gentile prostitute.

James 2:21 (ESV)

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

In Genesis 22 is the famous story of God telling Abraham to go offer his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice on Mt. Moriah. This was an incredible test of Abraham's faith, because God had already told Abraham that through Isaac his descendants would be too numerous to count.

There are wonderful truths in this even in Genesis 22, including:

- #1) Abraham's faith that even if Isaac did die, that God would raise him from the dead in order to fulfill his promise.
- #2) That God asked the Father of our faith to offer his only son just as our Heavenly Father would actually offer his only son.
- #3) That it was done on Mt. Moriah which is the same hill Jesus Christ was offered on as the final sacrifice of our sin.

But for this message the point is Abraham was willing to obey God in offering up his only son because of the incredible faith Abraham had in God.

Abraham's faith in God is recorded in Genesis Chapter 15 where God made this promise:

Genesis 15:6 (NLT)

6 And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.

Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness in Genesis Chapter 15. But then, in Genesis Chapter 22 God tells Abraham to offer this only son as a sacrifice, which (agonizingly) Abraham was willing to do because he believe God that much.

Let's look at how the NLT translates James 2:21.

James 2:21 (NLT)

21 Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

This is an extreme example, but James is saying Abraham believe God so much, that even if his only son had to die as a sacrifice (even at his own hands) that God would still bring his promise to pass. *Not even the death of his son could stop Abraham's faith in God.*

Isaac (of course) didn't have to die and Abraham's faith was "completed" or "brought to maturity" this testing of his faith. This is a huge deal and it's explained in James 2:22.

James 2:22 (ESV)

22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed (brought to maturity) ***by his works;***

Listen, please. *You will not know the depth of your faith until it is tested. Until it is tested, you will not know the depth of your faith.*

I have seen so many people seem to have strong faith right up until the enemy throws the smallest "dart" at them and the first thing they do is abandon their faith and go back to living in the flesh and thinking of themselves.

You will not know the depth of your faith until it is tested. And if you will stand strong, the testing of your faith will mature your faith. Where the ESV here uses "complete" the Old English versions use the word "perfection." When your faith turns into action it is "Perfecting" your faith. The Greek word means: "To come to maturity." Only when your faith becomes an action will it begin to mature. You can talk all you want, but when your faith really starts coming out in your actions then you'll know you've got the real deal and you'll begin growing and maturing in that true faith. But until your faith becomes action, James says, it is dead.

So, next, James 2:23 says:

James 2:23 says (ESV)

23 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.

What does that mean the scripture was fulfilled? ***"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"***

How was the scripture fulfilled? The word fulfilled here means "*To carry through to the end - to bring to realization.*" Abraham's faith was brought to realization. It was made manifest or shown. HOW? In his actions.

Abraham's actions proved his faith was genuine and by his "actions of faith" Abraham was called "a friend of God" and you and I can be as well.

And so James concludes his example of Abraham in James 2:24.

James 2:24 (ESV)

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Again, the NLT sheds some light for us.

James 2:24 (NLT)

24 So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Key words *we are shown to be right with God* by what we do, by our actions that flow forth from our faith.

Are we getting it? Could James be done? Probably. Is he? No. He wants to use an example from the other end of the spectrum.

James 2:25 (ESV)

25 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?

I believe James wants to include everybody. So he goes from the highest to the lowest. From the Father of the Faith to a gentile prostitute, Rahab. Her story is also a great one. It's found in Joshua Chapter 2. The first battle after Israel crossed into the Promised Land was at Jericho and before the battle, Joshua sent two spies into Jericho to scout it out. And a prostitute named Rahab hid them and helped them. Because, as Rahab says to them in Joshua 2:9-12:

Joshua 2:9-12 (ESV)

9 . . . "I know that the Lord has given you the land . . . 11 . . . for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. 12 Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my [family]

Rahab believed in the God of Israel. She believed enough to take action and to risk her life for her belief. And, this gentile prostitute became the mother of Boaz (Book of Ruth) and a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ. And so from the top of the list with Abraham, to the bottom of the list with Rahab, every person in the Bible who has been saved by faith has been saved by a faith that showed itself in action. Because this is true from Genesis to Revelation.

James 2:26 (ESV)

26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Remember zombies? If a body is not breathing it is a corpse. If our faith doesn't have action, it's a corpse.

True faith creates action. It creates life movement. *Faith is dynamic. It is not static.* Dynamic means faith brings action, it makes things happen. Static means nothing is happening. No action. No change in our lives. God says a faith with no action is dead. Let's commit to change that right now.

Let's pray. *Lord right now, we just don't want to mess around. We don't want to deceive ourselves. We don't want to be foolish, lacking knowledge people. We want to be alive. We want our faith to be real. We want it to be dynamic. We want it to move, God. (And if that's you right now just cry out to God. Say something like this.)*

God I'm afraid as I look honestly at my life it looks more like assent than saving faith. It looks more like I acknowledge that you exist but it's not changing my life, God. Forgive me Lord, save me before it's too late. Come into my life Jesus, for real. I don't want to take up a seat in a pew. I don't want to be a spectator Lord. I want my faith to be real and transforming. I want to be able to look at my actions and say that's because of Jesus in me. I made that choice because Jesus lives in me. Lord I want that faith. I repent of my sinful self centered control of my life. I surrender to you. I acknowledge that you will not relent until you have all of me. And so I give you all of me right now. Please come into my life, fill me with your Spirit and make it show. Give me the power Lord. In your name I pray, amen.