

Jas01 – Faith Works James 1:1

Pastor Dave Shepardson Calvary Chapel Nuevo / www.wordbymail.com

Open your Bibles. Title of the message today, “Faith Works.” We are doing the entire first verse of the book of James today. I’m thrilled about it, I really am.

The very heart of the book of James is a call to a wholehearted faith in Jesus Christ that “works.” So let me ask you a question, same question asked three different ways, which will carry us through this series in the book of James. Do most Christians today have a faith that visibly impact their daily lives? Do most Christians today have faith that truly shows, that is clearly evident in their lives? Do most Christians today have a faith that truly works to bring genuine transformation in their lives?

The title of our series is “Faith Works.” Because the book of James is all about having a faith that actually does something in your life. It works. It actually makes a lasting, tangible, transforming impact. That’s what James is all about. James is the practical side of our salvation. James is “rubber meets the road.” James is where the truths of following Christ turn into action, to an extent where you and others around you can easily, quickly see it. It’s the Apostle Paul who does the long, detailed, theology of our salvation which comes by God’s grace alone through our faith alone. We call Paul a great theologian. Theology simply means the study of God. And Paul is so great at that. He’s actually a missionary, but we call him a theologian because of his writing. But James focuses on the results of that true faith.

The battle cry of James is “Faith Works.” Meaning true faith results in actual changes in your life.

James was actually written before any of Paul’s writings. It’s possible that it is the oldest of the New Testament books, possibly written before 45 A.D. and at least a few years before Paul’s first letter which was Galatians. And so James is not writing in response to or to add to Paul’s writings on salvation by faith alone. James is writing with the heart of a pastor. He is encouraging and exhorting the believers to make their faith real, to make their faith work. To show in their lives the true transformation that comes from truly putting your faith in Jesus Christ. James calls our faith to actually work. James is saying if you have faith in Jesus Christ, it should show. That’s a pastor’s heart.

Listen, I don’t want to dissect the deepest theological nuances with you. I just want your life to be transformed by the presence of Jesus Christ in you. That’s a pastor’s heart. That’s what James’ heart is. And in the same way, my job is to have the life of Christ in you, transform you.

James has more imperative commands than any book in the New Testament. An imperative command is “do this.” There are over fifty imperatives (commands) in James in only five chapters and only a hundred and eight verses. Fifty plus imperatives saying our faith should actually bring about something tangible in our life. The battle cry of James is “Faith Works” and when your faith is working it will show. You will be able to point to actions in your life and say those actions are because of my faith. Have you ever been able to point to something in your life and say, “Whoa! That was God. That was the Lord. That was the result of my faith in Jesus Christ.” It’s that action, it’s that response.

The book of James is focused intensely on the practical side of the Christian faith and many Christians really like James, because we like practical, down to earth teachings. Unfortunately, James has also been embraced by those who have pushed the “salvation by works” or “salvation by faith plus works” heresy because there are so many practical commands in James. And then on the other side are those who heartily defend the truth that salvation comes by God’s grace alone (we didn’t do anything to deserve it) and through our faith alone (even Ephesians 2:8-9 says God gave us the ability to have that faith.) It’s by God’s grace alone and through our faith alone. Period. Our salvation is complete. It’s complete in Christ, we receive it through faith. It’s offered by God’s grace. And it’s offered to all who would receive it. It’s offered to all. You choose to receive Christ or reject him. The fact that God already knows your choice doesn’t change the fact that you have to choose. And so those defenders, the ones that are big on God’s grace, tend to shy away a bit from James because James is so practical. They don’t want to imply that James is saying your salvation is through some kind of work.

But James himself makes both side of this double edged sword perfectly clear. The work James is exhorting us to, is a work that naturally “springs forth” out of our true salvation. James says in chapter 2:

James 2:18 (NLT)

18 . . . “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

You see, there are actually two sides of this salvation by faith alone truth in the Bible. Side one is you absolutely are saved by God’s grace alone through your faith alone, with nothing else added. Side two is if that has truly happened it will show in your life.

A perfect example is our own studies of Romans and of 1 John.

When we taught Romans we had message titles like these: “By Faith Alone,” “Our Position in Christ,” “There’s Not Enough Try in You.” But then, when we taught 1 John

we had titles like these: “Disciples Follow The Word,” “Disciples Live Their Faith,” “Disciples Genuinely Love.”

It is two sides of the same wonderful and incredible truth.

#1) You cannot ever earn your salvation

#2) If your life has truly been surrendered to Jesus Christ it will absolutely show
Because true faith works!!

Another thing we love about the book of James is that it is so concise. You don't have to read many of these verses twice to understand exactly what God is saying. James gets right to the point and then he just “moves on.” In fact, James is so concise it reads a bit like the book of Proverbs (and has been called the New Testament Proverbs.) It often doesn't take James more than two or three verses to have us absolutely pinned to the wall. So even though there are only five chapters, there are a bunch of individual messages in James. Most scholars see anywhere from twenty to thirty individual messages. (I'm not sure how many we're going to do.) But one thing is for sure, every message is about application, application, application. Raw, honest, face-in-the-mirror, application. And every one of us can use a large dose of that.

Another thing I love about James is it is full of some of the best metaphors and illustrations in the New Testament. They make the lessons so easy to teach, so easy to understand and so hard to avoid.

There's a famous old TV character known as Sergeant Joe Friday from the hit TV show of the 1960's “Adam 12.” And Joe Friday was made famous by a phrase that can easily be applied to the book of James. Sergeant Joe Friday's famous line was “Just the facts ma'am.” That is what James is all about, just the facts on how our true faith works.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father, please God show us. Show us. Show us how you wrote James Lord. Show us the passion, the heart. Lord give us the courage to be what we are – naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Allow the Word to drain the poison from our lives. Show us today Give us insight into the person and the purpose of this letter. Let us come back every week ready to face the mirror of your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Alright. So you gotta know James a little bit. This is all introduction. For those of you who think, “Hey, I thought you were supposed to teach the Bible.” This is the way it goes. You have to know the author before you understand the book. Here's James.

There were several men in the Bible named James who were key disciples of Jesus Christ. But for many reason, scholars basically all agree this James was the half brother of Jesus. Matthew 13:55-56 (along with other verses) lists James as the brother of Jesus and refers to sisters of Jesus as well. This, by the way, presents quite a problem to the Catholic Doctrine that insists Mary was a perpetual virgin. I read their case a catholic.com (you can read it too) and what they say is these verses that refer to Jesus having siblings are misunderstood by ALL protestant scholars and then they proceed to say that these verses simply don't mean what they say. But still, the Bible (and history outside the Catholic Church) says Jesus had siblings. And this James was Jesus' half brother along with Jude, the author of the book of Jude.

This James was also known as "James the Just." He was called "James the Just" because of his incredible commitment to holiness and to serving God in all that he did. The early church also records that James was also called "Old Camel Knees" because he spent so much time in prayer on his knees he developed thick calluses on his knees like a camel. This James was the leader (first pastor) of the Church in Jerusalem which was the Mother Church for all Jewish Christians. Finally, history says this James was martyred in Jerusalem by being push off a high point of the Temple Mount (much like the devil's temptation of Christ.) But the fall did not kill him, so he was beaten to death where he lay.

James the Just, Old Camel Knees – is a pastor. He is the pastor/leader of the "Mother Church" of the Jewish Christians in and outside Jerusalem. And as you read James, you can imagine this trusted and respected pastor from the Mother Church in Jerusalem writing bullet after bullet of challenge and encouragement to those who know him (or know of him) and respect him.

It makes me think of our own Chuck Smith who finished his great race this very week. Chuck Smith was that trusted and respected pastor of the Mother Church for all Calvary Chapels. And every time I read something from Pastor Chuck, I read it knowing who he is, as a deeply respected pastor and leader of the church.

I believe this letter from Pastor James was received by the early Jewish/Christians in a very similar way. Straight forward, solid exhortation to make our faith work, written by the Pastor of the Mother Church of the movement.

I actually see this book like a great pastor's blog. James is written so much like Proverbs. Just these powerhouse truths strung together one after another. I think it's the first Power-

Pastor Blog. In fact, it almost reads like a Twitter account – BAAM! Life changing truth in 140 characters!! That is pretty much what James does.

And so, when we read the opening line of James, we read it with some understanding of who this pastor and leader was.

James 1:1 (ESV)

1 James, a [SLAVE] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

I know the ESV says “A Servant” but if you look at the footnote it say “or, slave.” The NLT says it like it is.

James 1:1 (NLT)

1 This letter is from James, a slave of God (Doulos) and of the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

The word used here for slave means literally one born a slave as in “Born again... as a slave of the Lord.” Of all that James could claim to be, both as a half brother of Jesus and as leader of the “Mother Church” in Jerusalem, of all he could claim of himself, James knows who he is. “I am a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” He does not say, “On behalf of my half brother Jesus who I grew up with and you know, I taught him a few things.” No. Rather, I am a slave (a bond servant) of the Lord Jesus Christ. James identified himself not by who he was but by who he served... (big lesson there.)

And so, as the slave of the Lord *and* pastor of the headquarters Church, James addresses his initial audience in the second half of verse one:

James 1:1 (ESV)

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

James was a Jewish focused Christian. He is the leader of the Jewish/Christian Church. In Galatians 2:9, Paul says of James (along with Peter and John) first that they were pillars of the Church, and then Paul says *They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews.*

James is written from a very Jewish perspective and written to Jewish/Christians who had been dispersed from Jerusalem. There are four direct quotes to the Old Testament in James. There are forty allusions to the Old Testament and James uses Old Testament terminology throughout his letter.

However, there are fifteen indirect references in James to the Sermon on the Mount, taught by Jesus. If you think James is heavy on faith that results in action, try reading the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, some say the book of James can almost be read as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.

And then, as a preview of next message, James ends verse one with the word “Greetings.” The word used here means “To greet with a wish of joy and happiness.” And that is what James is writing to do, to give his readers reason for joy and happiness in the midst of their trials. And we will dive directly into that next message.

I’m thrilled to be studying this double-barrel, powerhouse book of James. But allow me to end today repeating a very clear answer to one of the most important questions in Christianity.

Here’s the question: *Is salvation by faith alone, or is salvation by faith plus works?* This question was the cause of the great Reformation. This question was the cause of the split between all protestant churches and the Catholic Church. This question is the key difference between true Biblical Christianity and all other religions and cults. Is salvation by faith alone or faith plus works? And we must absolutely have this question answered before we dive into the book of James.

Please, please hear me. The Bible – end to end, clearly and completely, without question – teaches that our salvation is through our faith alone. When the Catholic Church developed the doctrine of faith plus works for salvation, it was during a time when the ordinary people were not even allowed by the Church to have a Bible. In fact, the correction of this errant doctrine came out of people like Martin Luther actually getting a hold of a Bible, and reading it. The Catholic Church in the middle ages did not come up with the doctrine of faith plus works out of correct Bible interpretation. They came up with it out of other motivations.

The problem is people love the idea of salvation by works, which is why religions and cults that promote salvation by works are the largest in the world. Every time you hear someone say, “I’m a pretty good person, I think God will let me in,” you’re listening to a salvation by works argument. Same as every time someone says “Oh I don’t need to hear about Jesus and the Bible, I’m a Catholic, so I’m good to go.”

The Bible does not teach – in any place – that salvation can be earned by any type of good works. And the Book of James certainly does not teach salvation by works in any way.

Let me just list a few verses regarding salvation by faith alone.

John 3:16 Acts 16:31 Romans 3:28

Romans 4:5 Romans 5:1 Romans 10:9

2 Corinthians 5:21 Galatians 2:16 Galatians 3:24

Ephesians 1:13 Ephesians 2:8-9 Philippians 3:9 Titus 3:5

Salvation is truly by God's grace alone and through our faith alone. So what is James so intensely focused on?

James is going to focus on one primary point. *IF* a person has true faith in Jesus Christ it is going to *SHOW* in a changed life and in good works. A person who has truly been saved by faith alone will display the evidence of that salvation, and James is going to get in our face about it. He's going to say in James 2:

James 2:19–20 (NLT)

19 You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

20 How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

James isn't say you have to add something to your faith. He's saying that *if* you have true faith it will show.

The Apostle Paul calls this evidence the fruit of our salvation. Jesus also refers to it as the fruit of our abiding in him. And look at how clear Paul states both sides of this truth in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:8–10 (ESV)

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

(but then, on the heels of that Great "Faith Alone" statement)

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We need to be perfectly clear on this, heading into James... salvation is by faith alone and not the result of any type of works. AND if we truly have that salvation it will show in our actions. We don't earn it by our actions, but it definitely shows by our actions. Will you commit to hear that before we move into James?

So, in the introduction, we have a first challenge, of which many will come in our study of James. If you are hearing that we must be able to test our faith to confirm that it is indeed genuine, then you are hearing correctly. Listen carefully to the way the paraphrase, The Message, writes Paul's challenge to the Corinthians and to us.

2 Corinthians 13:5 (The Message)

5 Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus help us respond if our heart has been pierced. If we have been challenged and convicted, Lord, give us the courage to respond. Lord show us what you are about to call us to as we study the book of James. Show us Lord that you are calling us to faith that works. You're calling us to a faith that exhibits itself in action. Lord show us, make it clear and give us the heart to respond. It is in your name we pray, amen.*

