

Jas13 – True Faith Shows James 2:14-19

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Open your Bibles. We're in James. Title of the message, "True Faith Shows." If you think James has been *to the point*, "you ain't seen nothin' yet!" James just decides to go ahead and get downright serious with us this message. We're in James Chapter 2, verses 14-19.

Your actions are the tangible expression of your faith. Your actions do not earn you anything from God, but they do prove that you have something from God. Faith alone saves – and true faith shows.

We spent the past two messages in James looking at the seriousness of favoritism. And now we are going to spend two messages on this subject as well. Our subject is *faith and works* and specifically how they interact, how they go together. Hear me when I say there is no battle between faith and works. They are not in conflict. They are in unison.

Here's the problem. I think it's a vocabulary problem with using the word "works." The word "works" has come to mean "something you do to earn God's favor." Something you do if you're religious, and so this word "works," especially for us relationally centered, Biblically centered, Christ centered followers, we see works as a negative. So I think it's really a vocabulary issue because James never uses the word that way. Never. Never. James never uses the word "works" as a negative. And so I think maybe a better word is "actions." Our actions. What are we doing? How are we living? What decisions are we making? James is saying that true faith will show in our actions.

True faith will show in how we live.

True faith will show in the choices we make.

True faith will show in how we treat people.

True faith shows.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father, we need to hear your Word, Lord. We lay ourselves open to your Word, Lord. We're willing. Lord, Hebrew 4 says we are naked and open to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. And so Lord we know we are already laid open and so we willingly say Lord, pierce us. Show us, Lord. Show us our self deception, the sin of our own heart. Allow us to use the practical mirror of the book of James to do what you wrote it through James to do. To challenge us, to exhort us and to encourage us and to be transformed into your image, Lord. Use the power of your Word for the purpose you intended it for, please. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Our actions are the tangible expression of our faith. But, is it possible to have actions without true faith? We see that easily in the Pharisees, don't we? And we see that from Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23 where some say to him ***“Lord, Lord, did we not do all these things in your name”*** and Jesus will declare to them ***‘I never knew you; depart from me’***

But now, here's the really big question, *is it possible to believe without having true faith?* That is the question we will be answering for two messages, taking us from James 2:14-26.

This section of scripture has been a theological battleground since the days of the Reformation. Some have seen James as contradicting the clear New Testament teaching of salvation by faith alone, no works required. And some have wondered if James and Paul are actually teaching in contradiction to one another. The answer is absolutely no! They are definitely not!

One commentator say James and Paul are not standing face-to-face battling each other. They are standing back to back fighting different enemies of the same Gospel. James and Paul wrote at separate times to separate people for separate purposes. But they both wrote to defend the same true Gospel. Paul was battling how people felt prior to salvation, that works could earn them salvation. James is battling how people live after they think they're saved and thinking their faith doesn't have to impact their actions.

Paul wrote to counter those who would say we must work to earn our salvation and he made it clear our salvation is by faith alone with no works required. But James is writing to counter those who think they can be saved by some casual belief in God that shows no evidence of God in their lives whatsoever.

Paul makes it clear – Your works can never earn you salvation.
James makes it clear - If you have been saved (by faith) it will show.

John MacArthur (as reformed as they come) says this:

Both James and Paul view good works as the proof of faith - NOT the path to salvation

Your actions are the proof of your faith, not the path to your salvation.

The Bible never supports salvation coming from your works. That is man's idea and man's religion. But the Bible does make it clear, genuine salvation will have a visible impact on how we live. *True faith shows!* That is what we will be looking at for the next two messages.

This message, James begins with a rhetorical question and a follow-up question.

James 2:14–19 (ESV)

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

What good is it if some says they have faith but there is no action in their life coming from that faith? Can that faith save them?

It's a rhetorical question and the answer should be obvious and it should be a challenge to each of us! What good is it? For us to claim we have a saving faith in Christ, if there is no evidence in our lives to support that claim? Can that type of faith – a faith that does not show in our lives – can that type of faith save us? The rhetorical question demands a “NO” answer. In fact, the way it's written the answer is, “Duhh, of course it can't save us.”

Now it's really important we make it clear that James doesn't appear to be speaking to the hypocrite here. He doesn't seem to be speaking to the Christian who's wearing a mask, playing the game. He's speaking to the person who really thinks a casual, minimal, superficial belief in God is going to be enough to save them. Don't we know so many people like this? “Hey, bro, I believe in God, but don't get all ‘churchy’ on me!” That's one person James is talking to here.

But the other person is the one who actually attends church, possibly even with good intentions, but will not accept the fact that their faith should actually make a noticeable change in the way they live.

James is talking to the person who says they believe...

But there has been:

no change in how they live,
no change in how they think,
no change in how they treat people,
and they believe their faith is a true, saving faith.

James is forcing us to take a very practical test: *does your faith show in your actions.*

Does it show in
How you live
How you think
How you treat others

And if it doesn't, can it be true, saving faith at all?

And maybe you would get all defensive and angry at James and start justifying your lifestyle and defending yourself. But, if this is true, when would you rather hear it, now? Or the moment after you die? Better to hear it and wrestle with it now than when you are standing before the judgment seat of God.

So next, James is going to use an illustration to paint a picture of how valuable faith without action really is.

James 2:15-17 (ESV)

*15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,
16 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?
17 So also (in the same way) *faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

What value does God put on faith that does not show itself in action? Here’s the picture. Let’s put ourselves in the position of the person in verses 15-16. First of all this person is a Christian like you. (Verse 15 says it’s a brother or sister.) So you are a Christian and the beginning of verse 15 says you are poorly clothed. Other translations say you are without clothes, in rags, or naked. You are in serious need of clothing. And that’s not all. Verse 15 goes on to say you are lacking in daily food. Again, other translations say you are in need of, you are without, and you are destitute of daily food.

So, you are seriously hungry, you’re pretty much naked and it’s cold. (Can you put yourself there?) And then another Christian comes by (verse 16 says “one of you”) and they’ve got on two jackets, a scarf and a tennis sweater (with an alligator logo) tied around their neck, and they are carrying an arm full of Subway sandwiches on the way to the church potluck, and they are singing, “Yes, Jesus loves me.” And they look at you, hungry, freezing and near naked and they say “Go in peace brother, be warmed and filled.” And they walk by you warm, fat and happy. How much good is that to you? Because that is exactly how much good God says your faith is without action! In fact, it’s probably safe to say, the way you feel about that so called Christian is the same way God feels about your faith with no action.

And the reason James uses such a clear illustration is because we can all easily get the right answer here. Every one of us would say that warm, fat, happy Christian on the way to his potluck was of zero value to the Christian who was cold and hungry. And again God says that is exactly how much value he sees in a faith that does not show itself in action.

Look again at James 2:17.

James 2:17 (ESV) -

So also (in the same way) ***faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.***

The word dead is the Greek **NEKROS**, literally it means “a corpse.” It is also the word used for the spiritually dead.

Strong’s dictionary says (of the spiritually dead) **NEKROS** is: ***“Destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God”***

Faith that has no action coming for it is ***“Destitute of a life that recognizes and is devoted to God.”***

Again, thinking of a corpse (as James is here) Breathing doesn’t earn the corpse life. Breathing is the proof that a person is not a corpse. And the actions that come from our faith do not earn us life; they are proof that we have life. Proof that our faith is not dead.

Let me put in just one more cross reference here, from the Apostle John (the Apostle of Love) to show his support for this same truth.

1 John 3:17–18 (ESV)

17 But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?

18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

Now, in verse 18, James anticipates an objection from those who would still try to separate faith and actions.

James 2:18 (ESV)

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” (then James says) ***Show me your faith apart from your works*** (as if), ***and I will show you my faith by my works.***

Look how the NLT helps us.

James 2:18 (NLT)

18 Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

The way the original is written, James is not just asking for evidence. He’s implying that without actions coming from your faith there is no true faith.

And so again, we have a very direct challenge from James and one that Christians love to debate and discuss and dissect. In fact, we love to do anything with this statement other than personally apply it to our lives. But James is all about personally applying his challenges to our individual lives. It doesn't matter how microscopically you can dissect and debate this statement. All that matter is do we have the courage to look into the mirror and honestly apply this challenge to our own lives.

Do my actions prove
that my faith is real,
that Jesus Christ is truly living inside me,
that he is truly my Lord,
that my faith is alive enough to show?

Because if it's not – *then it's not*. But here is the good news; as long as you have the evidence that you are not a corpse (meaning you're still breathing) you still have an opportunity to have a faith that is not a corpse (meaning a faith that is alive!)

TRUE FAITH SHOWS! And if it's not showing, James says... it's not true faith.

And that brings up another question, doesn't it? How does true faith show? James is going to give us two great examples next message. But let me give you some scriptures to study right now. There are actually so many scriptures to answer this question it's hard to know where to start. But let me give you two. Galatians Chapter 5 is great primarily because the context of Galatians is all about salvation by faith alone. But in Galatians Chapter 5 there's a perfect picture of what it looks like when we are truly living out our faith. It's in Galatians 5:16-26. Write that down in your Bible margin next to James 2:18.

Likewise, Ephesians is all about who we are "in Christ." It's about our guaranteed position in Christ, through faith. But again, in Ephesians Chapter 4 we see what it looks like when we are living out the truth of who we are in Christ. Ephesians 4:17-32. Write that down.

Study these verses. See how true faith shows. But remember, we must not fall back into a works based fear that if we're not living all those things perfectly that maybe we are not saved. Avoid the extremes of the pendulum. Living right does not save you. You are saved by God's grace and through your faith alone. So do not doubt your salvation if you're not perfectly living up to these verses. And do not try to earn your salvation by trying to live up to these verses. **STOP ALL THAT!**

Instead listen very carefully to 2 Corinthians 3:18.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

18 So all of us who have had that veil (of unbelief) removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed (continually) into his glorious image.

We are saved by God's grace and through our faith alone. AND if you have been saved, the Lord (who is the Spirit) will be in the process of changing you more and more into his glorious image.

Are you?

Are you in the process of being changed?

Is there evidence that your faith is alive? Or (lacking that evidence) is your faith a corpse?

And so, what do you do? If you have the courage to look into this mirror and admit that your faith is actually a corpse, Jesus says you must be born again. You must receive his new life... that's the only hope for a corpse. The reason you feel like a corpse is because you are a corpse.

Ephesians 2:1–5 (ESV)

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked . . . (that's YOU in your Faith without Actions)

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

If you find yourself a corpse today, God – because of his great love – wants to make you alive in Jesus Christ. By God's grace and through your true faith you can be truly saved today. And if you will truly surrender your entire life to Jesus Christ, and if you will truly allow him to be your Lord, then your true faith will begin to truly show.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, we need the real thing. We're scared that we can be so self deceived that we think that a minimal level of belief is acceptable to you. And yet the Lord of Glory condescended from heaven to this miry pit of earth to take on the sins of mankind, to pay the full penalty for our sin. You gave it all, Lord. God forgive u for thinking we could give back to you some minimal, superficial assent of belief and expect you to apply the cleansing blood of the Son of God. Lord, you didn't superficially or minimally give your life for us, and you won't allow us to superficially or minimally respond to you. Don't let the devil deceive the church, Lord. Don't let us think that some minor acceptance of your existence makes us any different than the demons that know*

you exist. But instead, Lord, draw us to a faith that's transforming, that's life changing, that's bondage breaking, Lord. Draw us to that place.

(If that's you, acknowledge it right now. Say something like this) "That's me. What am I doing? Save me Lord, from my own self deception. I need you Jesus in a real and powerful way. I need to meet you daily. I want to meet you daily. I need to commune with you daily. I need to turn from my sin and chase after you. I need you to fill my life and make me new. And give me the evidence that my faith is alive. I repent of my sinful false faith and I make you truly my Lord and Savior. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. It's in your own name I pray, amen."