

Our Works Show Our Faith
James 2:20-26
Pastor Jason Huffman
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Teaching Notes

Last week we looked at 2 different categories of faith...

- ...Faith without works and faith with works.
- ...We established that faith with works was saving faith...
- ...Saving faith works.

Today James is using two examples from the Old Testament...

- ...The same two examples are used elsewhere about faith.

Paul uses one as examples of faith.

James shows them as examples of faith that works.

James and Paul are not teaching different doctrines...

- ...they are just deepening the same doctrine.

Some struggle because they see them at odds with each other...

"Paul is clearly wrong here, and is flatly contradicted by James, Jesus' brother, and leader of the church."

We are saved by faith, but our faith is seen in our works.

Faith is invisible until it is seen in works...

- ...And true saving faith works and is seen.

Title and BIG IDEA: Our works show our faith.

Saying I care for someone that is cold and hungry is visible and real **when I do something** to help them get warm and fed.

Saying I love someone lost and hopeless is only **visible and real when I do something** to help them be found and have hope.

Like those romantic movies where someone has a crush but never does anything to show it...the suffer tragically until...

Saving faith is also not intellectual belief or emotional reaction

Saving faith is trusting and relying on God's work and God's word.

...And when that happens I have a new life and works follow.

Also— **Paul and James had different reasons** for writing.

Paul was writing to Jews that were **tempted** to add works of the Law to their faith.

Paul hammers out they are saved by faith not by works of the Law

Galatians 2:16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ...for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Again...

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God,* **9** not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Many people still think they need to **DO** something to be saved.

...But it **is already done**...Jesus paid for your sin on the cross.

Trying to keep the Law, be circumcised, eating kosher...

...none of it saves you or even shows you deserve salvation...

The Law requires perfection.

None of us are perfect or able to keep it perfectly.

So the Law doesn't save us, it shows us our need for a Savior.

James said, break one part and you have broken it all.

That is what Paul was dealing with...

...BUT James is talking to a different group.

James' audience are not tempted to add works to their faith.

They are tempted to have faith only.

1. Our works show our faith is real and right.

This is actually where the great reformer Martin Luther struggled.

Martin Luther did not like the book of James.

Luther pushed so hard against the abuses of the Catholic church with works that he perhaps went too far.

Correct doctrine is vital because it leads to correct living.

We need a real and right relationship with God and others...

What was the problem?

Some believe that it was the “faith only” doctrines of Luther that led to the eventual weakness of the Lutheran Church that eventually led to their inability to stand up to Hitler and the Nazis.

If all we have as Christians is faith, we are dead men.

And what good are dead men in a spiritual battle?

If we say we believe, but we have no fight in our faith.

Evil may easily triumph.

If the salt loses it’s flavor or the lamp loses it light or the sword loses it’s edge...what good is it?

So too if the Christian says they have faith but have no works
Their faith is just a prop taking up space but doing no real good.

**We are saved by faith, not by our works of the Law...
...but we must let our faith work.**

2. Our works show our faith is profitable.

Faith is like a plow horse in the stable.

You may have it, but if you don’t take it out to plow the field it won’t do the farm or the family any good.

James and Paul are talking to two different audiences.

It is like the difference between talking to your friend that is a workaholic and your friend that is a bum.

One needs a pat on the back and encouragement to chill...

...and the other needs a kick in the butt...

...and the encouragement to get to work.

James is telling them, it is great you say you believe in God...

- You need to show your faith with works.
- You need to care for the poor and the hungry.
- You need to love the lost and the hopeless.
- You need to trust the God of the Bible and obey Him.

Let’s get into the text...

2:20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

As in, you don’t believe faith w/o works is dead?

Let me show you.

Fool is actually: **kenos** usually translated “vain” or empty

Someone destitute of spiritual wealth, of one who boasts of his faith as a transcendent possession, yet is without the fruits of faith

This is not just a rebuking insult but a descriptive word.

So in Romans 4, Paul refers to Abraham from Genesis 15:6.

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” **4** Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

So God made a promise, Abraham believed it and God accounted it to him for righteousness **before** he was circumcised according to God’s command.

Abraham is right with God because he believed God.

Now here is what James says...

2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? **22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? **23** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God. **24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

What James refers to is much later in Abraham’s life.

In Genesis 22...

...Abraham takes his son to offer him as a **sacrifice** to the Lord

...James says the scripture was “fulfilled.”

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

Abraham was declared righteous because he believed God...

...And then years and years later...

...Abraham obeyed God to sacrifice his son.

Sacrifice is a response of worship not a work for salvation.

3. Our works show our faith is complete.

James says, “by works his faith was made **perfect**”

This **word perfect: teleioo**: to carry through completely, finish, bring to a close or fulfillment by event

The obedience of Abraham’s faith in being willing to sacrifice his son was the fulfillment and completion of his faith.

- The works of the law don’t save you.
- Faith in Christ saves you.
- But...your physical actions complete your spiritual faith.

Paul says that Abraham was justified by his faith.

James says that Abraham was justified by his works.

...Both are true with different kinds of justified.

"justified" by his faith= "declared righteous by God"

"justified" his works= "demonstrating it is real"

Notice Abraham is called a friend of God because of his faith.

The works are not just religious works of the Law...

...but personal works in response to relationship

In Isaiah and Chronicles he was called the friend of God.

3. Our works show our faith is relational.

Jesus said, John 15:14 **You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.**

Abraham's relationship with God...

...was demonstrated by his works for God.

James is reminding them that Abraham had faith and works...

...and you and I need to have works if we have faith.

Works follow a healthy, living faith.

A faith without works has no assurance for salvation, no peace of mind for loved ones or profit of power in the world.

Then James uses another familiar example...Rehab.

Matthew and Hebrews also refer to the faith of Rahab.

These were most likely written after James.

James was the first to pick up this courageous woman of faith.

Rahab a non Jew, under the judgment of God and in the lowest part of society is used 3x as an example of faith.

25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James would say, her faith was alive...she hid the spies.

You could see she trusted God because of the way she acted.

She wasn't a Jew, she wasn't a righteous person, but she acted out her faith.

Hebrews 11 is called the Hall of Faith.

And each one of these characters is said to have great faith but it is always described by some sort of work.

4. Our works show our faith cares for people.

Hebrews 11:31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

What was her work? Hebrews says: her friendly welcome.

James says she welcomed them and sent them out another way.

Abraham the father of faith had works along with his faith.

Rahab the sinner removed from God had faith and works too.

The big idea is saving faith works.

If you ever are tempted to think, "I just believe".

You are on dangerous ground...skating on thin ice.

Do you remember the scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade?

The Holy Grail was hidden deep in the rock city of Petra.

Indy is trying to save his dying father and comes to a great chasm

It looks like it will be a step to certain death...

Watch what happens at the end...

<https://www.google.com/search?q=indiana+jones+last+crusade+step+of+faith&oq=indiana+jones+last+crusade+step+of+faith&aqs=chrome..69i57j0i22i30j0i10i22i30j0i390i5.20933j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:5a83112e,vid:sBBbq2g7yf8>

Faith is what saves us, and works is what shows our faith.

His faith was seen in the step he took and in the rocks he threw.

Anyone else would see that he believed and had made it to the other side.

5. Our works show our faith can be followed.

We have taken the step of faith to believe and...

... we are showing our works to those around us...

...so they can see and follow.

There are countless works that demonstrate faith.

Let your works show that your faith is flourishing.

When you refrain from fornicating with your Valentine that you are not married to even though everyone else is...that demonstrates faith.

When you refrain from getting drunk during the super bowl when everyone else does...that demonstrates your faith.

When you don't lie on the business deal that everyone else lies about...that demonstrates your faith.

When you forgive someone that hurt you while everyone else says stay angry...that demonstrates your faith.

When you offer up your Sunday morning to serve in Kid LIFE.

When you invest a week of the summer to go to camp with student life

All of these works FOLLOW your FAITH.

They don't save you, but they can show you are saved.

They show you are changed.

And one of those works is baptism.

Baptism is not done to save us.

We don't baptize infants because we are afraid they are not saved.

We baptize people that have already believed.

It is a work that shows their faith has saved them.

Discussion Questions:

What do you think about this quote, "Faith is invisible until it is seen in works." What else is like that in life?

Do you think more people need to hear Paul's message of not trying to be saved by your works or James's message of your works show you are saved? What about for you?

What do you think of when you think of the idea of being a friend of God? How can we be better friends with God? How about worse friends with God?

How have Christian works made the world a better place? Can you think of any real examples? Do you know William Wilberforce?

Has anyone's works shown you the right way to live out your faith so you could follow?