

Saving Faith Works
James 2:14-19
Pastor Jason Huffman
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Teaching Notes

The Biblical Building code is getting real today.

James is calling in the building inspector!

James has been hammering home this point:

The Big Idea: The measure of our faith is love.

Every other way we treat people is simply missing the mark.
Favoritism-partiality-using people-judging by outward appearance

Today we will talk about the central issue of Christianity:faith

James has different uses of faith.

It's kind of like homonyms...one word, different meanings...

There is a crane that flies,
There is a crane that picks up cars
There is a way I can crane my neck to see.

There was a clip on YouTube I watched.
Deborah can clip my hair.
The boat can go at a fast clip.
There is a date you can eat.
There is a date you can go on with someone you like.
There is a date that you were born on.
There is a date that makes you feel old.

Today we are going to look at different kinds of faith in two categories of faith...faith with works and without works.

Saving faith is the first one and the title of the message.

Title: Saving Faith Works.

Saving faith has works and is what works.

It works out it's salvation and it works for saving.

But remember: WORKS DO NOT SAVE US.

What about the other category...workless faith?

There will be 3 different kinds of workless faith.

2:14 What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

New International Version

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?

New Living Translation

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?

English Standard Version

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

James is asking two questions:

“What benefit is faith if that faith has no works?” : “Workless faith”
...And more specifically: “Can that kind of faith save anyone?”

If your faith has no works, what is it good for?

Let's look at this idea in other ways...

- What if I said, I have a phone...but it has no charge?
 - Can it make a call?
- What if I said, I have a car...but it has no engine?
 - Can it drive you home?
- What if I said, I have a check for \$5,000...but no signature?
 - Can it get you money?
- I have a person to help you...but he isn't breathing...
 - What can he do to help?

- **The charge is where the power is.**
- **The engine is where the drive is.**
- **The signature is where the authority is.**
- **The breathe is where the life is.**

These things are useless by themselves.

To say you have faith but you don't have any works is useless.

Without a charge, an engine, a signature or a breath...

...You have something that is good for nothing.

And if we follow that line of thought...

...A faith that does nothing, is good for nothing, it is useless.

1. Workless faith is useless faith.

Maybe it takes up space, you can look at it...

...you can touch it, some people think it works...

...but you and God know it's a prop

This "faith" does nothing real, living, saving faith does.

Well, what does real, living, saving faith do?

It has power, it has drive, it has authority, it has breathe.

It is alive and because it is alive stuff happens.

When you have a new life in your house...stuff happens.

Puppy? It is alive, it barks, it pees, it chews up your shoes.

Baby? It is alive, they cry, and pee, and chew up things.

There is no denying something is alive.

It is not a doll or a stuffed animal placed and positioned.

Here is his first example...

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? **17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

2. Workless faith is dead faith.

Here is a brother or sister, this is a believer.

They are without clothes or daily, necessary food.

They have a very real and urgent need.

....The root of **destitute** is forsaken.

And your response is...

NLT: Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well

You say, have a good day. You say, stay warm. You say, eat well.

But you **do** nothing.

James is actually giving us a double example...

First, there is a person with needs and you do nothing to help...

...to that person, you are good for nothing.

Second, your words have no profit because they have no power.

There is no action with your words to make anything happen...
...so you must not really mean them...
...If you meant it you would do something.

You clearly don't really want them to stay warm because they are naked and cold and you have done nothing to help them.

You obviously don't really want them to eat well because you know they have no food and you gave them nothing to eat.

You say you have faith, but you must not mean it because you don't do anything to show it.

...It is not only useless, it is dead.

I would argue empty words are worse than no words.
Empty, powerless words can be hurtful.

What kind of person says to a starving person, eat well?!
What kind of person says to a person out in the cold, stay warm?!
That is cruelty not love.

It would be better to walk by silently than to speak out a lie.

Jesus said, I would rather you be hot or cold, but this lukewarmness makes me sick.

It is painful to hear kind words and be treated unkindly.
It is hurtful to hear promising words and be treated unfaithfully.

Let's go back to our earlier examples...

- To give a dead phone to a teenager would be heartless
- To give your spouse a car w/o an engine would be a sick joke
- To give an unsigned check to your employee would be mean.
- To give a kid a puppy that is not breathing would be unthinkable

**Churches are full of people who say they have faith...
...but their faith actually does nothing...
...It is useless and dead and it hurts.**

It hurts the people that hear it and hope for it to be real.

People show up, sing songs, and say nice things...
...but their attendance is a **duty**, their hearts are **cold** and...
...their words are **empty**.

The prophet Amos addressed this kind of thing with one of the harshest rebukes in the Bible...

5:21 "I hate, I despise your feast days,
And I do not savor your sacred assemblies.
22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings,
I will not accept *them*,
Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings.
23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs,
For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.
24 But let justice run down like water,
And righteousness like a mighty stream.

God was not looking for their religious observances.
God was looking for their words to match their works.

This last verse was often quoted by Martin Luther King Jr.
As MLK fought prejudice and partiality he quoted this verse

It is a beautiful picture of faith working...
...Living faith loves and does what is just and right.

God isn't looking for a church full of empty props...
...God is looking for a church with hearts He can empower.

II Chronicles 16:9 is Hanani's message to King Asa
For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those whose heart is loyal to Him*.

Some think workless faith will work for "fire insurance"

But James is teaching us a workless faith is useless and dead.
Dead faith does nothing and counts for nothing.
Workless faith doesn't work for salvation.

Next James brings up an argument some people will have...
18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

So James gives a hypothetical argument...
There are 2 kinds of people who claim faith...
...one with faith and no works and one with faith and works.

They say, my faith is a private thing.
You can't tell I believe anything, but I do.

- They don't seek Jesus.
- They don't talk about Jesus outside of religious settings.
- They don't serve anyone anywhere regularly.
- They don't seek to actually obey God's word.
- They don't give money to the church or those in need.
- They don't care about others any more than the average person
- They don't step out in faith or share their faith.

James says, if you try to show me your faith without your works...
...I can't see it.

Faith is invisible to the human eye.

James says, I will show you my faith by my works.
You can see my actions and know I have faith.

Like the tree in the orchard.

Someone can tell you it is an apple tree, but until you see the apples, you don't really know.

Just like we saw in Galatians...Love is the fruit of our faith.

...And love is an action.

But this person may say, but I DO believe in God.

And James has a pretty strong answer to that...

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

3. Workless faith is demonic faith.

Believing in one God is the Jewish Shema.
The Lord, the Lord our God is one.
The Jews would recite this over and over.

James says oh you believe that?...

...Big deal, the demons believe that...and shudder.

Demonic faith is a dangerous faith.

You can believe the right things about God.
You can even have an emotional reaction to this belief.

...I feel joy, I feel fear, I feel safe...

...But that sort of faith doesn't translate to any works.

Believing correct doctrine and having an emotional reaction is not saving faith.

Fruit demonstrates faith.

Faith without works is useless, it is dead, it is even demonic.

Saving faith works.

It has action, life, power, results, fruit, authority, breath.

If you are not sure...work it out.

Cry out to the Lord to save you.

Confess your sin and come to Him.

Put your trust in Him from your heart not just your head.

Saving faith is not something I can make or create.

Salvation is the gift of God.

It is life born in me.

It is a mystery.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

When we truly trust Jesus as the son of God, the savior of the world, we kneel, we yield, we seek and obey Him.

If you have saving faith, let your faith do its work in your life.

Don't hinder it.

Don't hold it back.

Let the fruit of the Spirit flow.

Let people see that your words and your witness match up.

Seriously...this is pretty tough!

It's like a building inspector in Laguna Beach.

He wants your house of faith to be beautiful.

He wants it to stand up to the storms & floods, fires & mudslides.

James is not going to go easy on us because it is a matter of life and death.

Do you want to get to the end of your life...

...and find out you were living a lie?

That what you were trusting in was a sham?

I think that is one of the reasons hell is described as full of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There is so much regret.

There is so much frustration.

There is so much agony over what could have and should have been.

Discussion Questions

What are your thoughts about this analogy for faith, “Without a charge, an engine, a signature or a breath, you have something that is good for nothing.” How could our faith be like that?

Why do you think people trust their works instead of Jesus’ work?

Why do people trust workless faith instead of true faith?

How does someone know that they have saving faith? Can you think of anything we discussed or you have experienced?

Why is it important to realize what kind of faith we have? (Clue: not all “faith” saves.)

What are ways we can hinder the true works of our faith?