



## Jason Smith - WHEN FAITH GETS OFF THE COUCH

Read: James 2:20-26

**20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?**

**22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 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.**

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

**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?**

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

**Intro:** Let's talk about credibility. Not the kind you earn with a résumé—but the kind your faith earns when people watch how you live.

Anyone can say, “*I believe.*” But James asks, “*Can anyone tell?*” Few verses in the New Testament have started more arguments than these—this was one of the battleground texts of the Protestant Reformation.

James is not picking a fight with Paul. He’s picking a fight with hypocrisy. James is not discussing how a sinner is declared righteous in God’s courtroom.

Instead, he is showing how a believer’s faith is proven genuine in the courtroom of life—before a watching world.

Because real faith doesn’t sit in the recliner and cheer from the sidelines—it rolls up its sleeves and gets in the game.

This morning is what I’m calling the state-of-the-church address for 2026. The word the lord is giving me is it’s time for the church to live a life of faith that gets off the couch.

After walking us through the tragedy of empty words in verses 14–19, James turns the page. And he does it with two unforgettable stories—Abraham and Rahab.

One was respected; one was rejected. One lived in a tent, the other in a brothel. One had a covenant and a mountain. The other had a reputation and a rope.

But both proved that genuine faith doesn’t remain theory—it hits the street.

So, here’s James’ closing argument: ***Faith that never moves can’t convince anyone it’s alive.*** And he’s had enough of it. **Real faith gets off the couch.**

## 1. **REAL FAITH HAS RECEIPTS (v. 20)**

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

James isn't talking to atheists. He's talking to believers who've stopped believing in how they lived every day.

He calls them "foolish"—literally "empty-headed." They know the right verses but never verify them with action.

It's like buying a treadmill to get in shape and using it to hang your laundry. The equipment is there, but the effort is missing.

James is basically saying, "Show me the receipts." You say you love the Lord—where's the evidence? You say you trust God—what risk have you taken that proves it?

Credible faith gets off the couch.

## 2. **REAL FAITH ACTS BEFORE IT SEES** (vv. 21–23)

**James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?**

Let's talk theology for a moment. This is not Paul versus James. They're not in a cage match.

Paul says we are justified before God by faith alone.

**Rom 3:28 Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.**

**Rom 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.**

James says Abraham was justified before others—his faith was vindicated by the actions he took.

It's not faith vs. works—it's faith that works.

**T. Kendall – We are justified before God by faith; we are justified before men by our works. It is the vindication of our testimony before others.**

**Genesis 15:6** says Abraham **“believed the Lord, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”** But years later, in **Genesis 22**, God said, **“Take now your son, your only son Isaac... and offer him.”** (v. 2)

And Abraham rose early, split the wood, and journeyed three days. When Isaac asked, **“Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”** Abraham replied, **“My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb.”** (v. 8)

Faith got off the couch and went up the mountain.

Abraham didn’t just step into the unknown—he stepped into the unseen. He didn’t have a roadmap—he had a relationship.

Did Abraham know where the path would lead? No. But he did know Who was walking with him.

**James 2:22** **Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?**

That’s not theory. That’s sweat-on-the-brow, knife-in-the-air obedience.

**Abraham’s faith proved God could trust him.**

When Abraham raised the knife to offer Isaac as a sacrifice back to the Lord, heaven wasn’t learning something new; heaven was confirming Abraham’s reliability for every generation after him to see.

It’s one thing to believe God will come through for you; it’s another for God to know you’ll come through for Him.

Before God entrusts greater influence or deeper responsibility, He often asks for an altar moment—a place where obedience costs something.

Because he obeyed when it made no sense, God could trust him to carry promises that would shape the whole world.

Remember: Abraham didn't see the ram caught in the bushes until the knife was already raised.

Sometimes the test of faith isn't whether you believe God will provide—but whether you obey before you see it.

**James 2:23** **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.**

Abraham was justified in Gen 15, and he was vindicated in Genesis 22.

### **3. YOU ARE VINDICATED BY WHAT YOU DO (v. 24)**

**James 2:24** **You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.**

*illus: Martin Luther was a gospel bulldog—bold, brilliant, ready to fight for the truth that we are justified by faith alone.*

*He was the lightning rod of the Protestant Reformation—the man God used to bring Christ's church back to the gospel of grace. But even Luther had blind spots.*

*When he reached James 2, he could not make sense of it. He called it “an epistle of straw.” He thought James contradicted Paul. He even said to his church, “We will not teach that book here.”*

*But Luther missed the context. James isn't talking about being saved before God—he's talking about being credible before people.*

*Luther got the gospel right—but he missed James' point: **The world isn't asking what you believe; it's asking what you do.***

## What “Justified” Means Here

The word translated “justified” can mean (a) “declare righteous” (Paul’s use) or (b) “vindicate/ show to be right” (James’ use). The Greek word **dikaioō**.

We see the same idea elsewhere in Scripture:

Verse	Translation	Sense
Luke 7:35	“Wisdom is justified [vindicated] by all her children.”	Wisdom’s actions prove her right
Matt 11:19	“Wisdom is justified [vindicated] by her deeds.”	Deeds confirm truth
Rom 3:4	“That You may be justified [vindicated] in Your words.”	God’s truth proven
1 Tim 3:16	“He was justified [vindicated] in the Spirit.”	Christ proven righteous

James uses it that same way—not “declared righteous before God,” but “proven genuine before people.”

So verse 24 could rightly read: “**You see then that a man is vindicated by works, and not by faith only.**”

Paul shows **how faith saves**. James shows **how faith lives**. God sees your faith. People see your works.

### 4. **REAL FAITH RISKS SOMETHING** (vv. 25–26)

James 2:25 **Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?**

James isn't done. He chooses the most unlikely example—a Gentile woman with a scandalous past. Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho.

Abraham shows us faith proven in the heights of devotion; Rahab shows us faith proven in the depths of brokenness.

One lived in tents and talked with angels; the other lived behind city walls and entertained strangers in her bed.

But Rahab risked her life to hide God's people. She heard about Israel's God and acted on what little she knew.

**Hebrews 11:31 *By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.***

Rahab had every reason to play it safe. She had zero social capital. But when she heard what God had done, she stuck her neck out.

You don't have to know everything to obey God. You just believe enough to move when He calls you.

Rahab's risk proved that God can work through anyone.

When she hid the spies on her roof, she was betting her life on a God she'd only heard rumors about.

Her risk said, "*God, I'm all in—even if I don't fully understand.*" And heaven responded by writing her name into the lineage of Jesus.

The world saw a prostitute; God saw a participant in His promise.

Rahab's courage and faith shout to every generation after her: ***If God can use me, He can use you.***

**illus:** Let me tell you about a 23-year-old woman who changed the course of history because she was willing to risk everything.

Her name was **Phyllis Latour Doyle (SHOW PIC)**. It was May 1944—five days before D-Day. Every man the British had dropped into Nazi-occupied France had been captured or killed. So Churchill's secret spy agency decided to try something unthinkable—send in a young woman.

Phyllis was trained in Morse code, combat, lock picking, and even how to disappear in the dark. But her greatest weapon wasn't strength—it was simplicity. Her cover story?

A 14-year-old peasant girl selling soap from a bicycle. She parachuted into Normandy, buried her gear, and started pedaling from village to village.

While she chatted and giggled with German soldiers at checkpoints, she was secretly memorizing troop movements, weapons, and fortifications. Then she'd hide in the woods, set up her radio, and send coded messages to London—135 of them in all.

One afternoon, Nazi soldiers stopped her and searched everything—her bag, her bicycle, her clothes. One officer pointed to her hair ribbon, demanding she remove it.

Inside that ribbon was a strip of silk holding every code she'd used. But Phyllis didn't panic. She smiled, untied the ribbon, and let her hair fall—codes dangling right in front of their eyes.

They waved her through. For 135 days she rode through occupied France, sending the intelligence that helped make D-Day possible. She survived when few others did.

Then, after the war, she went to New Zealand, married, raised four children, and never told a soul what she'd done—not for 56 years.

*When France finally awarded her their highest honor at age 93, she accepted it quietly. To her, she'd simply done what needed to be done.*

*Phyllis risked her life every single day for a cause greater than herself. That's what real courage looks like.*

Like Rahab, Phyllis Latour Doyle wasn't the obvious choice. But God loves to use ordinary people who are willing to take extraordinary risks. Faith always looks foolish until it wins the war.

### **Conclusion:**

**James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.**

Both Abraham and Rahab had faith that did something more than talk.

One climbed the mountain. The other risked her neck. One had a pedigree. The other had a past. But both had **credible faith**—faith that walked, faith that worked, faith that *got off the couch*.

- 1. “God, help me trust You enough to surrender what I love most.”**

Like Abraham, pray for the courage to place your Isaacs—your dreams, plans, and treasures—on the altar and believe that God can provide something even greater.

- 2. “God, use my story to show others Your mercy.”**

Like Rahab, pray for the boldness to risk obedience even with your past scars, trusting that God delights to work through unlikely people to reveal His grace.