

Authentic Christianity  
**Faith and Works Illustrated**  
James 2:21-26

October 11, 2020 am

HDBC

**Please open** your Bibles to James 2:21-26. Continuing our study of the letter written by James, the pastor of the early church in Jerusalem. In it he offers very practical and convicting instruction on what it means to be an authentic Christian.

**All the New Testament writers** affirmed the truth that authentic Christianity cannot be kept on the inside, but is evident in how we live. Unfortunately, for some who claim to be Christ-followers this does not happen. **They are like the ducks in a story told by the philosopher Kierkegaard.**

He called it the parable of Duckland. It was a Sunday morning and all the ducks dutifully came to church, waddling through the doors and down the aisle into their pews where they comfortably squatted. When all were settled, and the hymns were sung, the duck minister waddled to his pulpit, opened the Duck Bible and read, ***Ducks! You have wings!*** It was a marvelous, elevating duck scripture, and thus all the ducks quacked their assent with a hearty ***Amen!*** And then they plopped down from their pews and waddled home!

**For some** believers there is a disconnect between what they say they believe and how they live. James aggressively challenges this, declaring that real faith produces real works. If there are no real works there must be no real faith.

**In chapter 2** he addresses the relationship between faith and works, making it clear they are both important. Rather than competing against one another they work together. Last week we focused on verses 14-20. Genuine faith, the kind that actually results in salvation, is validated by good works. When a person is truly born again, it changes his or her life.

**A person cannot** be saved and remain the same! Things change on the inside and that change on the inside can be seen through the changes that happen on the outside. James offered two **Old Testament illustrations**; a patriarch and a prostitute. These illustrations confirm that salvation does not come from works without faith. Nor does it come from a faith that fails to produce works. Both are faulty views of saving faith. He then offers a third illustration to seal the point.

## 1. Abraham (21-24)

Need to see the context of Genesis 15:6, which he is quoting. Abraham had just returned from a major military victory. He and 318 warriors had rescued Lot, defeating four kings & their armies. You would think that he would be riding high. But, apparently he wasn't. It was a great victory, but it was not enough to erase the nagging realization that something was still missing. He has been in the land ten years and still there was no heir to carry on his name and produce the family line that God had promised. Maybe, he thought, it will never really happen.

### **Then God spoke.**

*After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision saying, "do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward will be very great."*

*Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus."*

God responded: *This man will not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body, he shall be your heir.*

**He took him outside and said:** *Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them. So shall your descendants be.*

**At that point** we read the simple statement that changed Abraham's eternity. *Then he (Abraham) believed the Lord, and He (the Lord) reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

**H.C. Leupold** calls the word ***believed*** here the biggest word in the chapter, one of the greatest in the O.T. He notes this is the first instance of this word being used in Scripture. He went on to say the emphasis here is on the permanence of Abraham's faith. He believed God's word and kept on believing God's word. Because of this he was declared by God to be righteous – right with God – saved! Keep in mind that this was 14 years before he was circumcised and hundreds of years before the law.

**This is the classic** O.T. statement that salvation is through faith alone. Paul quotes it twice in his letters. Romans 4:1-5 and Galatians 3:6-7. Now let's see James' argument.

## A. Abraham offers Isaac (21)

What exactly did Abraham do when he offered up Isaac on the altar? Genesis 22 tells the story. This would have been 30 years later, and Abraham is still **believing** in the Lord. He was instructed by God to take his son to Moriah tie him on top of a stack of wood, kill him and then allow the fire below to consume his body.

**I cannot imagine** the sickening horror as Abraham processed God's instruction. But he quickly obeyed. How could he? The text tells us. Along the journey he told the servants, *Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.* He **believed** that he **and Isaac** would come back. He didn't know how, but he was confident that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

**The moment** Abraham was about to slay his son, God stepped in and provided a substitute sacrifice. Abraham had been willing to give up everything, including his son and his dream to trust God.

**James says** *Abraham was justified* by this action. Keep in mind that there are a couple of ways to understand the word **justified**. The word can be used in terms of **an acquittal**, as in a legal proceeding. Judge or jury declares the person not guilty. They are acquitted by a decision and a declaration. On the other hand it is used of **validating or verifying** what has already been declared. *His action validated his statement.*

**Paul uses** it to describe the legal declaration by God that brings us into right standing with God. Declared right with God and therefore, saved.

**James uses it** in a different sense. He means Abraham's faith was **justified** or **validated in the eyes of men** by his action of offering Isaac on the altar. As people see the action of Abraham, it validates or proves that his faith in God is real. *You may say you believe a parachute will bring you safely to the ground when you jump out of an airplane. That belief is **justified** or **validated** when you jump out of the plane, acting on your belief.*

**Abraham's** claim that he believed God, was **justified** (demonstrated) by his action. Paul was looking at the root of salvation and James at the fruit of salvation.

## B. Faith perfected is by works (22)

James reminds us that faith and works go together. And, in fact, faith is *perfected* by works. That word means completed. The ultimate end of our faith is a changed life. So, as the works of salvation are seen in the life of the believer it is a sign that this faith is real.

## C. Abraham is a friend of God (23-24)

Finally, James points out one of the great benefits of becoming a follower of Christ. The Christ-follower is not simply forgiven . . . not simply saved from hell and for heaven . . . the Christ-follower becomes a **friend of God**. That phrase speaks of an intimate relationship that brings joy to both parties.

### **Kent Hughes:**

*James would say we are justified by faith alone but not by faith which is alone! He would say that if your faith is alone, you are in the grip of an eternal illusion and would urge you to experience real faith—a faith that works!*

## 2. Rahab (25)

James could not have picked a more opposite pair of illustrations. He was patriarch, the man of faith, father of Hebrew people. She was gentile harlot. But she, like Abraham demonstrated her faith with action. Both are included in the list of courageous men and women of faith in Hebrews 11.

**Some** might have taken issue with James using Abraham as an example to follow. After all he was a towering figure in Jewish history and considered by many to be far above normal, regular people. Rahab is not only a contrast to Abraham, she is a radical contrast. He was everything she was not. Yet the common thread that ties them together is their faith seen in their works.

**She was a prostitute** but had heard of the one true God. In God's grace, she believed in Him. So, when the spies sent into Jericho by Joshua found their way to her house, she made a quick decision to commit her life to God. Trusting God to protect her, she protected His people. Had the leaders of Jericho learned what she had done, they certainly would have executed her. She stepped out in courageous faith, risking it all. Once she decided to trust God and help the spies there was no turning back. She was all in!

**James offers** one more illustration. It's is not a person, but the human body.

### 3. Human Body (26)

In order to show the completely inseparable nature of faith and works, James calls upon his readers to consider the relationship between the body and the spirit. Without the spirit, the body is dead. Those people who walk around talking about their faith, but never demonstrating it are like living corpses. Alive on the outside, dead on the inside.

**Faith without works is DEAD!** It does not rise to the level of saving faith. Real faith can be seen in the good works that it produces.

Calvin and Hobbes comic strip. Calvin, a little boy, is hurtling down a snowy slope on a sled with his friend Hobbes, a tiger, conducting a discussion about sin. Here is the dialogue:

*Calvin:* I'm getting nervous about Christmas.

*Hobbes:* You're worried you haven't been good?

*Calvin:* That's just the question. It's all relative. What's Santa's definition? How good do you have to be to qualify as good? I haven't killed anybody. That's good, right? I haven't committed any felonies. I didn't start any wars. ... Wouldn't you say that's pretty good? Wouldn't you say I should get lots of presents?

*Hobbes:* But maybe good is more than the absence of bad.

*Calvin:* See, that's what worries me.

True faith is not only seen in what we don't do, but in what we do!

#### **Jesus said:**

*Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."*