

Bible Fellowship Teaching Plan for James 2:14-26 (October 11, 2026)
Real Faith Works

Central Truth: Genuine, saving faith is a living, active faith that produces visible evidence in a transformed life. Good works do not earn our salvation; they reveal that our faith is genuine and alive. “Faith is the root. Obedience is the fruit.”

Key passage (26): “As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

Opening Question: What’s the difference between just saying you believe something and actually living as though you believed it?

Background: James continues to emphasize and illustrate what genuine faith looks like. Having challenged his readers about partiality in the first half of chapter 2, he now confronts another problem: professing faith without demonstrating that faith through actions. His question is not whether genuine faith saves, but whether a faith that produces no evidence is actually biblical, saving faith.

This passage is sometimes considered one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament because of its discussion of faith and works. We should always remember that Scripture must interpret Scripture and that biblical doctrines must be understood in harmony with the whole counsel of God. Salvation is by grace through faith, not by human works; yet the faith that receives salvation is a living faith that produces the fruit of obedience.

Paul teaches that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works, but immediately explains that those who are saved are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. Thus, works are not the cause of salvation but the evidence and outworking of salvation, just as James shows us.

Lesson Objectives

- 1) Explain James's question about whether faith without works can save.
- 2) Be able to distinguish genuine saving faith from just a profession of faith or intellectual belief.
- 3) Explain how James doesn't contradict Paul's teaching that salvation is by grace through faith.
- 4) Recognize good works as the evidence and outworking of genuine salvation, rather than the cause of our salvation.
- 5) Identify practical ways faith should be visible through our attitudes, actions, obedience, compassion, and holiness.
- 6) Explain why faith without works is described as "dead."
- 7) Explain how Abraham proved his faith
- 8) Explain how Rahab proved her faith.
- 9) Answer the question individually, "Where is faith in Christ becoming visible in my life?"

Opening Illustration: The World-Wide Widget Factory

I. A Profession of Faith Without Fruit Is Worthless (14-17)

- A. James begins with the question: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"
- B. The issue is not whether faith saves. Genuine faith does save. The issue is whether the faith being claimed is actually genuine, biblical faith.
- C. Jesus said in John 15:8: "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and [by bearing good fruit] so prove to be My disciples." Good works do not bring about discipleship, but they are the proof of authentic discipleship.

D. James gives a practical example: “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” but that but does nothing to meet the person's physical needs.

1. The words sound compassionate, but, without action, they accomplish nothing.
2. James therefore concludes: “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Discussion Questions

- 1) What exactly is James questioning in verse 14?--the ability of genuine faith to save, or the authenticity of a faith that produces no evidence?
- 2) How does the example of the hungry and poorly clothed person illustrate James' point so well?
- 3) What's the difference between saying we care and actually showing that we care?
- 4) Can religious words and activity give the appearance of faith without the reality of faith?
- 5) What kinds of “fruit” should normally accompany genuine faith?
- 6) Why does James call faith without works dead rather than simply weak or immature?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Do my actions reinforce what I say I believe?
- 2) What are the areas where my Christian profession (my talk) is stronger than my Christian practice (my walk)?
- 3) If my faith were to become a discussion item on Facebook, what would people say?

II. A True, Living Faith Is Demonstrated, Not Merely Claimed (18-19)

A. James anticipates an objection: “You have faith and I have works.”

1. Faith, by itself, can't be physically seen, but its effects can be seen.
Faith is revealed through the lifestyle, actions, and attitudes that flow from it.
 2. Illustration: imagine a real apple and a wooden imitation. They may look similar, but only one real apple actually came from a living tree.
 3. A person can know biblical truth, affirm sound doctrine, attend church, use "Christian" words, and yet show little evidence of genuine transformation.
- B. James then gives an even more startling example: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!"
1. The Jews revered their statement of faith found in Deuteronomy 6:4: "The Lord our God, the Lord is One," but it had little bearing on the way they responded to God.
 2. This declaration of faith--in itself--can't help the agents of Satan, and it can't help those who go no farther in allowing that declaration to shape their lives.
 3. Correct information about God is not the same as saving faith in God.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What does James mean by "Show me your faith apart from your works"?
- 2) Why is intellectual agreement with biblical truth by itself insufficient for our salvation?
- 3) What can we learn from the fact that even demons believe that God is one?
- 4) How can someone be very knowledgeable about Christianity without being transformed by Christ?
- 5) What kinds of evidence would demonstrate that a person's faith is alive?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Is my Christianity primarily something I know or something I say, or is it really something I live?

- 2) Is my faith in Christ changing the way I respond to people, temptation, suffering, and obedience?
- 3) Is there evidence of increasing godliness and holiness in my life?
- 4) Where is Christ's transforming work most clearly visible in me?

III. Examples from Jewish History That Show How Works Reveal the Living Reality of Salvation (20-24)

A. Abraham: "Our father"--the one to whom all faithful Jews looked as the founder of their identity as a people.

1. "Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works."
2. Abraham's faith was not theoretical, speculative, or merely intellectual. When God called, Abraham acted, revealing the genuineness of his faith.
3. In response to God's promise of a son (Genesis 15:6): "he believed the LORD, and he (the LORD) counted it to him as righteousness."
4. When Abraham was called upon to prove the vitality of his faith as when God called him to offer his son as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:2), Abraham obeyed.
 - a. Abraham's faith was proven in the fruit it produced.
 - b. Scripture was fulfilled: Abraham believed God (Genesis 15:6) and demonstrated his belief (Genesis 22:3).
 - c. Abraham was called "a friend of God."
5. His obedience didn't create his faith; it revealed the reality of his faith.

B. Rahab (a very different person from Abraham)

1. She had heard what God had done for Israel (parting the Red Sea, conquering the Amorite kings).
2. She believed enough to act: she received the spies, protected them, and helped them escape.

3. Had she not acted on her faith, she would have died along with all the other residents of Jericho.

C. Abraham was an honored patriarch and mature believer. Rahab was a Gentile woman from Jericho with a very limited knowledge of God. Yet they both demonstrated the reality of their faith through their actions.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What did Abraham believe before Genesis 22?
- 2) How did his obedience demonstrate that his faith was genuine?
- 3) Why is obedience such an important indicator of genuine faith?
- 4) What does Abraham teach us about obeying God when obedience is difficult or costly?
- 5) Why is Rahab such a surprising example of faith?
- 6) What did Rahab know about God?
- 7) How did she act on what she knew?
- 8) What similarities are there between Abraham and Rahab?
- 9) What differences are there between Abraham and Rahab?
- 10) What does Rahab teach us about taking the next step of obedience even when we don't think we know enough about God?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Is there something God has asked me to do that I have hesitated to obey?
- 2) When obedience is costly, does my faith continue to trust God?
- 3) What recent decision has demonstrated that I genuinely trust the Lord?
- 4) Am I waiting until I understand everything before I obey what God has already made clear?
- 5) What would I do differently this week if I truly believed what I say I believe?

IV. A Living Faith Displays Evidences of that Life (26)

- A. James closes the section with one of his strongest statements: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”
- B. A body without life can’t function. In the same way, a faith that never produces obedience, godliness, repentance, compassion, or holiness is not simply a weak version of living faith, it’s a dead faith.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What does the illustration of a body without the spirit teach us about faith without works?
- 2) Why shouldn't we interpret every personal failure as proof that our faith is false?
- 3) How can we distinguish between imperfect but growing faith and lifeless faith?
- 4) Why is repentance itself evidence of God's work in us?
- 5) How does the Holy Spirit produce change over time?
- 6) What does the statement, “Faith is the root. Obedience is the fruit,” mean in practical terms?

Questions for Personal Reflection

- 1) Is my faith producing visible fruit?
- 2) Do I grieve over sin and return to Christ in repentance?
- 3) Is God's mercy changing how I treat other people, showing them the same mercy He showed me?
- 4) Am I learning to obey even when obedience costs me something?
- 5) Where do I see evidence that Christ is changing me, even if that growth seems slow?

Summary: James 2:14-26 doesn’t teach that we earn salvation by doing good works. Instead, James challenges us to examine whether the kind of faith we claim to profess is living, genuine, and transformative.

- A faith that produces no action is worthless
- A faith that is merely intellectual is insufficient
- Good works do not earn us salvation--they reveal genuine salvation.
- Abraham demonstrated faith through costly obedience, strengthened by his long relationship with God.
- Rahab demonstrated faith through courageous action in spite of her very limited knowledge of God.
- Living faith produces visible fruit in a transformed life.
- The self-examination of our faith should not drive us away from Christ and toward self-reliance. Our hope rests entirely on Jesus Christ and His finished work, and not on anything we could do to earn His favor. The Christ who saves us also changes us, giving us new desires and a longing to follow Him wherever He would lead.

Final Challenge: Rather than asking: “How can I prove myself to God?”

James calls us to ask: “Where is faith in Christ becoming visible in my life?”

Faith is the root; obedience is the fruit. The question for each of us is not whether we can talk about faith, but whether the faith we profess is producing a life that increasingly looks like Jesus.

Sunday School Lesson for October 11, 2026
James 2:14-26

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this second Sunday in October, we're well into a new series of lessons in the challenging letter of James. Throughout our previous study of the gospel of John, we heard the Lord Jesus call His disciples to follow Him. In this brief letter, James shows us just how we're to follow Jesus.

In just the first chapter-and-a-half of this letter, James has probably written something that's challenged the way you see the Word of God and yourself as the mirror of God's Word has shown you where you're not living up to the standard of righteousness the Lord expects of those who truly follow Him. I hope this hasn't discouraged you, because James doesn't expose sin in our lives so that we would turn away from the Lord either in our defense or in defiance, but that we would recognize that He is diligently at work in us so that that we would be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Perhaps today's lesson from the second half of chapter two will challenge you even more as we hold up the mirror of the Word of God from the second half of chapter two of James' letter--a passage that some have seen as one of the most difficult in all of the New Testament--what one commentator calls "the battle-field of almost endless controversies."

You've probably heard the sermon illustration that's often used to introduce this passage: There was once a large factory built on the edge of a bustling city. Above the grand entrance, massive golden letters proudly displayed the company's name: "The Global Widget Corporation." Their website explained the company's commitment to making widgets. The brochures even went so far as to describe their passion for widget-making. By the way, this was long ago when "widget" was a generic name for any, small gadget--not a software element as it's known as today.

Inside, the energy was electric. Every Monday morning, the CEO called the employees together in a huge auditorium where the walls were covered with motivational banners that read things like, “Widgets are our Witness,” “A Widget in Every Home.”

The meetings were amazing. The marketing team gave presentations on the global need for widgets. The executive board rehearsed their complex, five-year strategic plan for widget optimization. They even hired a choir to sing the official corporate anthem, celebrating the beauty and benefits of the perfect widget.

After these assemblies, the employees would break into small committees. They debated the practical and philosophical implications of widgets. They published weekly newsletters discussing the history of widgets. They built an onsite museum dedicated to the legacy of the company’s founders.

But no one had ever seen a single widget leave the factory. So, one day, the owner decided to stop by and check on things. A member of the reception office gave him a tour of the factory. He was very impressed by the enthusiasm of the employees. He saw the design department drawing blueprints of widgets. He saw the finance department allocating millions of dollars to the widget budget. He saw the human resources department hiring top-tier widget experts.

But as the day drew to a close, the owner was puzzled because, throughout the tour he had never heard the clanging of metal, observed the packaging of a widget, or seen anything prepared to ship on the loading dock.

"Excuse me," the owner whispered to the tour guide. "This is all very impressive. But could you show me the assembly line? I'd love to see how the widgets are actually made."

The tour guide blinked, looking confused. "The assembly line? Oh, we don't have one of those."

“You don’t?” the owner asked, quite stunned by what he heard. “But what about all the equipment you’ve shown me and all the people we’ve met? Where are all the widgets you make?”

“Well, we don’t actually *make* anything,” the guide replied with a polite smile. “We’re a corporate community entirely dedicated to the *vision* of the widget. We talk about them, we study them, we sing about them, and we fundraise for them. But actually *make* them? No, no, we don’t have time for that. We’re too busy with other, more important things!”

At some point, the owner is forced to reach the same conclusion you just did: Maybe this isn’t a widget factory after all?

James asks a similarly uncomfortable question. He isn’t questioning whether genuine faith saves. He is questioning whether what’s being claimed as faith is, in fact, biblical faith.

Before we begin, let me review a couple of basic principles of biblical interpretation. First, because there are no contradictions within the Word of God, scripture must always be understood in the light of scripture. In other words, whenever we run across a difficult passage, we must always seek to understand its meaning by considering other, relevant passages of scripture.

Second is what’s called the analogy of faith. This interpretive principle reminds us that there is one system of truth or theology in scripture and therefore all doctrines must agree with one another. In this principle also, the unity of scripture is recognized beyond the diversity that we find in scripture. Applied to our text today, it means that there is only one possible path for salvation, and that’s through a living, active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

James begins his direct, penetrating challenge to all those who say they believe by asking in verse fourteen, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”

Throughout his letter, James has been showing us what genuine faith looks like. Now he brings that theme into a laser-sharp focus, presenting us

with the question of whether a profession of faith, by itself, is enough, and his conclusion, as we'll see, is that a genuine faith is a living faith that's revealed in the fruit it produces. Like claiming to produce widgets without ever making a single one, simply claiming to have faith, is not the same as possessing the kind of faith that James has described.

In the question James asks, the answer is understood: "If someone says he has faith but does not have works, he doesn't have the kind of faith that can save his soul from eternal judgment." You remember from our introduction to this letter that James is writing to the Jews of the dispersion who have placed their faith in Christ as well as yet-unbelieving Jews. He was not writing, as Paul had written, to the followers of Christ in Corinth or the believers in the area around Ephesus. James is writing to those of Jewish background who were scattered throughout the Roman world.

As the Lord Jesus addressed the Jews of His day, He had difficulty convincing them that their relationship to Abraham alone did not bring about their deliverance from God's judgment. In John chapter eight, Jesus disputed with some of the Jews who were following Him. As they questioned His authority, they claimed that Abraham was their father. But Jesus told them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the deeds of Abraham." It seems that they believed that their physical birth and ritualistic, religious observation could count for faith. But Jesus and James challenged their thinking then and our thinking today.

James begins by suggesting an imaginary situation--imaginary, yes, but surely descriptive of the religious belief of many of his readers: "Suppose that someone says he has faith, but there is an absence of deeds to verify that faith. Can that bare profession of faith save him? James' words are very exact: "If a man says he has faith, but he has no works, can that faith save him?" The faith that this man professes is deed-less, fruitless faith, faith that's not proven or substantiated by the actions and attitudes of genuine faith. Can that kind of faith save him?

In asking the question in this manner, James has already set his readers up for a negative answer. Now the difficulty in such a challenge is that the apostle Paul, in the second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, for example, says, “It is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Some have reasoned that, “If Paul says that salvation is by faith alone, then there is no need for works, right? Now James is telling us that works are essential for salvation. That doesn’t make sense.” All that is true, but we need to recall how James understands the word, “faith,” as well the interpretive principles that I mentioned at the beginning of our lesson.

As we apply those principles, we find that Paul goes on to say, in verse 10 of Ephesians, chapter two, that those who are saved by faith are now God’s workmanship--since God has made us as new creatures in Jesus Christ, we are created in Christ Jesus so that we might do the things that He created us and saved us to do. From the entire passage in Ephesians two, we find that these good works are not the cause of our salvation because we were dead in trespasses and sins and could do no good works--nothing that we could ever do apart from Christ has any spiritual value, because it’s done from motivations that are only self-centered and not God-centered. The good works that are exhibited in the life of a believer are both the evidence and the outworking of our salvation, a conclusion that both James and Paul would agree with. I’ll leave it to you to delve into the voluminous discussions about how James and Paul view this if you so desire.

So, what did Jesus say? As the evidence of our salvation, Jesus told His disciples in John 15:8, “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and [by bearing good fruit] so prove to be My disciples.” Good works do not bring about discipleship, but they are the proof of authentic discipleship.

In the context of the entire New Testament--so briefly summarized here--, because we are God’s handiwork, because our very lives are of His making, we are His and not our own, and the outworking--the evidence of a genuine faith--

the fruits of our sure faith in God--all flow from our relationship with Him. The good works that naturally result from our new life in Christ are both the evidence and the outworking of our salvation, and the lack of this evidence calls into doubt the authenticity of what we claim to be faith.

John Calvin, that great reformer from Geneva, explained that if we could bring about our own salvation, we might have reason to boast; but, he added, “He who glories in his own righteousness robs God of His honor.” “... man cannot without sacrilege claim for himself even a crumb of righteousness, for just so much is plucked and taken away from the glory of God’s righteousness” [*Institutes*, III, 13, 2 and III, 14, 5].

It ought to be clear from even this brief review of scripture that helps clarify James’ words here / that works--things that we do in loving, trusting obedience to God’s commands for us--do not produce salvation, but are the verifying evidence of genuine belief. Faith first. Then evidences of faith that flow from that genuine faith. No evidence? No real, true, genuine, authentic faith. As one commentator writes, “Therefore it is impossible to sever works from faith; [even] as impossible as to sever burning and shining from fire.”

In order to prove his point, James offers several examples, the first of which is found in verses fifteen and sixteen: “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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?” Again, the answer is obvious, “It’s worthless.” Without the acts that correspond to it, this so-called “faith” is cold, heartless, and utterly worthless. It’s quite possible that, at the time that James wrote this letter, there was a famine in that part of the world, perhaps the one proclaimed by Agabus in Acts, chapter eleven, and James may have been addressing an actual situation of extreme poverty.

So, James drives the point home in verse 17 by saying, “So also faith, by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” This kind of faith, without

corresponding actions that demonstrate the vitality of genuine faith is no faith at all. It's ineffective and dead. It does not have the power to give life, and certainly not eternal life."

Anticipating an objection to this fact that the kind of faith that's devoid of visible evidence of that faith is no faith at all, James says in verse eighteen, "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

James seems to have us imagine two individuals who claim to be followers of Christ. Each one claims to possess the characteristics of genuine belief, just as two people might discuss and compare their spiritual gifts as if to say, "One person shows the reality of his faith by the things he says about a set of biblical principles, and other shows the reality of his faith by the things he does." It sounds like we're comparing apples with apples, right?

But they're not at all the same. One of the apples is genuine--it came from an actual apple tree. The other was like one of those wooden apples you see in a wooden fruit arrangement. James points out the difference by challenging the one who says his acceptance of certain doctrinal principles is enough to save him without any evidence of a life transformed by those principles.

It's a trick question. There is no genuine, authentic faith apart from the evidence of that faith that's revealed in a transformed life. James says, "I, on the other hand, can demonstrate the effective outworking of that faith by the fruits of that faith. Although works, in themselves, aren't absolute proof of a person's faith, you can be sure that, without a life that's growing in godliness and righteousness, the person who persists in sin with no sense of conviction or a pursuit of holiness is not an authentic follower of Jesus Christ. Simply put, real followers follow. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. And, as we said in our first lesson, your walk talks and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks.

If his reader's still not convinced by logical reasoning, James finds the greatest, clearest statement of faith in all of Judaism--in fact, of all religion--that--if belief alone in any confession could save the soul--it would be this, found in Deuteronomy, chapter six, verse four: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Then he lets us know of a group who claims to believe but shows no evidence that their belief in any way changes their behavior--verse nineteen: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!"

Ancient Jewish literature offers several examples of how they placed their trust in their great confession, "The LORD our God, the LORD is one." One commentator cites the following from the Talmud: "[These words] cool the flames of Gehinnom for him who reads the *Shema*." The very parchment on which the *Shema* was written was believed to be effective in keeping demons at a distance. Their reverence for the Shema, however, never translated into lives of obedience to the fact that God is One.

"You believe that God is One, just like generations before you who only went that far in their response to God and ended up being driven out of Israel and dispersed across the globe? Good for you. You're in good company--even the demons themselves believe that God is One--more strongly than you do--, and look where they are. They're not skeptics. They know God is One, and they shudder at the thought. If you're only trusting in your declaration that God is One yet do nothing in response to this glorious proclamation that He is the absolutely, unconditionally, unequivocally, undeniably true and only Sovereign over His creation, there's no hope for you. The demons who can't do anything in response to this truth believe, too, and they shake in their boots.

We can know the right answers, affirm sound doctrine, attend church, and speak the language of Christianity while showing little evidence that our hearts have experienced any real change. James isn't correcting a lack of biblical knowledge. He's correcting a false understanding of faith itself. Those who truly belong to Christ are continuously being transformed by Him, and that

transformation is increasingly evident in the way that genuine, authentic, true believers live--each and every day.

Moving on from this startling illustration of those who only believe that God exists, he has two examples from their own history to demonstrate the reality of true faith--a faith that's validated in lifestyles, and behaviors, and actions and decisions that are the fruit of that living, genuine faith. So, he asks in verse twenty, "Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?" The King James Version reads that "faith without works is dead."

A faith that doesn't produce good works is a dead faith, and it's useless in the matter of salvation. Only a foolish person would think otherwise. The spiritual emptiness of such a person corresponds to the spiritual emptiness or impotence and unproductiveness of his faith. James isn't saying that it doesn't have any effect, because the demons shudder in response. In contrast to this barren, dead faith that shows a person's spiritual condition is no better than that of the demons, James offers two prominent examples of living and fruitful faith: Abraham and Rahab--two people who lived very different lives but who both demonstrated the reality of their faith through obedient action.

The case of "Abraham our father" would be the first that would come to the mind of every Jew. Abraham's faith was a subject of frequent discussion among the Jews, and Paul, in Romans, chapter four, verse three and into chapter five, and Galatians, chapter three, verse six, and the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews in chapter eleven, verse seventeen, both write about the faith of Abraham.

James and his readers were well-acquainted with Abraham, so it's no surprise that he illustrates his point with Abraham's own, powerfully-effective faith: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 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.”

In Genesis, chapter fifteen, we read how God promised a son to Abraham. Because Abraham believed God--verse six--God “counted it to him as righteousness.” That belief would later be tested in chapter 22 when God told Abraham--verse two--: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you. So Abraham rose early in the morning, ... and went to the place of which God had told him.....” Because Abraham acted on the word of the Lord and did what the Lord called him to do--by faith--this is how God responded, beginning in verse sixteen: “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Without a doubt, Abraham’s faith wasn’t theoretical, speculative, abstract, or hypothetical. His obedience to the Lord clearly demonstrated that his faith was an active force in his life. Abraham gave proof that he served God out of a response of loving submission and obedience.

Lest there be any confusion about the effects of the works that James recognized in Abraham’s life, James is not suggesting that Abraham’s actions were the cause of his justification--his right standing before God that resulted in the Lord’s blessing of his life--but that his actions were the effects of his justification. He had both faith and works, and his faith was recognized by his works.

To underscore his conclusion, James offers three proofs that this was indeed the case. First, he tells his readers, ‘You see that faith was active along

with his works, and faith was completed by his works.” Faith was proven in the fruit it produced. Genuine faith produces works of righteousness and the works reveal that genuine faith.

Second, scripture was fulfilled. In Genesis, chapter fifteen, verse six, after God told Abraham, “‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be;’” we read in the very next verse, “And he believed the LORD.” How was that scripture fulfilled? Where do we find the story of how Abraham really believed the Lord--believed enough to offer his son as a sacrifice? Chapter 22.

Some twenty or so years after God promised him a son and Abraham trusted God to keep His word, this act of offering his son showed that his faith was genuine and that his declaration that he trusted God was true. As one commentator writes, “If he had not ... obeyed, his faith would have been inoperative and of no value. As it was, his act showed that the declaration of the Scripture that he ‘believed’ was well founded.”

Third, Abraham was called “a friend of God.” So proclaimed the writer of Second Chronicles in chapter twenty, verse seven, and the Lord Himself makes the same declaration in Isaiah, chapter 41, verse eight. No one else in all the Bible is called the friend of God. Only Abraham--and, because he trusted God and his trust was borne out in the way he lived his life, God called him “His friend.”

His conclusion to what he’s just told us about Abraham is found in verse 24: “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” Whenever this passage is quoted, the different senses of the word “faith” is often overlooked, as well as that little word, “alone.” Remember--James is talking here about a faith that stands alone, meaning without actions and attitudes that exhibit the reality of that faith--a dead faith. So, he’s not talking about faith here in the way Paul defines it as a pursuit of Christlikeness and works by love, produces joy, and brings confidence to the soul. Here, James is

talking about a cold, abstract, ineffective faith that goes no farther than the first verse of the Shema: “The Lord our God, the Lord is One.”

So, James doesn’t contradict Paul, but he contradicts a false explanation of Paul’s doctrine. As one commentator writes, “[James] doesn’t deny that a [person] is justified in the sight of God by faith, for the very passage which he quotes shows that he believes that; but he does deny that a [person] is justified by a faith which would not produce good works, and which is not expressed by good works; and thus he maintains, as Paul always did, that nothing else than a holy life can show that a [person] is a true Christian, and is accepted of God.”

James’ second example of faith that works is that of Rahab. If this were the first time to read this passage, you might be scratching your head, asking, “What does a pagan woman have to say to me about faith?” Well, if you look at the genealogy of Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew’s gospel, you’ll find Rahab’s name there. She married a man named Salmon and gave birth to a son named Boaz who married Ruth. Rahab’s background, however, was quite different from that of Abraham. The similarity comes in the fact that, like Abraham, Rahab didn’t obtain her salvation through simply believing that God exists. What she did--the actions she took--demonstrated and brought to maturity the faith she had come to possess.

Here’s what James has to say about her in verse 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?” Rahab, you remember from her story in the second chapter of the Book of Joshua, was the woman who hid the Israelite spies who had come to Jericho on a reconnaissance mission, protecting them even from the king of Jericho who came looking for them. She had heard about the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land and the defeat of the Amorites, and she had placed her faith in the God of Israel. But when she hid the spies, sent them out through a window in the city wall--betraying her

own people to protect the spies, she proved her faith was more than just a statement of belief.

In her case, just as with Abraham, faith led to action, and the action confirmed her faith. If there had been faith without action--if she had merely believed the spies without doing anything to act on their belief--, she would have died along with all the other people of Jericho when the Israelites took the city.

But note the striking contrast between Abraham and Rahab. He is the friend of God. She is a member of a vile heathen nation and a prostitute. His great act of faith is shown towards God, hers towards men. His is the crowning act of his spiritual development; hers is the first sign of a faith just beginning to exist. He is the aged saint, while she is just learning about God. But, based on the little she knew of God, she did what she could, and her faith was affirmed.

So, James' readers might be thinking, "Heroic acts are for those like Abraham; but I'm not Abraham. I can't do what Abraham did." "But," James replies, "there is Rahab--Rahab the heathen, Rahab the harlot; at least you can do what she did." And for the Jewish Christians of that day, her example was readily understood. She welcomed and believed the spies. She separated herself from her unbelieving people, and chose instead to cast her lot with the unpopular and despised people of Israel. She saved the lives of the spies and enabled them to complete their assignment, in fulfillment of the Divine mission with which they had been entrusted. She did what she could in response to what little she actually knew about God.

At either end of the faith spectrum, Abraham's and Rahab's works didn't create their faith; their works revealed their faith. Their obedience made visible what already existed in their hearts. James isn't calling us to manufacture good works in order to earn God's acceptance. He's inviting us to examine whether the faith we profess is a living faith that's bearing fruit.

So, he concludes this thought in verse 26: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

A genuine, living, active faith will always be accompanied by actions and attitudes that give evidence of that living faith, just like a heartbeat and breathing are evidences of a living body, it's only that kind of faith that can justify and save. Just as the animating energy of the body is the spirit as it was understood in that day, works--meaning those attitudes and actions that give evidence of that energy--is the animating energy of faith. A faith that never produces the fruit of obedience is not weak faith or immature faith--it's a lifeless faith. If your faith is the kind of faith that doesn't reveal a practical pursuit of godly living and holiness in your life, it's like a body without a soul: dead; not viable; hopeless.

Cindi Murphy concludes this chapter by reminding us that “James asks [the] searching question: ‘What kind of faith saves?’ He calls us to look honestly at whether the faith we profess is becoming visible in the way we live. But examining the fruit can't make the fruit grow. It can only reveal what is--or isn't--already there.”

“And, honestly, that can feel unsettling. We see inconsistent obedience, lingering sin, and growth that often feels painfully slow. We may start wondering whether we're doing enough or whether our faith is real at all. Before we turn James's words into another burden to carry, we need to remember where saving faith begins.”

“Our hope doesn't rest in the strength of our faith or the consistency of our obedience. It rests entirely on Jesus Christ. He obeyed perfectly in our place, and while we were still sinners, he bore the judgment our sins deserved. Everyone who trusts in him is forgiven and declared righteous before God.”

“... Your confidence before God rests on Christ's finished work, not your performance. Your security isn't measured by how much fruit you produced

this week or how consistently you obeyed. Even weak but genuine faith rests securely when its object is Christ.”

“But the Christ who saves us also changes us. Through his Spirit, he gives us new desires and teaches us to obey. That growth is often slow. It includes failure, repentance, and seasons when the fruit may be difficult to see. Yet, over time, the life he has given us begins to show itself in the way we respond to him and to the people around us.”

“That’s why James can point us toward our works without pointing us away from Christ. Our works don’t earn God’s favor or create genuine faith. They reveal that our faith is alive.”

“Faith is the root. Obedience is the fruit.”

“So, don’t leave this passage asking, ‘How can I prove myself to God?’ Ask instead, ‘Where is faith in Christ becoming visible in my life?’ Do you grieve your sin and return to him in repentance? Is his mercy changing how you treat others? Are you learning to obey even when it costs you?”

“These things don’t earn God’s grace,” she says. “They are evidence of his grace already at work in you.”

So, let me ask: “Have you prayed a prayer to receive Jesus into your heart? Have you been baptized? Have you joined a church?” All these things are good, but if there’s no more evidence of Jesus Christ in your life than a baptismal certificate or your name on some church’s roll, your faith is dead; it can’t save you, and if you don’t turn to Christ in true faith, a faith that’s verified in actions and attitudes of faith, you will spend eternity in a faithless hell. James asks, “Are you willing to recognize that faith without works is useless?” I pray that your faith would be a living faith--that kind of faith that’s verified and confirmed in your heart and in God’s eyes through acts and attitudes of justice and mercy, love and obedience to God.

Next week, we turn to the first twelve verses of chapter three where James will challenge us to review the acts and attitudes of our lives specifically

regarding our speech to have us ask the question, “Do the words of my mouth edify those who are made in the image and likeness of Christ and are they honoring and pleasing to the Lord?”

As always, as it’s still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!

The resources for this lesson include James: Christianity in Real Shoe Leather by Joel Gregory; Planting Roots unpublished manuscript, James: Rooted in Christ, by Cindi Murphy; The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction and Comments, by Joseph B. Mayor; Notes on the Bible by Albert Barnes (1834), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor’s Bible, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; The Expositor’s Greek Testament - Nicoll, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Exposition of the Entire Bible by John Gill (1746-63), text courtesy of Internet Sacred Texts Archive; ICC New Testament commentary on selected books, Text Courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical (John Peter Lange) text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; Expositions Of Holy Scripture, Alexander MacLaren, text courtesy of BibleSupport.com; and The Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database, copyright © 2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2010 by BibleSoft, inc.