

Living Faith

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Date: 12 February 2023

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[0 : 00] James chapter 2, beginning again in verse 20. Would you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together?

! You foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless. 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.

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

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? When I was in high school and some in college, I would often have jobs working, planning things.

[1 : 32] You know, whether that was at an arboretum or at Lowe's in the lawn and garden department or as a worker at a golf course. And so I planted a lot of stuff.

And if you've ever seen a seed, you know, a seed looks a lot like a pebble. Small and it's round and it's white. And if I had a seed in one of my hands and a pebble in another, they would look about the same, feel about the same, weigh about the same.

But say I claim that they both were seeds. Well, even though I claimed them both to be a seed, the truth would be that only one had the ability to transform its nature.

So say I have these two objects, but looking and feeling the seeds, you see that there's not really much difference. Besides, we know that one is and one isn't able to produce life and fruit.

Well, how would you know? If I handed both of those things to you, how would you know? Well, you'd have to plant them in the ground. You'd have to water them. You'd have to make sure that they got plenty of sunlight. And eventually, the seed will grow and it will produce a fruit, perhaps even a flower.

[2 : 50] The pebble, on the other hand, will lie lifeless in the ground and produce nothing. After a time, you'd be able to tell the difference. And once the seed germinates and sprouts out of the ground, you would say, Aha, now I know which one is the seed because I see it producing life.

And now I know which one is the pebble because it has produced nothing. This is basically what James is saying here about faith.

Genuine faith in chapter 2, verses 14 through 26. If this thing that you call faith doesn't produce fruit, works, deeds, actions of obedience, it's probably like that pebble.

True faith, on the other hand, the sort that justifies, saves, and reconciles us to God is like that seed. When planted and watered, it produces fruit.

It produces life. There is a transformation in which the person who has received the gospel loves the things of God and desires to walk in obedience to his will.

[4 : 07] It doesn't produce perfection, but it puts us on the road to it. It does, though, produce a new sense of direction with a passion for God and a desire to be like Jesus Christ, his son.

So if you remember last week, we were in James chapter 2, verses 14 through 19. And there, James describes what dead faith looks like. And he characterizes it in three ways.

Fruitless confession, false compassion, and futile conviction. James isn't arguing that true faith, living faith, is a product of good works.

He is saying the opposite. Good works are a product of genuine faith. You aren't saved because you do good works.

You do good works because you are and have been saved. Once the seed of the gospel has landed in good soil, it grows, it produces, as evidence that the truth of Jesus Christ has taken root in the heart of the person he's saved.

[5 : 20] A genuine believer is not merely a hearer of God's word, but a doer of it, as James has already pointed out in chapter 1, verse 22. Two, followers of Jesus Christ are those who abide in him and they produce fruit as evidence that they truly belong to him and that they have genuinely been saved.

As Jesus said in John 15, 7 through 8, So having defined what dead faith looks like, James contrasts it in our passage today with living faith, which brings us to our main idea this morning. Faith with works is living. Faith with works is living. So in verse 20, James asks, Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

And then he provides us with two examples from the Old Testament of what living faith looks like, what living faith does. The two people that he chooses for examples are completely different from one another, yet the faith that they possessed was proven to be genuine by the fruit of their actions. Through these two people, Abraham and Rahab, James explains two characteristics to us of what genuine faith looks like, living faith.

[7 : 06] First, we see that living faith willingly submits to God's will. Living faith willingly submits to God's will. In verse 21, James directs our attention to his first example of living faith.

There he says, Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? Now this event, James references here, is recorded in our Bibles in Genesis chapter 22, where God tested Abraham's heart, his faith, his willingness to submit to his will.

In Genesis 22, 1 through 2, it says, Thereafter these things God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. He said, 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, as on one of the mountains on which I shall tell you.

Now this was a shocking request from God. Think if God had asked you to do the same.

It's hard to imagine, isn't it? Abraham being the one holding the knife, that you would plunge into the flesh of your child, putting an end to their life.

[8 : 39] Abraham would also be stunned by this command, because God had repeatedly promised that Isaac was the son through whom Abraham would have descendants, as countless as the stars in the sky.

In fact, in Genesis 12, 2 through 3, 15, 14 through 5, he makes that promise. He made it not long before the events in Genesis chapter 22, where in chapter 21, God reaffirms that promise in verse 12.

For through Isaac shall your offspring be named. So, what is God doing here? Why test Abraham's faith in this way and not in some other way?

Perhaps, Isaac was chosen for this test of Abraham's faith because Abraham struggled with what many parents struggle with today.

That's child worship. That's child worship. I think many parents are looking to their kids for the things that they should look only to God for.

[9 : 47] Self-worth, purpose, meaning in life. Many parents live vicariously through their children, pushing them to excel more in sports and academics so that they have reason to boast.

Maybe using their child's success to brag or to boost their own egos and make them feel like they are a success. Some parents use their children to be a part of whatever community they desire to belong to.

They use their kids to network, to build relationships with other parents who belong to whatever circle that they hope to be a part of.

So maybe an aspect of Abraham's testing, his faith, was to put to death the belief that through Isaac, Abraham could find all the things that only God could provide to him.

So love your children, but don't love them more than God. In fact, a parent who loves God supremely will be a parent whose children feel truly loved because they aren't being used by mom and dad for selfish reasons and they aren't burdened with providing the things to them that only God can truly supply.

[11 : 17] So are you submitting to God's will for your children? Or are you forcing them to submit to yours for yourself? Again, that perhaps is one minor aspect of this test of Abraham's faith and

willingness to submit to God's will, but there are more concrete ones that we'll soon see.

So Abraham takes his only son, the son whom he loved, the son of the promise of God, the son who he loved so much, and with Isaac, he takes two of his men with him for this three-day journey where Isaac will be sacrificed to the Lord.

We can't help but wonder what was going on in Abraham's mind during those three days. The text gives us no indication that Abraham questioned or that he argued with God.

He doesn't attempt even to delay the journey just another day. Maybe God will change his mind. He's obedient. He's fully submitting to God's will. But a few verses provide some insight, I believe, into Abraham's state of mind.

One is in Genesis chapter 22, verses 4 through 5. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. And Abraham said to his young men, the two men that came with them, stay here with the donkey.

[12 : 53] I and the boy will go over there and worship and we will come to you again. Abraham may have been confused, but he was confident that God could be trusted.

He was confident that God keeps his promises. Later, as Isaac and Abraham are on their way up to the mountain, Isaac can't help but notice something strange.

In verses 7 through 8, he said to his father Abraham, my father. And he said, here I am, my son. He said, behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb of burnt offering?

And Abraham said, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son. So they both of them went up together. Abraham at this point didn't have all the answers, but he was continuing to submit to God's will, trusting in God and who he had revealed himself to be over and over again to him.

And in Hebrews chapter 11, verses 17 through 19, God's word reveals more to us of what was going on in Abraham's mind at that time. There it says, by faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son of whom it was said, through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

[14 : 23] He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. So this is what's going on in his mind.

The two of them walk together. they come to the place where God told Abraham to build the altar. And so again, imagine, Abraham's constructing this altar and Isaac is probably helping him to do it. And Isaac is probably also looking around wondering, well, where is this lamb? Abraham's stacking the wood that Isaac carried on his back up the hill, the mountain.

Isaac's probably even handing him piece by piece as his father constructs this altar. And when it's done, Abraham looks at his son and he says, come here, son.

And he lays him on the altar, binding him with cords and with ropes. And that's hard. But the hardest part is still to come.

[15 : 41] And he takes his knife and he's poised to bring it down on his son. The son of the promise submitting to God's will because he knows that God can be trusted.

He knows that God has revealed himself to him over and over again. This is someone whom I can trust. He refuses to give in to his feelings.

He refuses to trust in his own understanding. And just before he brought that knife down, we read in Genesis 22, 11 through 14.

The angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said, Abraham, Abraham. And Abraham said, here I am. He said, do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him.

For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and behold, behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by its horns.

[16 : 46] And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, the Lord will provide. As it is said to this day on the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided.

In submitting to God's will, Abraham learned once more that the Lord provides. Two thousand years later, we believe on that exact same spot, God took his son, his only son, the son whom he loved, the son he had promised, and he fastened him to a vertical altar of sacrifice.

But this time, no one hollered stop, and God brought the knife down on him who knew no sin so that we, by faith, would receive his righteousness.

And in John 8, 56, Jesus said, your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.

Abraham's joy in seeing the ram caught in the thick. Imagine that? In Genesis 22, foreshadowed the lamb of God who would be the substitute for us. So now that we've seen and hopefully better understand the event James was referencing in verse 21, let's look at verse 22.

[18:22] He continues, you see, you see, faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works. James applies the testing of Abraham in Genesis 22 to make the point that Abraham's actions, his submission to God provide us with a visual demonstration that genuine faith is more than a feeling.

It works, it does, it acts, it bears fruit, he continues to press that truth home in verses 23 and 24. 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.

You see that a person is justified by faith, works, excuse me, and not by faith alone. In verse 23, James directs our attention to another event that happened much earlier in Abraham's life.

About 30 years before God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, Genesis 15, 5 through 6 say, and he brought him, God brought Abraham outside and said, look toward the heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.

Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be, and Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness. James is making it clear that Abraham was declared righteous in God's sight by faith alone when he believed God's promise in Genesis chapter 15.

[20:02] But 30 years later, Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac on the altar to the Lord. And here's the point that James is making.

Abraham was justified by his works in the sense that his obedience to God's command, his submission to do God's will, proved that his faith, that faith that he exercised in the Lord 30 years earlier in Genesis chapter 15 was real, genuine, living, saving faith.

Abraham was not a perfect man. Far from it. But despite his sins and shortcomings, there is evidence, there is proof, there is fruit in his life that verified that God had truly saved him.

As Jesus said in John 15, 6 through 8, if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this is my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and again so prove to be my disciples.

[21:22] Just as a fruit tree has not fulfilled its goal until it bears fruit, so also faith has not reached its end until it demonstrates itself in a righteous life.

life. That is the sense in which Abraham was justified by his works, his unreserved willingness to submit to God's will.

Placing Isaac on the altar was the works by which his justification by faith was demonstrated and manifested before people so that they could see.

This is what living faith looks like. It submits to God's will. it is willing to lay down on the altar whatever it is that God asks to be laid there.

In July of 1999, almost 24 years ago, I was called to ministry at the Nazarene Youth Convention in Toronto, Canada.

[22:27] That night, after I'd been called, I locked myself in my hotel bathroom, a bathtub, serving as my altar, and I pleaded with God to change his mind.

I presented him with all the reasons why, and there were many of why I should not be someone he calls into ministry. But in the end, and it took a while, I knew God, and I knew that God is a God who could be trusted, and he got his way.

And I'm continuing to learn and be reminded that it is better to submit to God's will than to trust in myself or anyone else.

The verse that the Lord used to call me into ministry was John 15, 16. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide.

So whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. Now, while the Lord used that verse to call me into full-time ministry, its truth is for all of those whom he's saved, whom he's justified, to abide in him, to bear fruit for him by submitting to his will, by knowing Jesus Christ as both your Savior and your Lord.

[23 : 57] Lord. And so I ask you this morning, are you submitting to God's will for your life? I ask you, is there fruit in your life?

I ask you, what is God calling you to lay upon his altar today? Is he the Lord of every aspect of your life?

Is he the Lord of your home? Is he the Lord of your bank account? Is he the Lord in your workplace? Is he the Lord of your habits?

Is he the Lord of your life? When Charles Spurgeon was preaching on this text, he urged his congregation with these words that I want to share with you this morning.

Oh, I charge you by your soul's salvation, neglect nothing Christ commands, however trivial it may seem to you or your reason.

[25 : 00] Whatever he saith unto you, do it. For only by a childlike obedience to every bidding of Christ can you expect to have the promise fulfilled.

They that trust in him shall be saved. faith with works is living. It willingly submits to God's will as the example of Abraham proves.

Also, next we see that living faith risks everything for God's glory. Living faith risks everything for God's glory.

The second person James uses to illustrate living faith, which is justified by works, is Rahab. In verse 25, he says, 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 was just about as different from Abraham as she could be. He was a patriarch of the Jewish people. She was a prostitute in a Gentile nation.

[26 : 10] Abraham was called a friend of God. Rahab was living in the midst of the enemies of God. Abraham was a great leader.

Rahab was a common citizen. Abraham was at the top of the social order, and Rahab was at the bottom. We meet Rahab in Joshua chapter 2.

Her profession meant she also worked as an innkeeper in Jericho. When Joshua sent two men to the city to spy it out, she housed them and protected them from being discovered when the king of Jericho found out that spies were in the land.

And as his spies were, Joshua's spies were about to leave, Joshua 2, 9 through 13 says that Rahab said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land and that the fear of you has fallen upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to Sihon and Og whom you devoted to destruction.

[27 : 29] And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted and there was no spirit left in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and all who belong to them and deliver our lives from death.

Rahab didn't have a lot of information to go on. She heard the stories about the people of God, how they walked through the Red Sea on dry ground and were delivered by God from foreign armies and enemies, but the little that she heard, she believed.

She knew that Yahweh is God in heaven and on earth. She knew he was sovereign over all things and she knew that she was accountable ultimately to him.

she knew that judgment was coming on her land and she feared and she revered the one true living God and was willing to risk her life and the lives of her family in order to serve him.

Like Abraham, Rahab appears in Hebrews 11 as an example of a hero of faith. Hebrews 11 31 says, by faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

[29 : 05] Again, Rahab put her life and everything she held dear on the line for the Lord, trusting him without hesitation, qualification, or reservation. She risked it all, going against everything in the culture around her.

She risked it all so the people of God might take Jericho for the glory of God. And according to James, she was considered righteous for what she did.

And so I ask you, are you willing to do that in your life? Are you willing to take risks in obedience to the word of God because you revere the sovereign God who has saved you by his grace?

A grace which extends to the least of these like Rahab. Are you willing to go against the grain of culture are you willing to stand for what is right, to speak what is true, to refuse to call good and evil and evil good and exchange the truth of God for a lie?

Are you willing to take risks for the glory of God's name? Those who have living faith understand that God doesn't exist to make them great.

[30 : 24] They exist to make God great. Rahab and her risks paid off. She was saved.

She was spared. She was the first Gentile welcomed into God's family. And little did she know at the time she would also be blessed to be a direct ancestor of God's only son Jesus Christ.

She bore fruit and God blessed her by including her in Jesus' family tree. if you're saved, if you're producing works, fruit, that proves it, if you're pursuing and submitting your life to God's will, then there is no such thing as failure.

And really, it's not like we're really risking at all because we can trust that God will be honored in it. In 1956, our nation was stunned and saddened by the news that five missionaries trying to make peaceful contact with an infamous tribe in Ecuador had been murdered.

Their deaths were seen by many as a tragic waste of life. Fox's Book of Martyrs records the events that unfolded two years after those five men were martyred.

[31 : 55] It says, within two years of their deaths, Elizabeth Elliot, who's the wife of Jim, one of the men slain, and Rachel Saint, the sister of Nate Saint, another of the men who were slain, made friendly and lasting contact with the Wodani tribe, the very people who murdered their husband and brother.

They began translating the Bible into that tribe's language. church. And one by one, even the men who had committed the murders became believers in the one who sent the missionaries to reach them.

Steve Saint, Nate's son, spent much of his childhood among the Wodani people, despite the fact that they had killed his father.

He became like an adopted son to that tribe. Eventually, he took his own family to live with them for a time.

The painful arrival of the gospel among that violent people worked a miracle of transformation.

Before he died for Christ, on the mission field, before he submitted ultimately to God's will for him to risk his life, to go to others, that they might hear and be saved, Jim Elliott wrote this in his journal.

[33 : 34] He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

In Matthew 16, 24-26, Jesus made it clear what it means to truly be one of his disciples. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

For what shall a man give in return for his soul? So I ask you, what are you living for? Jesus Christ or yourself?

are you seeking comfort and keeping quiet when you should be the one speaking? Are you staying put when God's telling you to go?

[34 : 51] Or are you seeking an escape when God's telling you to stay? Is the goal of your life that Jesus Christ be glorified or that you be glorified?

is there fruit that proves that? And if there's not, why? Is Jesus Christ someone whom you consider to be a part of your life?

Or is he your life? Is your faith living or is it dead? James says in verse 26, for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Brother, sister, is there fruit? Is there evidence? Is there that proof? Main point of application is this, faith that is living is evidenced by a radically transformed life.

life. So I ask you, can you go back to that day when you publicly professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior?

[36 : 09] And can you look at that day and where you are now and see that there has been a trajectory of you becoming more like Jesus? There's valleys, there's pits, we stumble, we sin, but can you look back and see, yeah, the person who I was then is not who I am now.

My desires are different, my thoughts are different, my passions are different, my habits are different, the way I live is different. And if so, you have the fruit. But if not, understand that a day is coming. And you will be there on that day. And there will be many who will claim, Lord, I knew you, Lord, I knew you. But the reality will be that they never knew him. And what they will hear from him is depart from me, I never knew you. I think those words will resound in their ears for all eternity. Depart from me, I never knew you. I believe that if you are here today and you realize that you know what, I don't have that fruit, this is the Lord's message for you.

[37 : 39] And hopefully he's revealed to you that he is a God whom you can trust, that he is a God who is good and who is gracious, who's provided for us, his only son, Jesus Christ.

We could never do enough good things to earn God's grace or his favor. We're incapable of living sinlessly. Jesus Christ came completely without sin and willingly went to the cross to die as a sacrifice, to give his life, to have his flesh pierced, and to bleed, to die, to endure the wrath of God for our sins, so that by faith in him, trust in him, we receive his righteousness.

We are declared his children. We have eternal life. That's a promise that is good and is never revoked. My hope today is that if you don't know that today the Lord has called you to faith, that you've heard him call your name, that you be one of his sheep, and that you'll follow him, that you'll submit to his will, and you'll risk whatever he asks, because you know what?

There is no risk that God asks you to take that will not amount to great things for the glory of his wonderful name. Three application questions for you to look at today, this week.

Question number one, in what ways are you playing it safe instead of submitting to God's will and taking a risk that God will be glorified? What encouragement does Matthew 25, 14 through 30 give us about risking for the Lord?

[39 : 28] Question number two, read 2 Corinthians 13, 5. Does a self-examination of your faith reveal fruit? fruit? And then finally, how will our works factor in with our profession of faith in Jesus Christ on the day of judgment?

Read Matthew 7, 21 through 27 and 25 verses 31 through 46. Will you bow your heads with me and let's pray. Father, we pray, I pray that every single person in this room is someone whom you know as your child.

God, I pray that every single one of us will have heard your word this morning, will be in agreement with it, and that we will submit to you in every way that you command us to.

God, that we would do so not begrudgingly, but that we would do so joyfully, because we know, Lord, that whatever you ask us to do, there's a reason for it, and ultimately that reason is to glorify your son, to use us to do that is the greatest privilege that we'll ever have in this life.

God, and I pray that we would be in agreement that whatever you ask us to risk for you is worth it, that Lord, ultimately, our lives are yours. We don't exist without you.

[40 : 49] We exist by your doing. We're saved by your doing. Lord, you are our Lord. Whatever you ask us to do, the answer must be yes.

So God, whatever it might be that you're asking people in this church to submit to or risk, I pray that today they'll do it, and they'll do it gladly, and they'll do it willingly, that fruit will be born, that more will hear the good news of Jesus Christ, and that we will get to experience the enjoyment of being used by you to make much of the name of Jesus.

It's in his name we pray. Amen. Thank you.