

Dead Faith

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[0 : 00] James chapter 2 verses 14 through 20. If you're there, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's word together.

! What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 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 needs needed for the body, what good is that?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 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. You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated? Story is told of an old Scottish man who was responsible for transporting passengers across the river in his robo.

[1 : 27] One day a passenger noticed something odd about this old man because on one of his oars was written the word faith and etched into the other oar was written the word works.

So the man in the boat said to the old man, why do you do that? Why do you have faith engraved on one oar and works engraved on the other? And so without saying a word, the man put the oar marked faith down in his boat and he rode with just the one marked works.

He went in a circle. Then he put the oar marked works back down on the boat and picked up the oar marked faith and he rode. And he rode in the other direction in a circle.

And then the man, the old man responded to the man's question and he said, You see, that is the way it is with the Christian life. Faith without works and works without faith gets you nowhere.

But faith and works pulling together make for progress and for blessing. The Bible says that a Christian is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

[2 : 42] But as we see here in James chapter 2 and in other parts of scripture, truth faith, true faith, genuine faith, saving faith, in a sense is never alone because it is proven genuine by a changed life.

A life that desires to honor and obey Jesus Christ. It's a transformed life in which a profession of faith in Jesus Christ is marked by evidence of good works done in his name and done for his glory. How you live proves who you are or are not in God's sight. As James declares in chapter 1 verse 22, But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

You know, during Jesus' earthly ministry, he crossed paths with many people who were self-deceived like that. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus said in Matthew 7, 15 through 20, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Our grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

[4 : 05] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus, you will recognize them by their fruits. The false teachers Jesus mentions promote entering through the wide gate and taking the easy road that leads to destruction.

Things that Jesus had just warned his audience about before the passage that I just read to you. As was the case for Jesus' audience then, so was the case for the recipients of James' original letter. James was concerned that many people had been deceived into thinking that their fraudulent faith was genuine. So he presents them with a series of tests to evaluate the authenticity of their profession.

We've already looked at some of those tests. The test of endurance in chapter 1, verse 3. The test of perseverance under trial in chapter 1, verse 12. The test of purity, chapter 1, verse 21.

[5 : 15] The test of obedience to scripture, chapter 1, verse 27. The test of impartiality, where we've recently been, chapter 2, verses 1 through 9. The test of compassion, where we are today, chapter 2, verse 15.

The test of controlling the tongue in chapter 3, verses 2 through 12. The test of humility, chapter 4, verse 6, in verse 10. The test of truthfulness, chapter 4, verse 11.

And the test of patience, chapter 5, verse 8. So you have a lot of tests in your future. Jesus' original audience, or James' original audience, consisted primarily of Jewish Christians who had just come out of an extremely legalistic religion that taught you were saved by your works.

He knew that some of them had heard the gospel and they were attracted to it because they assumed that this new religion gave everything, promised everything, and demanded nothing. Some of them had wrongly concluded that if works are not necessary for salvation, then they must not be necessary at all. To such people who were professing to be Christians but had no evidence, no fruit of a genuinely saved life, James says rather directly to them, your faith is dead, your faith is dead, it's worthless, it's nothing.

[6 : 45] You can profess Jesus as Lord, you can pray the sinner's prayer, you can walk down an aisle during an invitation, you can be baptized, you can join a church.

If it doesn't manifest itself in repentance, obedience, a love for God and of your neighbor, then the faith you proclaim to have is not genuine.

Salvation is not a transaction you make, it's a transformation that you undergo. It produces a faith that works.

Because as James says in our text this morning, which is our main idea, faith without works is dead. Faith without works is dead.

So why should you care about this? Well, I think one reason why we should all care about this is based upon how we as Christians, we have a church, have determined our success.

[7 : 43] Like the world, we often measure our success by numbers. How many people have you baptized? How many people have you had join your church? What, how large is your budget?

Things like that. Viewing those things as things that will determine whether or not we're successful. Now they can, if they're done genuinely, but sometimes what we do is we're just so eager to put people in the baptistry.

We're so eager to have anybody who comes down the aisle just to accept their word and say, yeah, okay, whatever, we'll let you join our church without doing any kind of work to determine whether or not they understand the gospel that they profess to believe.

Because we want the numbers. We're desperate to prove that we're successful in that way and it's wrong. Also because there are people who think that they are saved because they were led through the sinner's prayer.

And if you said that prayer, and I know some who have, maybe you are truly saved, but maybe not. Because you were told that just because you said those words that automatically that meant that there was some kind of power or magic in them and all of a sudden you are saved.

[8 : 56] The real question that will reveal the true answer, the real answer, are you genuinely saved is this. Is there any fruit?

Is there any fruit? And so today in James chapter 2 verses 14, we see three characteristics of fraudulent faith. And so what I want you to do, what the Lord I believe is calling you today this morning is to examine and evaluate yourself and others.

Is your faith genuine? Is their faith genuine? The first characteristic of fraudulent faith is a fruitless confession.

A fruitless confession. Look at verse 14 again. What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? Now the phrase there, if someone says, is key to correctly interpreting and understanding this passage.

James does not say that this person has genuine faith, only that they claim to. In this context, James is referring to a kind of faith that affirms things like the existence of God, maybe even the inspiration of scripture that Jesus lived and died and was resurrected.

[10 : 19] These facts are acknowledged by the person who claims to have this kind of faith. But this knowledge hasn't truly made a difference in this person's life who claims to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

And so James asks here, can that kind of faith save him? And the grammatical form which he uses to pose this question calls for a negative answer.

No, it cannot. You can have all the knowledge. You can answer every question right in your Sunday school class. But if there are no works, if there is no fruit, no evidence that your life has been changed and transformed by Jesus Christ, if you confess that Jesus is your Savior, but if that confession is not accompanied by actions that demonstrate that he is also your Lord, then such faith isn't genuine but fraudulent.

Now, someone might hear that and say, well, wait a minute. I've read the Bible and I've especially read Paul's letters. And he says that salvation is solely by God's grace working through people's faith.

And now here James seems to be saying something totally different. Well, the Bible does not contradict itself. And James and Paul are not standing face to face in conflict with one another. [11:49] They're actually standing back to back as they fight two common enemies. The thought that you have to earn your salvation through good works is one enemy.

And James is opposing the idea of easy believism or cheap grace, the other enemy. The thought that you can simply mouth the words, Jesus is Lord and go through the actions, but then go on living your life in ways that demonstrate that he really isn't.

Acting as if you've got, you know, I went to church, I said that prayer, I did whatever they asked me to do. And now I have this get out of jail free card that I can use whenever the time comes. Both men make it clear that we are going to be judged based on what we've done.

That our confession will be validated by our lives, by our actions, by our works, by our decisions to obey and follow Jesus Christ, which revealed genuine transformation has truly taken place in our lives.

Look at what Paul says in Ephesians 2, 8 through 10. He says it very clearly. It's both. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your doing. It's the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

[13:10] But now look at what he says in verse 10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Where there is true salvation, where sovereign grace reaches down to regenerate and transform a person from sinner to God from sinner to saint. God will create in that soul of that person new longings to forsake sin and self and gladly serve the Lord Jesus Christ and obey his divine standards of righteousness.

And you know, the Bible is full of examples of people who have undergone this transformation. Of people who have been saved. Of people who have been saved. Who have been changed.

And as a result of that, they produce fruit, good works as evidence that the salvation that they've received in which they confess is true. So, Zacchaeus, for example, was a wee little man.

And a wee little man was he. But he also was a tax collector who cheated his neighbors out of their money and became filthy, stinking rich as a result.

[14:28] Everyone hated Zacchaeus. But Jesus saw him up in the sycamore tree. Invited himself to Zacchaeus' house. Shared the gospel with him.

And Luke 19.8, we see the immediate fruit. The immediate results. Look at that with me. Zacchaeus stood and he said to the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor.

And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold. There was a change. A transformation in his life.

Zacchaeus had a new set of desires. Money was no longer his God. Jesus Christ was. He wanted to right his wrongs. This action to make restitution was proof that his conversion was genuine.

He didn't do it to be saved. He did it because he was saved. It was the fruit. Not the condition of his salvation. Later in Acts chapter 19, verses 18 through 19, Luke records what happened in Ephesus when many who practiced witchcraft were saved by the preaching of the gospel.

[15:49] It says there are also many of those who were now believers came confessing and divulging their practices. And there are a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.

And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. Like Zacchaeus, the genuineness of these people's salvation was proven by their actions.

The things that they once held dear, the things that were worth a fortune became absolutely repulsive garbage in their sight that they just wanted to burn and be away with.

By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, working through their new natures, they instinctively knew that their past evil practices could have no place in their new redeemed lives.

Now it must be mentioned that when you are saved, and I wish it worked this way, but it doesn't. It's not like the full implications of the gospel and knowing everything that you should do and should not do is instantly downloaded into your brain.

[16:59] Those things come as the Holy Spirit of God works in conjunction with the word of God to sanctify and to purify us. However, no one is genuinely saved without becoming a new creation with a new set of desires which produce fruit.

Salvation does not produce immediate perfection in the sense that you don't ever sin, but it does produce a sense of a new direction in life.

A hatred of sin, a love for the Lord, and a desire to know him and obey him more and more and more as you abide in him.

John 15, 6 through 8, Jesus said, 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 my Father is glorified, now here, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.

[18:09] So I ask you, is there fruit? Are there good works in your life that reveal that your confession of Jesus and Lord and Savior is true, is genuine, is authentic?

Many people talk the talk, but do you walk the walk? Fraudulent faith is characterized by fruitless confession, and also, second, we see false compassion.

False compassion. Verses 15 through 17, James says, 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?

So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Here, James uses an illustration comparing faith without works to words of compassion without corresponding acts of compassion.

Poorly clothed describes someone who is insufficiently clothed. Think of the cold weather that we've endured this past week, and imagine someone trying to survive it outside without a coat, without warm clothes.

[19:31] They would be insufficiently clothed. Similarly, lacking daily food doesn't mean that this is a person who is starving to death, but is insufficiently nourished.

It's been a really long time since they've had a nice, warm, freshly cooked meal. So in James's illustration, someone who professes to be a Christian, sees a person like this in need, and presumably has the means to meet whatever those needs are.

But instead of doing that, they say, Go in peace, be warmed and filled. That expression, go in peace, I think is equivalent to our expression that we use today, God bless you.

And be warmed and filled, I think, is equivalent today to saying something like, You'll be in my thoughts, and you'll be in my prayers. Now hear me out.

It's good to want God to bless people. There's nothing wrong with saying that. It's good to pray for people. But sometimes, those expressions are used to dismiss the person in need and excuse yourself from having to do anything about it, wanting to appear as if you're compassionate, but having no desire to actually be compassionate.

[21:00] 1 John 3, 17-18 says, But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but indeed in truth. You know, there are a lot of people in this world who love in word, but not in deed.

I read an article this week about a professional basketball player. He talks the talk on social media. Whenever he's interviewed, he talks about how oppressed people are in our country.

He's very vocal and supportive of all of the social justice movements that are out there, contributing even millions of dollars to some of those causes. But when he found out that low-income housing was going to be constructed close to his mansion, he wrote a letter to his local government pleading for them to put a stop to it, to prevent those undesirables from becoming his neighbors, disrupting his privacy, reducing maybe his property value.

I think that's the same thing as saying, go in peace. Be warmed and filled, just not here. And not by me. It's like the wealthy people in our world who promote socialism and warn against global warming.

[22 : 33] All the while they live in these massive houses, consuming massive amounts of resources and flying in private jets to wherever they need to go. They don't truly believe what they say.

They are people with false compassion. But they talk the talk to appear righteous in the eyes of those they want to impress. I think sometimes as Christians, we're guilty of doing the same. But how utterly different from that were the first Christians who we read about in Acts chapter 2. They were saved. They were transformed. They saw the needs of others. And they didn't need the government to redistribute their goods. They did it voluntarily. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus revealed what genuine compassion looks like. In response to a lawyer's question about who his neighbor was, this is what Jesus said in reply.

[23 : 35] A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a priest was going down the road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. Now these are two men whom you would expect would have compassion but didn't. Now the person who you wouldn't expect. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was and when he saw him, he had compassion.

This is what compassion looks like. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper saying, take care of him. And whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. And Jesus asked, which of these do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?

The lawyer said, the one who showed him mercy. And Jesus said to him, you go and you do likewise. A person who has been genuinely saved, desires to be the blessing from God to those who are in need and desires to be the answer to prayer, to serve, to give, to go the extra mile for others because they truly understand the compassion they have themselves received being saved from their sins by Jesus Christ.

[25 : 10] First, do you say compassionate things? Or do you do compassionate things? To turn someone away in need of things that you can supply, James says, is to demonstrate a faith without works that is dead.

Fraudulent faith is characterized by fruitless confession, false compassion, and now thirdly, futile conviction. I like pronouncing it futile.

I think it's futile, but I like futile. It sounds more powerful to me. Futile conviction. Verse 18. 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. This is what James is saying in effect. You claim to have faith and that nothing else is necessary.

That your faith can stand by itself before God and bring salvation. But the truth is, you cannot show me your faith without works. You cannot demonstrate your kind of faith because you have nothing to demonstrate it with.

[26 : 22] There's no evidence. There's no proof. In verse 19, he continues, you believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe in shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

Again, James makes the point here that you can know things about God. You can know about the gospel, about the Bible, but knowledge without action doesn't prove the genuineness of salvation. As Jesus pointed out in John 13, verses 13 through 17, you call me teacher and Lord and you are right for so I am. You know that.

But if I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you.

Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

[27 : 29] Demons know that God exists. They know that the Bible is God's word. Demons know that Jesus Christ is God's son.

That salvation is by grace through faith. They know that Jesus died and that he was buried and that he rose again for sinners.

They know that he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father right now. They believe in heaven and oh, they believe in a literal hell.

They know that Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead in them. But you know, with the knowledge they have, they could pass a lot of our seminary courses.

They know the truth about God, Jesus' son, and the Holy Spirit. But the thing is, they hate it and they hate them.

[28 : 32] And though they have this knowledge, they have no hope for salvation. In fact, the truths they know cause them to shudder. You know, it doesn't feel right complimenting demons, but at least they have the sense to know that these things about God, concerning who he is, should cause anyone to shudder in fear.

And in that regard, they are more realistic and sensible than those with false faith who think they can escape God's judgment, fooling everyone else into thinking that they are the genuine article when God knows all and sees all.

And another thing, Satan has convinced this world that he is the one to be feared, hasn't he? I mean, you think about our movies movies and our TV shows depicting demonic activity and possessions and things like that.

And they scare people. They cause people to shudder. But, think about this. People might fear them, but who do they fear?

God. Let that sink in. If you fear them and they fear God, then who is the one who should truly be feared?

[30 : 04] In Luke 12, 4 through 5, Jesus says, I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear. Fear him, who after he has killed has authority to cast into hell.

Yes, I tell you, fear him. God is not fooled. He knows who are truly his. And those who genuinely know him are convicted by the truth that he is Lord.

And they have been made recipients of his gracious love. And they produce fruit by being gracious and loving towards others. 1 John 4, 17 through 20 says, By this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment because as he is, so also are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.

If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. Does your life reveal that you have truly been convicted by the Holy Spirit?

[31 : 32] Convictions are what you believe. They don't change. And your convictions determine your mission in life. Your mission answers the question why you exist.

And together, your convictions and your mission will bring into focus your vision, which is where you're going. And all three of those working together define your identity, who you are.

If your faith in Christ is genuine, then you will be convicted that he is both your Savior who died for you and your Lord whom you must obey.

That conviction will determine your mission. I will obey what my Lord and Savior commands. And that mission will focus your vision.

I am walking the narrow path. I am running the race. It gets hard at times, but I'm keeping the faith. I am following Jesus Christ.

[32 : 42] I know that I will hear my Savior say to me one day, well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the rest of your master. And I know my identity.

It's hidden in Christ. I've been clothed in his righteousness. I've been saved by grace through faith. It's no longer I who live, but it's Christ who lives in me and I can't help but be different.

I can't help but think differently. I can't help but act differently. So I ask you this morning, does that describe you? So here's the main point of application.

how you live proves who you are in God's sight. How are you living?

Is there fruit? Is there evidence? Is there proof? The greatest sermon that ever was preached was preached by Jesus.

[33 : 52] The Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 7 verses 24 through 27 he closed with this illustration. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and underline this and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rocks on the rock excuse me and the rain fell and the flood came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock and everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand and the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was the fall of it.

Friends upon which foundation are you building? are you building on the rock because you know Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior you've experienced that transformation you're not perfect I'm not perfect that waits at the end in glorification but can you look back on that day when you said that you were saved when you professed your faith in Jesus Christ when you went through with baptism and obedience can you remember that time and since that time can you look back and see there's been fruit maybe not as much as I had hoped there would be but there's been fruit I can see it or do you look back on that time that day and do you realize that you know what there really hasn't been any change I'm still basically the same person I just have gotten better at hiding my true identity who I really am the sins that I keep hidden so others won't see which house which foundation I should say are you building on and if you realize today that you know what God has opened your eyes to see I've been building on the sand let me tell you that you are here by his divine appointment to hear this word and to receive it by faith and to be saved and transformed and to begin building on the foundation who is Jesus Christ the rock who lived the sinless life that you and I could never live who died on the cross to atone for our sins who endured God's wrath for the sins that we've committed against him who died but who three days rose again as proof that he is all that he claimed to be and he accomplished all that he said that he would do and if you believe in him and if you trust him you're saved and if you've experienced that salvation you can't help but to do things to live your life for his glory and if that's you today

I want to know and we want to celebrate what God has done in your life for application questions for you to discuss in your community groups tonight take them home and look at them this week or this afternoon later this week if you don't have a community group I encourage you to be a part of one if you're not a part of one please see me or Tyler or Pastor Tyler after service and we will help you find one question number one why is it so easy to blur the line between doing a good work as a means to salvation and doing a good work as evidence of salvation question number two what counsel would you give to someone who believes the teachings of scripture but has no spiritual fruit what would you say to them how would you counsel them conversely question three what counsel would you give to a believer who has evidence of genuine faith but who never feels like they measure up to God's standards what scriptures would you show them what truth do you have from God's word to comfort them and then finally how is knowing facts about Jesus similar to demonic faith hope that God blesses your time to go through those questions tonight and that your conversations will be fruitful let's pray

Lord we know that we live in a time we look at your word it's not all that different from the time when you lived on this earth the time that James was writing in there are many who think that they are saved but they're not and Lord you have warned us you've shown us in your word you've told us about that day that's coming when you will tell many depart from me for I never knew you though they thought that they had they had never truly been saved so God I pray that we would take this seriously for ourselves we would take it seriously for our brothers and sisters in Christ God that we would be analyzing our lives first to see is there fruit and hopefully there is that Lord we would have the courage to do what you did to do what James did in chapter two to have those hard conversations and to ask where's the fruit in the hopes that if that person's faith was fraudulent they will come to genuine saving faith in Jesus

[40 : 00] Christ your son God I pray for those of us whom you've saved that Lord this passage would encourage us to not be those who say words that sound good but they're empty but that we would be people who act that we would be people who serve that we would be people like Jesus Christ your son in whose name we pray amen you