

James: Faith Does

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Last fall my cousin handed me a cup and he said, "I am giving you this cup and it is going to change your life." I thought, wow, that is pretty big! This cup is going to change my life; that is a lot to say about a cup. He said, "Let me tell you about this cup, it is called a Yeti cup. It holds ice for days and it will keep your drink colder than any other. From now on when you get a drink from a fast food restaurant, you are going to put the contents into that Yeti cup and throw the other cup away. That is how much this Yeti cup is going to change your life." I just rolled my eyes and thought yeah that sounds really great, so I got the cup, put some ice and drink in it. Within in a few days, the cup changed my life. Here is Yeti's slogan: *Wildly stronger, hold the ice longer.* To back that up you actually have to do what they are saying; the proof is really in the ice. You can fill their cup up and it will prove itself to be true. Since then I have given several Yeti cups to other people and I gave the same spiel to them that my cousin gave me, "I am going to give you this cup, and it will change your life." The reaction is always the same, "Thanks for this cup. I am sure it is not going to be that big of a deal." Without fail, every person I gave one of these cups to always texted me the next morning and said, "You are not going to believe it; this cup is still full of ice! This cup has changed my life." If you boast something like Yeti does, you have to be able to back it up. So how do we know that a Yeti cup really holds ice longer? The only way to know is to fill the cup up with ice and put something in it. I promise you the proof will be in the ice, and it will prove itself to be true.

The question James is going to deal with is our faith, whether it is actually real faith, whether it's genuine faith. James will say the faith you boast about of being a believer and following Christ is a good statement, and that is where to start, but the proof is going to be in your life. To say you follow Christ is good, but it is only when you 'fill up the cup' and life goes by that your life will actually be proof whether or not you have real saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to make a few comments before we read our text in James 2:14-26. James is the half-brother of Jesus. So this is Jesus' brother writing a letter to the church where he is now one of the leaders. I love how Andy Stanley uses this as a proof to show that Jesus really is the Son of God. He asks what it would take for your sibling to prove to you that they are God. Imagine if your sibling came home and said, "Hey, I'm God." You would think...*really, I have been sharing a room with you for a while and I just don't think that is true.* I mean, I love my sister, she is great, but if she started telling me that she is God, I would have a lot of problems with that! I would tell her I would have to see some major evidence because I am not sure I would believe it. So what would it take for James, the brother of Jesus, to believe that He is the Son of God? The only reality is that it would take a supernatural event. It would take his brother dying on a cross, not staying dead, and rising from the grave three days later. It would take a resurrection for James to believe his brother is indeed the Son of God. James doesn't put his faith in Christ until he sees the resurrection. After the resurrection, he believed in Jesus, his brother, as his Lord and Savior. Now, as the leader of the church, he is writing to some Jews who are dispersed, and he is writing to us as well.

We love James because it is exceedingly practical. In fact, there are over 60 imperatives in 108 verses, so there is a lot of application. In fact, there are over 20 references to the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus gave. Some have called it the proverbs of the New Testament. We love James because we can read it and within a few verses, we can walk out, go, and do

something. We are going to look at James and deal with the thought of faith. Is your faith real? If it is real, the proof will be in your life.

Scripture

"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 things 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? 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."

If you wanted to poll Americans on whether or not America was a Christian nation, most pollsters would pose that question by asking if you believe in God. We would see that 70-75% of Americans believe in God, so a lot of people deduce from this that 75% of Americans are Christian. Yet when we look at American culture, pop culture, the things we celebrate, things we love, things we watch, thing we entertain ourselves with, we have to ask if there is a disconnect in the 75% of Americans who say they have taken up

their cross and followed after Jesus. Does that seem like the reality of the culture we live in? I think we all would say that obviously it is not. When we look at the culture, we don't see a majority of followers of Jesus. Instinctively, we know there is a disconnect between saying you are Christian and that you believe in God, and actually being a Christian and following the Lord Jesus. We instinctively know that because we see so many people in our circle and in our culture that claim Christ or claim to believe in God, yet have no life change, or do not follow after Him.

False Faith

I think James is dealing with a culture much the same. He is dealing with a culture in which a lot of people are claiming Jesus Christ, they are claiming to follow Him, but James is examining their life and saying that there is a disconnect between what they are saying and what they are doing. So James' conclusion is that you have faith, you are saying the right things, but your faith is actually dead, it is useless; it is not true saving faith. According to James, you can actually profess Christ and not possess Christ. You can actually say one thing, but in reality, you are living something completely different. When you read the letter, you see he was very harsh to a certain group of people; he is harsh to those who merely say things but don't do things. They say they follow Jesus, but they don't actually trust Him and follow Him with their life.

So the question we are going to talk about is the question James asks in chapter 2: Can that faith save you? Now notice, he doesn't say, can faith save you? Faith is, obviously, what saves you; faith alone is what saves you. James is not dealing with that, he is saying, can *that* faith save you? Why does he put the word, that, there? It is because he is showing 'that' faith is a different faith, it is a pseudo faith. It faith is a false faith, a faith that is not real. The answer to the question is obviously no. False faith cannot save you; it does you no good whatsoever.

- **Dead Faith**

So what is false faith? What is 'that' faith? First of all, it is dead faith. In James 2:17, he talks about faith that is dead. He says faith that is dead is like a person who walks up to another person who is hungry and cold, and he says be warm and be filled, and then he walks off. In his head, that person says *I really helped that guy; he is so full and so warm*. James says you did nothing for that guy! In your head, you might think you are helping this poor person over here, but in reality, you have done nothing. You had empty words, because if your words actually meant something, if you really cared about that person, your words would be backed up with action. You would actually give him food and a blanket so he could actually be warm and filled. He said saying stuff without actually doing it says that you don't believe what you are saying. In the first scenario, he didn't care if the person was warm and filled; he just wanted it to look that way. If a person cares, they will actually do something about it. Dead faith is the same way. It is faith, but has no works backing it up. It is you merely saying I am a Christian, (which, by the way, means follower of Christ) yet you don't follow Christ. So it is saying one thing, but not actually doing the thing that you just said you do; "I follow Christ, I trust Christ," yet in your day to day life, you don't trust Him and you don't follow Him. James would say there is a problem, and the problem is your faith is dead. It is absolutely useless. You can say something all day long, but until that saying is backed up with a life change, you haven't really believed what you said. So there can be faith that James calls dead faith, and it is faith without works. So if your faith has no life change, no works, James says your faith is indeed dead. It is not real. It is absolutely useless.

- **Head Faith**

The next kind of faith he is going to deal with in 'that' faith is head faith. Head faith is knowing all the right things and all the right answers, yet not living a changed life. He says you guys believe that God is one, you do well. So he is kind of bragging a little bit. He is talking to the audience who

has false faith that is just in their head. He says you believe the right things about God; you know the right doctrine, you have got the right things down, that you believe God is one is going back to the ***Shama***, which all the Jews would celebrate; they know God is one, they know how He revealed Himself. So they know the right things, they have the right theology, they are correct in their thinking. He said that is great, but spiritually speaking, that puts you are on the same level as the demons. He said even the demons believe in God and shatter. So if you believe in God and you believe all the right things about God, you are on a demonic level. That is obviously not where James wants you to be. He doesn't want you to just intellectually know that Jesus is God, He died, He rose again, and He is coming back. He doesn't want you to just intellectually know the apostles creed. He doesn't want you to intellectually come say a certain prayer and just say you believe and consent to it. If it just stays in your head and it doesn't go down in your heart, it is absolutely useless. Just believing the right things, if it hasn't lead you to a trusting in Christ and a following after Christ, then it is just in your head, and the distance between your head and your heart is missing. James says that true faith, when you really believe in the Lord Jesus, when you really trust Him, will work into your heart and into your hands, and you are going to do something with it.

Heart Faith

What is real faith? It is not dead faith or head faith, but it is heart faith. It is faith that actually goes into your heart and you actually trust Christ, and then you start walking with Christ. That is how you know whether or not you have had real faith in Christ. It leads to a life change. It leads to a life lived under Him and for Him. James' example is Abraham and Rahab. We are going to walk through this example that he gives of Abraham. He said in verses 21-23, "*Was not our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar. You see that faith was active among his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness and he was called a friend of God.'*" He wanted a group of

people to examine themselves to see whether or not they have true faith, so he gives an example. They believed Abraham. He was their father. The way they knew that he believed God and had true saving faith in God was because they could look at his life. His life actually revealed, it justified, his faith, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, James believed just like Paul believed, he believed that faith (salvation), is about putting your faith and trust in Christ. That is how you get made right with God. How do we know that? It is because James actually quotes Genesis 15, which tells us the moment Abraham got justified, and that was when he said I believe you God, I trust you God. James says he was accounted righteous at that moment. That is exactly what Paul says, exactly like the gospel says, so he is on the same level as Paul. James question is how do we, as people, know Abraham was really justified? How do we know that when he believed, it really led to salvation and then to trusting after God? The only way to find that out is to fast forward some years to Genesis chapter 22, where God tells him to take his son and go sacrifice him. You see, that moment doesn't justify Abraham before God; it justifies that he has faith in God. That moment was not making him right with God; it is showing and proving that years later he had been made right with God. Because he had been made right with God, and had trusted God, years later he was able to say I will take my son and I will sacrifice him because I believe in You.

Now, if he had not been willing to do that at that moment in his life, what would it have revealed? It would have revealed that at the Genesis 15 moment, he really didn't believe God. He didn't really trust God; that all along his faith was false. It was his life that showed his faith in God was real. His life didn't justify him; it justified his faith and showed his faith was real. That is why James said it was active and completed by his works. You could tell his faith was alive because it moved. You could tell the Scripture that said he was justified was fulfilled by a life that was lived in righteousness before God. It was proof that the Genesis 15 moment was a real moment, and he really was justified before God.

- **Justifying Faith**

Then in verse 24, James said, "*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*" We cringe at that verse, because as Baptists who believe the gospel, we believe that salvation is by faith alone, apart from works. We are only justified by faith alone, then James comes along and says it is not just faith alone; it is faith and works. So how do we deal with this verse and reconcile it with what Paul and all the apostles have taught us about the gospel? The first question is do we have two gospels? Do we have Paul's gospel and we are justified by faith alone, or do we have James gospel that is faith plus works? If that is the case, then we have a contradiction of Scriptures and we have a contradiction of the gospel, which would mean two gospels. Obviously, we do not believe that is true. So how do we marry these two together? How do we synchronize them so they are able to speak in their own way? I believe that Paul and James are using the term, justification, in a different way. It is really easy to see that if you just read the context. Paul says in Romans 3:28, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." It seems to be different from what James just told us. How do we reconcile the difference? Paul was using justification differently. He is talking about how a person is made right with God. That is justification for Paul. How is a person made right with God? It is through faith in Jesus alone. There is nothing you can do to earn it and nothing you can do to help it. It is by faith alone. James is not talking about justification of a person before God; he is talking about justifications of a persons' faith before men. In other words, how do we know that Abraham was justified? We look at his life. How do we know that your faith is real? We look at your life. How is your faith justified in your own heart? You look at your life and what it says about your faith. Paul would amen his brother James here. Let me give you an amen verse. In Ephesians chapter 2:8, Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is a gift from God, not a result of works, so that no man may boast." So for Paul it is faith alone, grace alone, and absolutely apart from works is how we are

made right with a God. Notice what Paul says next, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Paul is saying that you are made right with God only by trusting in Christ and what He did for you. But if you believe that and you are made right with God, that faith will live a life of works before God. That is the point of your salvation. That is why God saved you. He created you for good works. So for Paul, if you believe in God and then have no evidence, no life change, then he would say that you don't have real faith because faith alone is never alone. Faith always produces a life that is lived for the glory of Christ. So Paul and James are not disagreeing. James is not teaching faith plus works equals salvation. He is teaching faith plus salvation equals good works. If you had faith that led to redemption, you become a new creation; it will produce a life change. You are going to live a life for the glory of Christ.

- **Living Faith**

James ends the chapter 2 saying, "*For as the body apart from the spirit is alive, so also faith apart from good works is dead.*" He has three questions:

- 1. What makes your body alive?**

According to James, your spirit makes your body alive.

- 2. How do we know that you are alive?**

You breathe, you talk, you walk, and you move...that is how we know you are alive. You are moving, so we know you are alive!

- 3. Can movement cause someone to come to life?**

If you took a dead man and started moving his arms around, would that make him alive? No, movement is just evidence of life in a person.

The same is true with works. Works in no way can save you or add to your salvation, but if you have salvation we know it because you are living a life

for the glory of Christ. The evidence that you are spiritually alive is you are trusting in Christ and you are living for His glory rather than your own.

Evidentiary Faith

To give us a statement to hold on to as we summarize chapter 2, I believe that James is trying to get us to see that salvation is for faith alone, but faith is never alone. Salvation is faith alone in Christ, but salvation in Christ is never alone. Salvation in Christ always has a life lived for His glory with it, because salvation is trusting and following after Jesus. If you say you are a believer, but you have no trust and no life lived for His glory, or under His Lordship, then you can have no confidence that you have saving faith in Christ.

The question we want to wrestle with is does your life justify your faith? Does your life reveal that your faith is real? Or does your life reveal that your faith is dead, or that your faith is just in your head? What does your life show about your faith? Does it prove to be genuine, that you have had a life change in the Lord Jesus Christ? The proof will be in your life.

I want to go through seven things from this letter that I think can give you evidence whether you have true faith or not. We see that faith moves, faith works, and faith is alive. It is active, it is completed; it is doing something.

1. True faith stands under pressure.

James calls these trials. When trials come into your life, you should rejoice because they are actually testing your faith to see if it is real or not. Trials put a squeeze on your life and show whether or not you are in the faith. One of our deacons told me that he has always loved the book of James. He battled cancer for over a year or so. For my whole life, he has told me how much he loves Jesus, how much he believes in God's sovereignty, and how much he loves Christ. During everything he went through, his only thought was that he wanted to tell whatever doctor he got about Jesus. He said, "Every day I am here on earth I want to tell someone about Jesus. I cannot wait to go see Jesus." That was a trial that came in his life, and he

said, "I love Jesus." You see, he didn't blame God during this trial, he trusted God. That revealed he had true faith. In trials, you either blame God or trust God, and that is what James deals with. He said don't say God is tempting you to sin, God doesn't tempt with sin. No, if you sin in the trial that is your own issue. You need to work that out, don't blame God. In every trial God wants you to remain faithful, because it builds steadfastness, and steadfastness makes you complete and whole in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trials are going to show whether or not you have true faith in Christ. So in the middle of a trial when life squeezes you, what is going to come out? Will it be trust in faith, or blaming God? If blaming God happens, you might be revealing that you never really had genuine, trusting faith.

2. True faith hears and does God's Word.

James says don't just be a hearer, be a hearer and a doer. Some of you hear the Word of God, you memorize the Word of God, you read the Word of God, but you never do anything it says. That is just a hearer; you are not a doer. True faith in Christ reads and does what the Word says. James' illustration says it's like a man who looks in a mirror, forgets what he sees, then goes and lives as if he never saw it. Ladies, it is like looking in the mirror and you see lipstick on your teeth, you see it, and you just walk out of the bathroom like no big deal. Guys, it is like looking in the mirror and seeing that little bit of toilet paper on your face that you used when you cut yourself shaving, looking at it, and then walking away as though it isn't even there. James says that is crazy! When you see a problem, you fix it. He says if you don't have true faith, then when you read the Word and see your problems, you just walk on with life. True faith sees your issues, and you work them out through the gospel. True faith applies the Word of God to your life.

3. True faith practices true religion.

False religion is about the outside; it is about what everybody can see. It is about gaining power. True religion is about being self-controlled with your

tongue. It is about helping people that are helpless, like orphans and widows. It is about doing things in secret that no one will see. It is not what you do on Sunday, and then the next Sunday; it is what does Monday through Saturday bring when no one is looking at you? True religion does the will of the Lord all of the time, even in the secret places when no one sees it. So do you have true religion, or do you just have outward show because you want everybody to see and believe the lie that you know in your heart, which is that you don't really have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

4. True faith treats everyone equally.

Showing partiality is a big deal to James. He says in the midst of their congregations, they would treat the rich very well and the poor very poorly. He said that should not be, brothers, because if you have faith then you know the royal law. The royal law is to treat your neighbor as yourself. If you have Jesus' love poured into your heart, you will love God and love all people. Worldly love separates people, sees people differently, and gives love to some and withholds love to others. You see some people as servants of yours, not you as a servant to all. That is a big difference. So James is going to say that true faith sees everyone as equal, and you love everyone the same. The reason is because God's love has been poured into your heart and God loves all people. So love your neighbor as yourself in all situations.

5. True faith controls your tongue.

James says your tongue is a little bitty member of your body, but a little spark can start a forest fire, and a small rudder guides a whole ship. Your tongue, though it is small, can do a whole lot of damage. He says false faith blesses God with your tongue, and it curses people at the same time. You go to church and you sing songs about God, and then you leave and you speak ill of others and you tear others down with your tongue. James says, brothers this ought naught be! We should be worshipping God and blessing God, and with the same breath blessing others, because we are

connected to God and we have true faith that sees our mission is to be a blessing to those around us.

6. True faith lives faithfully to God.

James actually calls the people adulterers. He says you have actually cheated against God! God has been your husband and your lover, and you are cheating on Him by loving the world and running to the world. They love both God and the world. James says in reality, this shows you don't love God. If you loved God, you would not love the things that are opposed to God. So you can't love God and the things that God doesn't love. If you love God, you will love the things He loves, and you won't love, serve, and worship the world's things. You will love, serve, and worship the things of God because that is your true lover, God, not the world.

7. True faith lives dependent on God.

I love it when he says come now, you who say tomorrow we are going to go to this place and make a profit, make a lot of money. He says, what is your life? You are like a vapor, like a mist that disappears, and what you should say is that if the Lords wills it, you will go do this tomorrow. He is looking at a group of people that are completely independent. They feel like they are autonomous over their own life and they can do whatever they want, and they don't realize they are completely dependent on God. As a culture we celebrate autonomy. We celebrate independence. We are not dependent on anyone. We define the rules, we can change whatever we want to change, and we are supreme in the universe. James says not if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you will not be autonomous, you will be dependent on Him. You will live your life under Him, in submission to Him and for Him, because you really believe He knows better than you do. You will stop trying to control your life. You will live under His control because you are completely dependent on Him, and you have true faith in the Lord Jesus. That is why James gives a warning to the rich. All throughout the book there are warnings to the rich, because the rich are the most likely to be self-sufficient, to be not

dependent on anyone. They have their riches, so they are secure on their own. He said don't trust in your riches; they are fading away. They will not last in the last days, but instead, depend and trust in God.

Dependent Faith

He closes the letter talking about true dependence on God. It means you have prayers that have faith in God. You go to God in prayer when things are happening in your life. You believe and have faith that God is going to work out His will that you get to enter into through prayer. A life that is dependent on God is going to be a life that is constantly praying to God because you are dependent on Him.

One of the big things we see in James' letter is that faith is not a checkbox. For some of us, faith is a checkbox, I did that at VBS, I did that at camp; I walked, I said it, I repeated it, and now I am good and I am just going to move on with my life now. James says faith is not a checkbox; faith is you jumping off a building into the arms of Christ by trusting Him. He catches you, He redeems you, and now you live for His glory for the rest of your life. That is what faith is. Faith is just not head knowledge, it is heart knowledge that trusts the Lord, and then you walk under His leadership for the rest of your life. In other words, faith actually changes you. That is James big point. If you are not changed, it is evident you don't have true faith because James true point to the letter is that real faith produce life change.

Those cups with a catchy little slogan, *wildly stronger, holds ice longer*, the only way to know if it is true is to fill a cup up and wait a few days. That is the only way to know. You have this confession that you believe in the Lord Jesus and you are trusting in Him, but the only way for us to know that is to give it a few days, weeks, months, or years and let's see how your life lives out, because the proof of your faith is in your life. James wants you to know that salvation is through faith alone, but faith is never alone. Faith does. So how is your faith?