**Let the Scripture say it’s so and Let Your Life Show it’s so!**



**Bro. Ricky Cunningham**

**James 2:14-26**

Go ahead and open your Bibles to James chapter 2. In just a few moments we will be looking at verses 14-26. Now, there is no way we can do this, but I want us to imagine just for a moment that we are reading through our Bibles and for the first time we are hearing what the Bible is teaching, and then we come to James chapter 2. Many people, when they get to James chapter 2, believe there is a contradiction between what the Bible has been teaching previously in the New Testament with what James is now going to teach. (Remember what we would have read earlier in the New Testament in Romans chapter 3.) The Apostle Paul made this statement in chapter 3:28, “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” A few verses later, as he continues to write, he says in chapter 4:1–3, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” In chapter 5:1, Paul says, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When Paul writes to the church at Galatia, in chapter 3:6–8, he says, “Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” Then, if we had been a part of the people who received the letter at the church of Ephesus, Paul would have said this in chapter 2:8-10, “For by grace you have been saved, through faith. This is not your own doing: (Listen to this phrase) not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” I think most of us who are here this morning believe from reading our Bibles that we are in a right relationship with God based on the fact that we have put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ –– not trusting anything we have done, but totally trusting in Christ, and because of faith in Christ, we are now justified and right with God. Amen?

But because of this very passage we are going to study this morning, Martin Luther would not include the book of James it in his Bible. Now, I know you and I struggle with that. We have been given 66 books. We put it together and call it our Bible, but Martin Luther, as a theologian, as a man who came to know Christ, wrestled with what the Bible taught about justification by faith alone, by grace alone. When he came to the book of James, he concluded this, “It is a right strawy epistle.” Can you imagine anyone taking one of the books of the Bible and saying it is a *strawy* epistle? Strawy meant that if you weighed this book along with the other books of the New Testament it is strawy –– it is light. It is light to the point that he actually believed this book contradicted the writings of the Apostle Paul. It was not until much later in his life that he would give it any justification at all in the life of a believer.

This morning, I want you to listen afresh to what James is saying. As a church, we want to try to interpret what James is saying because it is very beneficial for us as believers. I had about seven different titles for this sermon this morning, just so you know. I could never settle on a title.

So here is the theme this morning, and I want you to listen for this theme as we read this passage –– Let Scripture say it is so, and let your life show it is so! I think that is the gist of what James is saying. Let’s trust Scripture to say what Scripture says. Our responsibility is to let our life show that it is so. What is so? Our life is to show that we are in a right relationship with God based on faith that shows itself. Let’s quit listening to what people say has happened to them and let’s watch what people reveal is actually real in their lives, and that is whether they are right with God or not. I am not going to preach this morning and I am not going to teach this morning. I am just going to explain. We are just going to walk through these verses. It is so important that we get the gist of this.

**Scripture**

***“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*** {The answer is no}***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?****”*

{I have to pause here just a minute. If you have been reading Paul, the answer is no, but the answer that James wants us to say here is yes. Abraham was justified by works, not by faith alone. This is why Martin Luther called this a strawy epistle and he struggled with it.}

***“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.”***

Look at that first question. “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” The thought of James would be if there is a person who says they have faith but does not have works, it does him no good to have faith. Faith without works is no good at all, but he does not stop there with “good.” He now deals with salvation…salvation being used in the sense of to deliver or to rescue. The thought of Scripture is that we, as sinners, are under the wrath of God. We are dominated by the power of sin in our lives, and salvation is the ultimate rescue where God pays our penalty, frees us from that penalty, and then sets us free from the power of sin in our lives. James asks can that faith save him –– the person who says he has faith but has no works –– can that faith, a faith without works, save a man? James is going to say (and we should not argue with him because he is going to prove his point) no! A faith that does not have works cannot save a person. Yet, we just acknowledged earlier that most of us believe we are saved by faith alone, totally trusting in what God has done for us, putting no trust in ourselves at all!

Do you see why Martin Luther struggled? On face value, he saw a contradiction. Please hear me. There is no contradiction, no contradiction at all. James is not saying here that faith PLUS works saves a man. Neither is he saying faith AND works saves a man. No. He is talking about the true nature of saving faith. What he is saying is can a faith that does not issue into action, does not issue into deeds, or does not issue into works, can that kind of faith save a man? The answer is no, because he is going to say that kind of faith is dead! It is lifeless. It is not alive. So if it does not produce works or action in you, you had better not be trusting that it can save you. Now when we get through, I think you are going to see that James believes we are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone. He is going to illustrate this. He says if you see somebody poorly dressed (and when we say poorly dressed, we mean barely having enough clothes on their back to be protected from the weather) and no food in their belly for days, and you just say to them, *God bless you, stay warm, find a great meal to eat*, and then you go on your way, did your words do anything for that person? NO! James says in the same way, faith that says something but does not reveal something is dead. It is lifeless. See, James knows in the influence of that early church, there were people that were taking the position that in order to be saved all you had to do was say something. All you had to say was that you believe in God. All you had to do was say you believed in Jesus and then nothing in your life ever gave evidence that showed your life changed because of that faith. If it is real faith, it has something that flows from it. Real, saving faith produces action, action that reveals you are in a right relationship with God.

Look at the next passage, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.”’ I want to make sure you see this, this is so important. You heard me say that James is not saying he is arguing for faith plus works or faith and works, and it is based on this passage. James knows that there are some people who clearly delineate faith and works. That there is a group of people who believe they are saved by faith, another group who believes they are saved by works, and that the two are diametrically opposed to each other. James says, “Show me your faith apart from your works…” Can you do it? No. You can say it all day long, but you cannot show it because words will not show it; works have to show it. So he says, “I will show you my faith by my works.” Then just to show us what saving faith is not, he says, “You believe that God is one; you do well.”Hey, some of us have come to the belief that there is one God. We know there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We mentally believe that.

I had a neighbor growing up who lived across the road from us and after I became a Christian, every time I would try to talk to him about Jesus, he would say to me, “Ricky, I believe Jesus is the Son of God.” But what he was meaning was he personally knew the facts about God and Jesus and he mentally agreed with me that there was a historical Jesus and that He is the Son of God. Guess what James says? He says you are doing good, but just know this, even the demons believe! They don’t just believe; they shudder in His presence! They shake violently is what this word means. Can I ask you a question? How many of you believe the demons are saved? Of course you do not believe the demons are saved. Then why would you believe you are saved? You do not even shake! You sin, cheat, steal, lie, gossip, malign, and do not think a thing about it. You justify it! But even the demons believe enough to shake in the presence of God who is holy, holy, holy.

For James, saving faith is not a matter of the head and it is not just a matter of the heart, but it is a matter of the head, heart, AND the hands, because he is laboring to show us what true saving faith is. Paul…he labored with people who were raised under the law or were pagan and he tried to get them to understand there is nothing you can do in and of yourself to bring yourself into a right relationship with God. The only thing you can cling to is personal faith in what God did for you on the cross and he is always addressing justification before a person gets justified. Not James –– James is writing to a church that has already perverted the gospel into an easy believism. I cannot tell you all the people who believe they are saved just because they walked down an aisle, knelt at an altar, and said a prayer. They are trusting that prayer to get them to Heaven, yet that prayer has not even changed their life at all. Do you really believe a faith that cannot get you through life, a faith that cannot get you out of sin here, is going to keep you out of Hell and get you into Heaven? NOT A CHANCE, James says. He saysquit thinking that you have done something right because even the demons believe. There may be atheists in America, but there are no atheists among the demons.

Look at verse 20. James says, “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?” Do you remember that true religion that was useless? I have had many people say, “Hey, Brother Ricky, I am not into religion, I am into a relationship.” Well guess what God is saying to you*…*if you believe your relationship with God is based on faith that is not producing works, that faith you have is useless to you. Whoa! Why is it useless? It is dead. Very few dead things serve a purpose. What James is contrasting here is saving faith from non-saving faith. Saving faith is alive! Non-saving faith is dead. Saving faith is useful! Non-saving faith is useless. James is going to show some people how foolish they are to believe that they are saved by faith alone and that faith *be* alone. Are you hearing me? James is not arguing faith PLUS works or faith AND works. There is church, after church, after church, radio program after radio program, and tv program after tv program today that will teach the gospel as faith in God PLUS what man does for God. That is not what James is teaching here. James is talking about works that are produced by the faith, not the person, because the faith is alive. It is active and it is working in your life so that if you have that moment of faith that is real and you are brought into a right relationship with God, it issues into a life of faithfulness.

Let’s read the next thought. James is going to show how foolish it would be to actually argue using Abraham as a basis that works do not ultimately justify a person, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?” Hmm…Paul contradicted that in Romans. He contradicted it in Galatians and Ephesians. Is James contradicting Paul, or is he using justification in another sense? What I am going to say to you is he is using justification differently than Paul is using justification (we will see that in just a moment). You see that faith was active, alive, along with Abraham’s works. Faith was actually completed, brought to fruition, by his works. Verses 23–24 say, “…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.” This seems like a contradiction to what Paul has said, but it’s not. Paul has argued in all of his writings to Jewish people who believed works of the law were part of their salvation that not even Abraham was justified by works, but by faith alone. Now James comes along and teaches Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son on the altar. Was that when he was really justified? Listen again. It is not a contradiction.

First, just so we understand what James is dealing with here, let’s remember Abraham, not from the way preachers, teachers, or parents present Abraham, but let’s review what the Scripture says about Abraham. He was considered the father of the Jewish people. He was seventy-five years of age when God stepped into his life. He was a pagan following pagan gods. The true God of Heaven revealed Himself to Abraham and told him to get out of the land and follow Him, and then He told him what He was going to do for him. Ultimately, God was going to make him the father of many nations, and in his bloodline, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God said He would bless everyone who blessed Abraham, and curse everyone who cursed him.

So, Abraham leaves his land, starts following God, and is going to a different land. He gets to the land and cannot stay in the land so he has to go down into Egypt. (Now, this is father Abraham, but it was pre-salvation –– he was pagan and at this time he was called Abram.) He looked over at his wife Sarai and said…*Wow honey, you are just as pretty today as the day I married you. I think you are prettier. You know what? We are going to get into Egypt and there we will be foreigners. There will be some folks down there who will look at you and they will say how pretty you are, and they are going to want you. To get you, they will kill me. When we get down there, if somebody asks we will say that you are my sister, not my wife*. What a man, amen? How would you ladies love to be married to a man like this?! You are going on your honeymoon, you go to the beach, and your husband says, “When we get on the beach, if somebody looks at you, thinks you’re pretty, and wants you, we will just say you are my sister. We are not going to say we are married.” Well, when Abram and Sarai are in Egypt, they wanted her and they took her, and then, not her husband, but God intervened for her. Praise God for God, amen?

Shortly after this story, Abram comes home from a battle and he is worn out. He lays down and goes to sleep. When he goes to sleep, he gets this vision. In this vision, he saw all of the stars at night and God says…*Hey Abram, count those stars, and as many stars as you can count, that is how many kids you are going to have because I am your shield*. Now, before this, Abram had been complaining to God…*I am a wealthy man but when I die all of my assets are going to go to the servants in my household because I don’t have a son*. Now in this vision God says you are going to have that many kids, and Genesis 15:6 says Abram said amen to God, let it be so. Let what be so? Let your word to me be true. Let your plan for my life be true, that one day I will have as many kids as there are stars in the sky. The Bible says the moment he said amen, God counted it (his faith) because the only way you can say amen to God is to believe in God, to put your faith in God. The moment Abram said amen, God counted his faith as righteousness, and God, on the basis of his faith, his trust, brought Abram into a right relationship with Him and he is now a righteous man. Wow!

Now, let’s be honest. Sometimes when you have come out of a pagan background and you are new to the faith, you just don’t really know how to walk as a righteous person at first, agreed? We see that in the life of Abram. He has this promise that he will have as many kids as there are stars in the sky, but his wife has not given him any babies. So you know what this new believer does. He steps outside of the marital bounds and has sexual relationships with his wife’s servant to help God fulfill His promise to him. Can I be totally honest with you? This guy might be talking faith, but I am sure not seeing any faith. Are you? That kid is born, and thirteen years later God gives him the sign of circumcision as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant. When Abraham gets circumcised at ninety-nine years of age and his son gets circumcised, God said he is not *the* son.You are going to have a son by Sarai. God sends some visitors, Sarai hears this, and she laughs, but the visitors tell hima year from now, you will have a son and *he* is the seed.

Now we have the story of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah. At this time, Abraham is still fighting battles. Within that year, he knows his wife is going to conceive and the promise is going to be fulfilled. He has to go down to the Negeb, the tip of the peninsula down there, and King Abimelech is there. Abraham is a hundred years old now, and his wife is ninety. He has been walking with God for years. They cross that border and he said…*Wow, you are just as pretty as the day we got married.* (She is just grinning from ear to ear) *Other men are going to think you are pretty. When we get down there, if anybody asks, we are going to say you are my sister again*. GIVE ME A BREAK! I am blowing your image of Abraham, right? I do not know where you got the image you have, but I got my image from Scripture. I am just walking from Genesis 12 to Genesis 20. If it were not for God, his wife would have had sexual relations with another man again. They get back home…and whoa, wouldn’t you like to have been a fly on that wall? Genesis 21 tells us Isaac is born. Wow- a miracle birth!

Time passes, and this little lad grows up, and here comes the incident James is talking about –– was not Abraham justified by his works when he offered his son, the son whom he loved, on the altar? Because this is where the Bible said God told Abraham to take Isaac up on the mountain and kill him.Whoa! Let’s get past the emotional attachment in his old age to his son and let’s think about this…*but God said he was the son of promise. From him, all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. From him, I am going to have all of my kids and my grandkids and my great grandkids. Now you are asking me to kill him?* Genesis 22 starts out this way, “And the next morning, Abraham rose up early…” If I can just say this, if God asked me to kill Kory, I am not getting up early the morning I am supposed to do it. I am going to sleep through the iPhone ringing. I am going to sleep through Celisa trying to get me out of the bed at 9 o’clock in the morning. I am going to still be asleep at midday with a bad headache. Agreed? Not Abraham. He is up early in the morning. He took his servants to the foot of the mountain. He tells the servants to stay there. He has the fire, he has the knife, and he lays the wood on the back of his son. His son is not an infant or a toddler. He is a strapping young man, a late teenager, no doubt. It was probably thirty years after he got saved. He is going to go up a mountain and he hears Isaac say to him…*Hey dad, we have the wood, we have the fire, we have the knife, but we do not have the lamb*. Abraham says to his son, *“*God will provide for Himself the lamb.” They get to the place where they stop and they build the altar. Man, what a picture! As an old man, Abraham takes a young man in his youth, stronger than him, can whip Daddy no doubt, and that son submits to his father’s will. He lies on that altar as Abraham straps him to that wood and draws back that knife, getting ready to take his life. What kind of man does this sound like to you? It sounds like a man who trusts his God. It sounds like a man whose life has been changed.

Remember what James said, “Was not Abraham justified by works?” In other words, didn’t him offering his son on that altar reveal that he was really in a right relationship with God and that he had faith in God keeping His word and promise to him? Yes! See, when James talks about works, James is not talking about faith PLUS works, he is not talking about faith AND works making you right with God while you are in sin. He is talking about you after salvation. After salvation, you life out faith. How does anybody know if you really are a believer? Do you really expect us to believe you are saved because you heard a sermon, walked an aisle, knelt, said a prayer, went down into the waters of baptism, and joined a church? Do you really expect us to believe you are saved because of that? NO! I do not believe that. Do you know what we are going to believe? We are going to believe it when we see it, and we are going to see it in your life because your life will have moments where you fail God, but the momentum of your life, as you grow more mature and as you grow older, that saving faith is active. Because that saving faith is alive and is useful, it issues into a life change that reveals you have been made right with God because your trust is in what He has said is true of you! What does He say is true of you? He loved you so much that He put His Son on a cross in your place. The moment you put your faith and trust in Christ –– faith alone, but a faith that is not alone, a faith that is really saving is going to issue into a life of deeds, actions, and works.

Is that not exactly what Paul said? Did not Paul, after talking about for grace you have been saved through faith, as it is not through yourself, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast, did he not say, therefore, we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS! Why did God save you? Just to die and go to Heaven? NO! He saved us so that we would His workmanship, that we would be the fruit, the testimony, of what God can do in taking the life of a sinner who is completely trusting in Him and show what a life will look life after a person has been made right with God. When we deal with other people in whatever capacity we deal with them, those are the opportunities, the moments, to let Scripture say what Scripture says. Here is what Scripture says –– we are justified by faith. What do we do? We let Scripture say what Scripture says, but let’s show it to be so. How do we show we are right with God based on faith? Our life that flows out of our faith lets the world see that we have saving faith. Wow.

I have been telling you for years (I believe this with all my heart) that I will not argue or defend your life when your life does not measure up to the truth of the gospel. God allows life to happen to ultimately reveal whether or not we have saving faith. Hear me! If you cannot trust your faith to get you out of a habit, to get you out of a sin, to get you out of a circumstance, or to get you through something, you are telling me you are going to trust it to get you to Heaven? You are telling me you are trusting it to believe you are right with God on something that according to James is dead and useless? No. Our faith is ALIVE and it is USEFUL. The life it produces shows what God says in His Word is true. We are right with Him because of the finished work of Jesus Christ.