

James 2 (Part 2) :14-26 • The evidence of a living faith

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James chapter 2, we're picking up the latter half of the chapter, and that begins for us in verse 14, down through the end. So, follow along with me as I read these verses. It says,

“¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

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. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ 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. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we unpack these verses this morning, we pray for your Holy Spirit to lead us in wisdom and understanding. We believe, Lord God, that you are the God who gives insight and truth to your children. And we sit at your feet today, Lord, that you would teach us and instruct us according to the wisdom and grace, from Your Holy Spirit. Lord, do that work we pray, we ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

Well, this is an interesting portion of the Bible. You know, this second half of James, chapter 2, can be very challenging for people, and it has been very challenging for people, frankly over the years. I have to tell you some people have a very strong feeling about this section of scripture in James chapter 2. You might know if you've done any reading that Martin Luther, the reformer from the 1500s, was one such person who took issue with this latter half of James chapter 2.

And you might remember that he was, Martin Luther, was the man who broke away from the Roman Catholic Church because of, you know, what he considered to be unbiblical practices and beliefs. He started of course, the Reformation, and you know, he came from a particularly challenging kind of background because having been steeped in Roman Catholicism; and the Roman Catholicism of Luther's Day was hyper-focused on good works, good deeds, as a means of salvation, you know. And Luther realized that wasn't consistent with the gospel and what the Bible had to say.

And so, you know, after searching through the Word and recognizing that the Catholic Church was way off base. He not only broke off from Catholicism, but he became very sensitive to any suggestion by any person, you know, that works was necessary to be saved.

And I would say just as the Catholic Church was kind of hyper-directed to works, he became hyper-sensitive to that whole thing. And that happens, you know. So, the bottom line is Luther wasn't a big fan, to be honest with you, of this particular section of scripture.

So, the first thing we need to do is kind of ask ourselves, "Is this passage in the Bible problematic?" Is this a problem? When we read through these verses, I mean you read it just like I read it. We have to say, "Okay, is there anything here that I need to kind of look at here?" And because you know, you can tell when you read this that James is kind of a fan of works.

You know, I mean, you know, look at it. Look at verse 17 again with me. He speaks pretty highly of, he says, "¹⁷...*faith by itself, if it does not have works, (he says there in that verse) is dead.*" And I think, probably the most challenging verse, in fact, let me put both of these up on the screen for you, is verse 24, where he says,

v17 ...*faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

v24 *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

Well, I'll tell you that has really messed with some people's heads over the years, let me tell you. But that is precisely what people do. What we've just done by me putting these up on the screen. That's what some people do. When it comes to what James is saying or the statements that James is saying here.

What they do is, they do just what we did right here. They isolate a couple of verses from the rest of what James said. In other words, they pull these verses, and I'll tell you right now, if you were to look at these verses and stand them on your own, you'd probably have trouble. I think I would have trouble by just reading these alone.

But you see, you just, you can't do that. You can't quote a verse and get all up in arms about it. You have to look at the context of what James is actually saying because otherwise you're just going to misunderstand and you're going to miss the point. You're going to miss the overall point, that he's trying to make in this passage. So, let's look at some of these verses again.

I want you to look with me again at verse 14. All right. Where he says, “¹⁴ *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says (with his mouth) he has faith but does not (with his life) have works? (And then he asks the question,) Can that (kind of) faith save him?*” And so, he's asking the question, can the words of a person's mouth, if that's all there is, can that get the job done?

And then he goes on to speak of a situation; where someone speaks, words of faith, but doesn't act out that faith. He says in verse 15, “¹⁵ *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,*” Now, I want you to realize he's not just talking about anybody. When he says, when a brother, (correction) if a brother or sister, that's not talking about a biological brother or sister. It's talking about believers, fellow believers.

So, he's saying you're in church and you're literally, you know, in the fellowship of believers and you see a brother or a sister who as he says, “*Is poorly clothed and lacking in (daily) food,*” he says, “¹⁶ *and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, (he says,) what good is that?*”

And then he makes this connection in verse 17. “¹⁷ *So also faith by itself, (in other words, that has no action connected to it, he says, is ultimately dead.) if it does not have works, is dead.*” And so, he's drawing a contrast. And that's what I want you to notice here. There's a contrast here, between what someone says, and how they live. Okay?

That's very important for us to see because we're (correction he's) talking about a person who "claims" to believe in the Lord. He "claims" to have faith, but that when they meet a fellow believer, who is lacking these things, they feel absolutely no compunction to meet that need in any sort of a practical way. And of course, the conclusion as you saw that James draws, is that their faith is hollow or dead. That's his conclusion.

Well, we have to ask ourselves the question, "Why?" Well, the reason is because James firmly believed that what we do is the result of what we believe. Let me repeat that. James believed that what we do is the result of what we believe. That's a very important statement. So, he's saying if you do nothing to help your brother or sister, James would conclude then, that you believe nothing. That's kind of the point. Because faith, James tells us, results in action.

Look at verse 22 again. Verse 22, he begins by saying, "²² *You see that faith was active...*" You see that statement right there? That's very very important. And frankly, you know, this conclusion or this attitude or statement that James is making in this section of chapter 2 really shouldn't surprise us.

You guys remember in the last chapter, James is the one who exhorted us saying, "don't just be hearers of the Word, be also, doers of the Word." (paraphrasing **James 1:22 ESV** "²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, ...*") So what's James kind of emphasizing in this letter? Doing! Don't just listen. Don't just talk. Do. That's what he's, that's really the emphasis of, you know, kind of this letter.

And what James dislikes are people who walk around with empty claims about what they believe, and they have no action behind it. You know, I have no idea who coined the phrase, but there's a phrase or a term that has been used to kind of describe what James is talking about here in this chapter, and it's called "Easy Believism."

Have you ever heard of that? If you look up "Easy Believism" like in...I Googled it, and tons of messages and statements and writings and articles about "Easy Believism." You say, "Well, what is Easy Believism?" Well, it basically stems from our understanding of what the word believe means, and our, I mean modern. Let me show you, okay, John 3:16, right?

John 3:16 (ESV)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

“For God, so love the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him (How easy is that? Whoever believes in Him) should not perish but have eternal life.” So, to be saved, all you have to do is believe in Jesus, right?

See, the problem comes because I live in the United States of America today, and to me, the definition of believe is essentially to believe that something exists. “I believe in Jesus.” You know, you're sitting there witnessing to somebody about the Lord and you're saying, “You know, you need to have faith and stuff.” And they're not getting...they go, “Hey, you know, I don't know what you're railing on me for man, I believe in Jesus.”

And they do, from the standpoint of their modern interpretation or definition of that word, believe. They believe. They believe there was a guy named Jesus that came along at some particular point. They believe, “Yeah, sure. Believe in Jesus. Yeah, absolutely. I believe in Him. Hey, you know, leave me alone.”

Well, even 50...well over 50 years ago, A.W. Tozer observed this same kind of an idea of “Easy Believism.” He didn't use that term, but this is what he did say. He said,

Faith now means no more than passive moral acquiescence in the Word of God and the cross of Jesus. To exercise faith we have only to rest on one knee and nod our heads in agreement with the instructions of a personal worker intent upon saving our soul. – A.W. Tozer

So, even Tozer was writing about this, you know, probably about 60 years ago, talking about “Easy Believism.” All you got to do is just nod your head in agreement.

“You believe in Jesus?”

“Oh yeah, (Pastor Paul is nodding his head) believe in Jesus.”

But that's not biblical faith. That's not the definition of biblical faith. Real faith, the word believe, goes so much beyond just intellectual agreement that something exists, or I believe this person, you know, or whatever, used to live or lived on the earth at some time. Do you believe in God? Wonderful, yeah. Do you remember what James said here in this section? He says, (paraphrasing **John 2:19 ESV**) “Great, you believe in God. The demons believe in God.” The demons believe in Jesus. Do you think they're saved?

Yeah, we can't...we can't sit and comfort ourselves with this kind of “Easy Believism,” you know. To believe according to the Bible, means I have put my faith in this person. It means that I trust this person completely. It means I have full confidence in this person, and particularly to believe in Jesus means to believe in what He did on the cross.

It means, I believe, I have full confidence that what Jesus did on the cross was for me, and it was enough. That's the biblical definition of belief. So, when **John 3:16** throws out that word and says, “...*that whoever believes in Him.*” Oh, it means, totally puts their trust in. There's no “Easy Believism” to it.

It's an...it's a whole wholesale embracing, kind of like we did with communion taking in. Taking in, you know. So, and that's one of the reasons why, frankly, when I'm talking to somebody; when I'm talking to an unbeliever today, I don't much use the word, believe, when I'm talking about what they need to do concerning Jesus.

I use the word receive because that's frankly another biblical word. You know, John said that in the first chapter of his gospel account, (**John 1:12 ESV**) “¹² *But to all who did receive him...*”, right? And that's what we have to do. We have to receive, Jesus Christ, and what He did on the cross, and frankly when a person has that kind of faith...that kind of, you know, (clenching fist to chest) really receiving Jesus into their life, that faith is going to be expressed in action. That's what James is saying. That's the point that he's making. The examples that he gives begin in verse 20, look with me again in your Bible. He says,

“²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?” And then he gives the example of Abraham, he says, “²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ 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.”

And then in verse 25, he gives another example, and this is the example of Rahab, the prostitute. You'll remember her, when the spies came into the land of Israel, the Promise Land. You'll remember that Rahab is that woman who hid the spies so they wouldn't be found out by the people of Jericho. And it says that she sent them out by another way (“²⁵ *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*”) and so he makes this statement, “²⁶ *For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*”

But you got to understand when you read those verses, James is not saying that we're justified before God by our good works. He's actually saying that our faith is proven by our good works. Because, you know, the word justified, if you look it up in a Greek dictionary, you'll find out that it has actually several meanings but one of them is, to acknowledge. Our faith is acknowledged by our actions.

And that's the point of what he's saying here. And as he gives these examples of Abraham and Rahab. Acknowledge. Our faith is acknowledged as true and genuine by what we do. And in their cases, what they did. And we call this the fruit of faith, it's the outgrowth, the fruit.

When you believe something, you act on it. You know, for years and years, I've been using this exact same argument when it comes to prayer. When you believe something, you act on it. You know, Christians talk a lot about prayer. They don't do it a lot, but they talk about it a lot. If I want to be guaranteed to have a really small crowd, all I got to do is put together a prayer meeting.

I'm serious, and because actions tell the story. I've always said, you know, your demonstration of how much you believe in the power of prayer is shown by how much you do it. Right? If you really believed it was going to make a difference, you'd do it more. And how many times is our understanding or our belief in prayer betrayed by making statements like, "Well, I guess all we can do now is pray." All we can do? All we can do? Isn't that many times the greatest thing that we can do? We don't think about it that way. Why? We don't really believe that it has that much of an impact. It's kind of a last-ditch effort.

"I'm going to do everything I can to fix the problem in my own strength, and if that doesn't work, well, I guess all I can do now is pray."

So, you see, you know, we're used to seeing this in our lives where action follows belief. Where belief generates action, real belief, and that sort of thing. So, you can kind of tell as you're reading through this passage that there's a very specific personality and attitude that James is targeting in this letter, can't you? He's talking about the person who's very quick to say, "Oh yeah, I believe. I believe in God, or I believe in Jesus."

But you can tell as you talk to them that they've never really given faith much thought. Have you ever witnessed to somebody and they came up with that statement? Just said that to you to try to kind of put you off from continuing to share. "I believe in God. Why are you talking to me like this? I believe in God."

That's the person James is targeting here. That's the person he's talking to. There's nothing in their lives of the faith that transforms and renews. You know, that changes the way we live. Can I bug you again with one more quote from Tozer? He writes,

The faith of [the Apostle] Paul...was a revolutionizing thing. It upset the whole life of the individual and transformed him into another person altogether. It laid hold of his life and brought it under obedience to Christ. It said goodbye to its old friends...it had a finality about it. It turned earth into a desert and drew heaven within view. It realigned all life's actions and brought them into accord with the will of God. It made him little and God big and Christ unspeakably dear. All this and more happened to a man when he received the faith that justifies. – A.W. Tozer

Isn't that incredible? I put those quotes up because there's no way I can possibly say that, that way. And I wanted to share that with you, but what Tozer is saying in that quote is absolutely true.

Real faith, genuine faith, it transforms the life. And you look back after several years of walking with the Lord at your old life and you're going and you say, "I don't recognize that person." Sue and I have a hard time even talking about our life before we came to Christ. Because, you know, we were married for five years before we started walking with the Lord.

We have a hard time even thinking about some of those years because they just...we don't recognize those people. They were different people. They were living for different things, different goals. They had different ideas of what life was all about and what to do with money and what to do with free time and what was the definition of pleasure.

And those things didn't, you know, they may not have all changed immediately, overnight by any stretch. But over time, as the Lord brings us past each mile marker, you know, of some aspect of transformation in our lives. There's that work that He does to change the people that we are, we think differently than we did before.

I can remember back in my early days in rock and roll radio when I, you know, was living the life and thinking along those lines, and the people that I talked to, and the things that I did, and the things that I would say that I wouldn't be caught dead saying today because Jesus has changed me from the inside, you know.

That's what faith does. When you put your faith in the Lord. Now, having said all that and having, I hope, brought a better understanding of what these latter verses in James chapter 2 are actually saying. I want to kind of wrap this up a little bit with a word of caution and this word is applicable to some of you.

And I'm not...this is not a...Oh, what do I want to say? I'm not speaking down to any of you, but I want to address those of you whom the Bible has a word for you, and that biblical word is faint-hearted. I want to talk to some of you who are faint-hearted. Because a faint-hearted person, according to the scripture, is one who is overly concerned about their salvation.

And I, frankly, wouldn't have been really aware of the existence of faint-hearted people because I've never questioned my salvation; but I'm very aware of them now, as in the last 10 years or so, connecting with people as I do. I have talked to many, many, many people who I would classify as faint-hearted. And they, these kinds of individuals, often overanalyze themselves.

And they can easily become afraid that they don't measure up. And I've learned that this condition is a little bit more common than I would've otherwise believed. To those of you who, and hopefully you know who you are, to those of you who would consider yourself faint-hearted in that particular respect, and by that definition, may I just say to you, "You are not the person James is targeting in these verses."

I say that because a passage like this one can send a faint-hearted person into a tailspin. I've seen it happen many many times because they're the kind of person who overthinks their life. They literally put their lives and their actions under a microscope, and they are constantly worrying that they're not bearing real fruit in their lives. In order to validate their claim of being a Christian.

And I'm hoping that you know who you are this morning, because like I said, over the past several years I've been introduced to this particular kind of personality, and I've become rather sensitive to them from the standpoint of how I teach the Word. I've recognized in some of my years past that because I wasn't that I...because I couldn't relate to that particular understanding, I would say things rather callously or recklessly, and some people would walk away feeling condemned. Because I hadn't considered the kind of personality that I was dealing with.

And over...you know, we're told in the Bible to examine ourselves. Paul tells us that, I think it's in Corinthians (referring to **2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV**), "Examine yourselves to make sure that you're in the faith." But these kinds of

people, they're kind of personal examine...and they do that they take that very seriously, faint-hearted people, but they examine themselves and their examination is so over the top that there's no possible way they could ever measure up to their own examination.

That's the kind of person I'm kind of talking about. And here's the problem. The enemy gets ahold of that. And you know what the enemy loves to do? He loves to condemn. And so, if somebody is already kind of disposed or predisposed to the idea of self-condemnation, and they don't think they're good enough, and God can never love someone like them, and can God really forgive me, and on and on and on.

The enemy gets ahold of that and pretty soon, you know, they're being tormented. They're literally being tormented by the enemy. And if you fall into that category, I want you to take this teaching and this passage here in James and I want you to pull out from it what you can. But I don't want you to torment yourself with relentless self-examination.

Because James is talking about people who are very casual about their faith, and I have found that people who are faint-hearted are not casual about their faith at all. They're serious about their faith. They're just seriously kind of messed up a little bit. Excuse me for saying so, from the standpoint that they've kind of allowed self-thoughts to trip them up.

So, I don't want that to happen. And because you know, guys, you got to understand the Word of God has to address everybody. Do you understand? The Word of God doesn't just speak to one person or one personality type. It speaks to all of us. And so, there are different messages based on who you are and where you happen to be at with the Lord. Do you understand that?

I find that there are Christians who struggle embracing the Word of God because they don't get what I just said to you. That there are different things that are spoken to different people. And I'm not giving you a free pass to ignore passages of the Bible that you don't happen to like.

I'm just making a statement, you know, that is true. Let me show you just an example. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians and he kind of said,

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

...we urge you, brothers admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak...

Now, I want you to notice about that passage he said that some people need to be admonished. Do you know what that word means? It means rebuked. Some people need to be rebuked. And it literally...it means scolded. Some people need to be scolded, but you know what? The faint-hearted need to be encouraged. They don't need to be scolded. They sit all day long and scold themselves. Have you ever raised one of those kinds of kids?

And so, you can see here, you know, that there...I mean you look at the letters that Paul wrote in the New Testament. You see that there were even attitudes in the churches that caused him to write different things to different churches. What did...you remember when Paul wrote his letter to the churches in Galatia?

It included...it was a long letter of strong warning, right? But when you read Paul's letter to the Corinthians or letters to the Corinthians, those were full of correction. But when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he wrote encouragement. He didn't correct and he didn't warn, he encouraged, because they were in a different place.

They were in a different stage of their personal growth in Christ as a church. And do you know that there are people who are in different stages of their growth and attitude in Christ? And so there are different messages that go out through the Holy Spirit to those different people according to where they're at, I think I made my point.

So, I want you to know that James is addressing a very specific attitude. A very specific, sort of a, you know understanding of faith in this. He's talking to people who are playing fast and loose with the idea of faith. And they're just casually going, "Oh yeah, I believe, I believe, I believe" and there's nothing in their life that shows it.

That's who he's talking to, okay. And those are the people, Paul would say, (referring to **2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV**) "Examine yourself to see if you're in the faith." But that's not a message for the faint-hearted.

So, if you are the person James is talking to, and maybe this is the, maybe the Lord has convicted you. And you can even sit there today, and you can say, "You know what? I've been playing fast and loose with the idea of faith, and I think I've just kind of never really much thought about it, and I've never really considered, you know, the kind of life-changing faith that is true and genuine. I need to heed this warning. I need to heed this word." And that's an important thing to do.

Amen. Let's stand together.

As we do every week if you need prayer then please come up front. We'd love to pray with you. We'll have some people here from our prayer team to pray with you or you can grab somebody that you know and just ask them to pray with you. If there's something weighing heavily on your heart, then I would encourage you to do that.

Father, we thank you so much for the Word and the Word is so good to speak to us in so many different aspects of life and attitude, and we thank you for that Father. We thank you for Your Word. We thank you for the power of Your Word. We thank you for the wisdom of Your Word. We thank you, Father, that we receive just the right warning. And I pray my Father, for anyone who could say to themselves, you know that I think this fits me.

I need to rethink this whole idea of what it is to truly trust in Jesus with all of my heart and to be transformed by that faith. To put faith into action. I pray my Father, that you would do that work and bring that person to a full and saving understanding of what it means to be confident in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

We thank you for Your Word. We thank you, Father, for speaking it to our hearts. And we ask for the ministry of your Spirit to continue with us as we go from this place, in the name of Jesus, amen.