

James 2:14-26

“Saving Faith”

What does “saving faith” look like in a person’s life? That’s really the heart behind this section of scripture. & It’s an important question to consider because *faith* is a key, (in fact critical) doctrine in the Christian life. – The sinner is *saved by grace through faith* (Eph 2:8), the believer is to “*walk*” or live by faith (2 Cor 5:7). The Bible teaches that *apart* from faith it’s *impossible* to please God (Heb 11:6) & that *whatever* is not *from* faith (Rom 14:23) is sin.

& Just for the record; when we talk about faith, we’re not talking about some sort of nebulous/indefinable feeling that we work up w/in ourselves. We’re talking about the confidence/conviction that the Word of God is true, which provides the inspiration & motivation to act *upon* it & render obedience *to* it, trusting (ultimately) that acting upon God’s *word* will bring God’s *blessing*.

Let’s jump right in along w/James here in Vs 14 of Ch 2.

Vs 14

Real quick, allow me to clarify his question at the end of this Vs. In asking, “Can faith save him?” ... If you took that question out of its context, the answer would be, “Yes.” You hear me quote it all the time. Acts 16:31, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,*”¹ In Jn Ch 6, when the people were asking Jesus what they needed to do in order to work the works of God (what did God require so that they could be saved), He answered & said to them, “*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*”² It’s faith alone that provides the conduit (the pipeline) through which the saving grace of God flows into your heart/life making you a new creation in Christ. – When James asks, “Can faith save him?” He’s asking a question that aids us in detecting/discerning or distinguishing a true & genuine faith from a false (or even self-deceiving) profession of faith.

He’s essentially asking, “What are the fingerprints of true/saving faith in a person’s life?” & The bottom line here is, “If a person professes to have faith, but there’s zero evidence of any kind of change in their life, can *that kind* of faith save him/her?” So, the question isn’t really, “Can faith save him?” The question is, “Can the kind of faith that produces no change in a person, really save that person?”

It’s a rhetorical question. The answer is implied in the way the question is phrased. “What good is it, if someone claims that they have faith, but nothing about their life backs it up?”

¹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ac 16:31]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Jn 6:29]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

The answer is, “It isn’t any good at all!” People have zero obligation (or really even any right) to believe that I’m saved if nothing about my life changes after I claim to have put my faith in God. We might even go as far as to say that a “workless” faith is a “worthless” faith.

We’ve already established that a person is saved through faith alone. We’re not saved by works. However, saving faith will *go to work & be at work* in our lives. Christianity doesn’t demonstrate itself simply by what comes out of my *lips* (though that’s certainly part of it), it involves what I do *w/my life* as well. – Paul captures the flow of this perfectly in Eph Ch 2 where he writes, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” (We’re not saved *by* good works). “*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*”³ We are saved *for* good works.

So, at the risk of redundancy, the kind of faith that will save my soul will effectively change my life. Remember the lesson in our previous passage? The Christian’s life should be marked by consistent courtesy *toward* others & compassion *for* others.

Vs 15-17

As James is so good at doing, he takes us from the *exhortation* (true faith will be at work in/through my life) to a practical *illustration*. & He’s distinguishing for us the difference between a *living* faith (that brings forth life/change, courtesy/compassion) as opposed to a *dead* or barren/fruitless faith that simply substitutes *words* for genuine *works*. Someone who may have the right *talk* (they can quote scripture & offer words that *sound* spiritual) but the reality is that that spiritual *tone* isn’t matched by their *walk* or the way that they lead their lives. – Somewhere in this person’s mind words are as good as works... they’re wrong.

James envisions you encountering a brother/sister in the Lord who is genuinely down & out. It’s cold, they don’t own a coat, they honestly have no idea where their next meal is coming from & you know this to be true... (This isn’t the guy on the street corner holding a sign that you know nothing about, that’s a different situation/conversation altogether). We’re talking here about the credible need of another believer that you come in contact with...

³ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [Eph 2:8-10]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

It's not a person who's refusing to work or feeling entitled or trying to manipulate you emotionally because they know that as a Christian you're wired toward compassion. This is a fellow believer in a destitute condition & they've been found by you *in* that condition.

James says, "If you just spit out some spiritual platitude toward them, 'Depart in peace, be warm be filled...'" or in our day we might be inclined to say, "Brother, let me pray for you that God would really provide for you..." But then we do nothing to help them... (Again, taking for granted you're in a place where you *could* help them. It may be a bit of strain, or a sacrifice for you, but you could put a few groceries on their plate or whatever the case may be.) He says, "Look, it's fine to pray that God would provide, but think it through, you're standing right there. God has placed *you* there to be the one through whom He provides!" If you pray *for* them, or offer some spiritual word of consolation *to* them, but then don't in any way *help* them... what good is it?

John said it like this, "*By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*"⁴ You see? John acknowledges that you have the means to help. You have "this world's goods". & That's generally the way that God will meet needs or provide for ministry. He uses *us* to be His hands, His feet, to show His love & compassion. A *saving* faith will be a *servicing* faith. We'll put our hand to the plow, get involved, help someone out... you get the idea.

A "workless" faith is a "worthless" faith. It's unproductive, ineffective, barren, sterile... dead. The picture is of a fallow field, there's no life that comes forth from it.

Vs 18-19

One thing about James; he's very thorough... ☺ He just continues to pound on his point (to prove the principle). He wants us to know, that faith w/out works... doesn't work!

& The concept that he's seeking to help us understand is this: what is it that ratifies, verifies, or confirms (the word he uses is "justifies") living/saving faith in our lives. How do we know that our faith (or anyone else's for that matter) is genuine faith as opposed to a false profession?

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [1 Jn 3:16-18]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

(& I know we've spent some time on this already, but he's still on it so we're still on it. It's of paramount importance that there's no confusion concerning it.) & At the end of the day it boils down to this. I can't "see" someone's faith. What I *can see* is the fruit of their faith, which is good works. (The examples James has spoken of throughout his letter so far is enduring tribulation, enduring/overcoming temptation, controlling our tongue, being patient, slow to speak, quick to hear, slow to wrath (or anger). He's mentioned laying aside impurity, receiving the Word of God in humility & responding obediently. He's spoken of treating people fairly & being available to help the truly needy.

& It's not that you'll always exemplify them all perfectly, but these are the kinds of things that will be developing & make for the fingerprints (or fruit) of genuine faith in your life. Jesus (in speaking of discerning true believers Vs would be deceivers) said it like this, "*You will know them by their fruits.*"⁵ The kind of characteristics & patterns that their lives produce.

Now: I should probably point out that some people set James & Paul at odds w/each other because Paul went to great lengths to show that we're saved by faith & not by works. & That by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. He spoke about in Romans, in Galatians. He said, "*...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*"⁶

So people contend. On the one hand you have James saying, "Works are essential." On the other you have Paul saying, "Works have nothing to do w/it." Is James right, or is Paul right? & The answer is, "Yes". These guys aren't at odds w/each other even a little bit. Their focus is on 2 different vantage points concerning faith. Paul speaks to the *root* of faith as to where James focuses on the *fruit* of faith. Paul is saying, "Works won't save you." James is saying, "After you're saved, faith goes to work in your life." Make sense?

Paul was talking about performing the ritual works of the law to make for your own righteousness. He used circumcision as his example. You can't do anything to make yourself righteous or acceptable before God... James is speaking of the righteous works of faith working through love.

A principle w/which Paul would completely agree. He penned words like, "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*"⁷

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 7:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ga 2:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ga 5:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Again, *"This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works."*⁸ One more, *"And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful."*⁹

On the other side is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). You have a priest & a Levite, each having had religious training, each would've defended their faith. But neither of which would stop to help the dying man on the side of the road. They would've professed faith, but there was no fruit of faith in their lives... It's that old saying, if you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough proof to convict you?

James goes on, "You believe there is one God." More literally, "You believe that God is one." The reference is to the great creed of Judaism. It's found in Deut 6, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one!" James lived in a day of pantheism (which is still around today, but not as prominent in our culture). *That there were many gods. But he's saying, "You believe that God is one." The idea is, "You have a correct understanding, that there's only 1 true Living God." – He says, "That's great, but an accurate understanding isn't enough. The demons have an accurate understanding as well..." Demons know that there's only 1 God, & they tremble before Him.*

So in one respect you could say, "Demons have faith." But it's not a *living* faith, it's dead faith. They believe in God, they know God to be true. But what is the fruit of demonic activity. What works are produced by demons? Are they God glorifying, others oriented, self-denying, body of Christ edifying kind of works? No. Therefore their faith does nothing for them. They're not saved. You know them by their fruits.

Vs 20-24

Back in Vs 20 James asks the question, "Do you want to know?" The idea is, "Do you really want to know the truth?" Some people don't like to be confused by the facts because their mind is made up. But James is saying, "If you want to know the truth, here it is. Faith w/no fruit (w/out works) is dead (of no value)." & Again, it's not faith *or* works. It's not faith *plus* works. It's faith *that* works. (I hope that makes sense to you).

But he brings up the illustration of Ab offering up his son Isaac (though God stopped him) as an example of faith that produces corresponding works. Now, God knew that Ab's faith was genuine the moment he believed, years before he offered up Isaac.

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Tt 3:8]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
⁹ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Tt 3:14]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He quotes the Vs, “Ab *believed* God, & it (his belief/faith) was accounted to him for righteousness.” That was the *root* of faith. God saw it & he was instantly accounted as righteous before God. However, the *fruit* of his faith, the true/genuine nature of his faith was made manifest in his obedience to God’s word so that others could bear witness to. We might say that he let his light so shine that others were able to see his good works & God was glorified in his life.

When it speaks of his faith being made “perfect” it means that it was brought into maturity. It blossomed (came into full bloom). So if faith is the *basis* for justification, then works is the *barometer* (or indication) of justification.

Ab teaches us that if our faith is real, we’ll obey God’s word & follow God’s leading (even if we ultimately don’t fully grasp where it will lead). There’s no way Ab could’ve fully understood either the “what” or the “why” behind what God has asked him to do. But looking back through the lens of the cross, we see perfectly the picture of the Father sacrificing His only begotten Son whom He loves upon that Mt for the sins of the world.

So, this acts as a bit of a litmus test for us as we examine ourselves as to whether or not we’re in the faith. If you’re not born again, you really have no desire to obey the word of God. If you find yourself obeying & desiring to obey God’s Word, that’s evidence of saving faith at work in your life... One has said that faith is the force behind the deed, the deed is the finality of the faith. Meaning; faith finds fulfillment in action.

Now, in these last couple of Vs James reaches to the opposite end of the spectrum to stop the argument & establish the very same point.

Vs 25-26

I love how James moves from the patriarch to a prostitute. From a Jewish man to a Gentile woman. He couldn’t have picked a polar opposite person. Why did he do that? Because he knew how people are. “You expect us to be like Abraham!?! The greatest patriarch of the nation of Israel, the father of faith! That doesn’t hardly seem fair, how can you expect us to be like him!?”

But in moving to Rahab, he shows that faith works the same way, regardless of who a person is, in everyone’s life. Jew/Gentile, male/female, patriarch or prostitute, doesn’t matter. Her story is found in Joshua Ch 2...

The short of it is this: Joshua sent 2 spies into the city of Jericho to spy it out before they set out to conquer it.

They came to her house to lodge there (it wouldn't seem suspicious for 2 strange men to mosey into a harlot's home). But when the king was told they were there he sent & told her to send them out. Instead, she hid them & when it was safe, she sent them out another way.

But before she did, she told them that she'd heard of all that God had done in delivering them from Egypt, how He'd parted the Red Sea & that He was going to give them that land... Here's the point. She heard God's Word, she *believed* God's word, & the evidence that she believed it is that she *acted* upon God's word. **Her *behavior* bore witness to what she *believed*. She forsook her old life, her old lifestyle, departed from her former friends & chose to identify w/the people of God. Ultimately, she winds up in the lineage of J.C. Himself... (Close)**

Listen, she didn't just tell them, I'll be here singing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow as you enter the city." She didn't just share some spiritual sounding platitude that went no further. Her *faith* stirred her to *action*. She got involved in the situation because she believed the word of God!

The lesson Ab teaches us is this: if we believe in God, we obey His word (we do what He says). The lesson Rahab teaches us is this: if we believe in God, we will help His people (even when it costs us something, even when sacrifice is involved).

"For as the body w/out the spirit is dead, so faith w/out works is dead also." So examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. What is the fruit of your faith? & Cry out like David, **"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."**¹⁰

Prayer Points:

God that is our prayer. Search us & know our heart. If there be any wicked way in us reveal it, strengthen us to repent of it, remove it & lead us in the way everlasting. May our lives bear witness to a true/genuine faith. Make us more like Jesus...

Btw, another thing we learn from the 2 extreme examples in Ab & Rahab is that *anyone* can be saved. It **doesn't** matter who you are, how old you are, where you've been or what you've done. **God extends the opportunity unto everlasting life to everyone alike.** We're all on equal footing before God (sinners in need of salvation). Jesus came to seek & the save that which was lost. You can leave your old life behind & become a new creation right here, right now, by God's grace through faith in J.C.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*, (1982). [Ps 139:23-24]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.