

Faith that's Alive

James 2:14-26

February 11-12, 2017

The book of James could be considered the Proverbs of the New Testament. He writes to challenge them to live according to the wisdom that comes from above, to have the word of God implanted in your heart and to abide by it so that you will be blessed in all you do.

He writes to challenge us to have faith that's authentic, sincere, and genuine; faith that's alive. Faith that genuine and real is living and active and will be seen in how you live your life. In other words, we should live according to our faith.

Those words come out of Habakkuk 2:4 and are quoted several times in the New Testament, "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within them; but the righteous will live by his faith." That's what James is calling us to, to live according to our faith.

Faith will direct your steps. In fact, Paul wrote in Romans 14:23 that anything that is *not of faith* is sin. How important is faith? Without faith it is impossible to please God, and He wants us to live according to our faith. In other words, if you have faith, then you have something to live by, it doesn't make sense to have faith and then not live according to it.

It's like having a GPS and not using it. How did people find their way before GPS? It was called a 'spouse,' and it usually ended in an argument. Just think how many marriages have been helped by having GPS. But what's the point of having one if you don't use it?

Before we had GPS on our phones, I had one of those GPS units that you attach to the inside of the windshield. You could download different voices so I thought it would be fun to download Yosemite Sam, Looney Tunes character and arch enemy of Bugs Bunny, to give directions. Every time you missed a turn he would get bossy, "Turn around you lily-livered muley varmit before you get us both lost."

If you have faith, and it's sincere and genuine, you should live according to it. The evidence of genuine faith is the good works that result from it. You can't have one without the other, they work together.

Maybe a good illustration would be a bicycle. Although bicycles are not as popular as when I was a kid. Things have changed. When I was a kid, bicycles were for traveling. I could go anywhere I wanted as long as I was home for dinner. Although with some of the dumb stuff we did, it's amazing we survived. If you're out on an adventure and lose a pedal, that's a tragedy. You try riding a bike with just one pedal and you realize it was never meant to be used that way.

The same is true with faith, it was never meant to be by itself, it was meant to be combined with works, with a good life and those things that come from a good heart. That's the theme of our verses today.

I. Faith without Works is Useless

- Verse 14 - James starts out with the negative, he shows you what faith without works looks like so you can see that it is useless.
- The point he drives us to is that there is no such thing as living faith that produces no works; only dead faith produces no works.
- While it's true that faith without works is dead, it's also true that works without faith is dead. Faith that does not produce good works is useless and works that are not born out of faith are spiritless.
- Faith by itself is not saving faith.
- Works by itself also doesn't save anyone.
- The two must be together. When you stand before God He's not going to ask if you recycled or if you saved the whales or helped old ladies cross the street. Your relationship to God is based on your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

- But having said that, nor does God want you to have faith that is dead.

A. Faith is seen by its works

- Verse 15 – “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and someone says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”
- Living faith does something useful; it does something helpful, it blesses those around them.
- It’s born out of sincerity of faith.

Illus - A good illustration might be Valentine’s Day. If you love sincerely then you want to do something to demonstrate that love. The action is derived from the heart that loves. Conversely, the person that brings the flowers and the chocolates without the love is doing it out of obligation and it is without life.

Isaiah 29:13, “This people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for me consists of tradition learned by rote.”

- Verse 18 – *“Someone may well say, ‘You have faith, and I have works;’ show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”*

Luke 6:43-44, “There is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its fruit. Men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush.”

B. Faith believes and seeks after God

- Verse 19 – You believe that God is one, you do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.
- There are no atheist demons; every one of them believes in God. Even Satan himself believes that Jesus is God’s Son.

Matthew 4:3-4, The tempter came and said to Him, “Since You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

Illus - Perhaps you remember the time when Jesus was casting a legion of demons out of a man and they requested that Jesus cast them into some nearby pigs. Which, by the way, was the

first time there was deviled ham. These demons said to Jesus, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me.”

- When we studied the book of Hebrews we read that those who come to God must believe that He is – and that – He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

II. Faith is Accomplished by What it Does

- Verse 22 – You see that faith was working with the works of Abraham, and as a result of the works, faith was fulfilled, or completed by the works it brought forth.
- James uses two examples in these verses, Abraham and Rahab, but he could’ve used the entirety of Hebrews chapter 11 which gives one example after another of heroes of faith.
- But would you notice in Hebrews 11 that the faith of these heroes is described by what they accomplished...
- Abel offered to God a better sacrifice... Enoch walked with God... Noah, in reverence for God, prepared an ark for the salvation of his household... By faith Abraham obeyed by going to the place he was to receive for an inheritance... By faith

Moses left Egypt... By faith they conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight...

A. Faith on the move grows stronger

- That's what it means when James says that as the result of the works, faith was completed, or perfected.
- In other words, *it is in the nature of living faith to always become stronger.*
- Faith on the move grows stronger. The more you exercise your faith through what it accomplishes, the stronger the faith becomes.
- The example of Abraham offering up Isaac his son on the altar is perhaps the capstone of Abraham's faith. But step-by-step he had been growing in his faith to bring him to this point.
- You see in Abraham's life several times where he faltered, his faith not yet fully accomplished.
- At one point when Abraham was in Egypt, he asked his wife Sarah to tell a half-lie in order to protect himself rather than trust in God's hand of protection.

- When God told Abraham that he would bear a son in his old age and that that son would be the fulfillment of God's promises to him, he laughed in his heart.
- But when you come to the story of Abraham offering his son Isaac on the altar, it is the capstone of Abraham's faith because he believed that He who promised was faithful. He believed that God's promises would be fulfilled through Isaac, just as He said, and therefore, if God wanted Isaac offered as a sacrifice, it must mean that God will raise him from the dead.

Hebrews 11:17-19, By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.

- That was such a pivotal point in the history of Israel that on that same Mount Moriah where Abraham offered Isaac, Solomon built Israel's Temple to the living God and on Mount Moriah God would sacrifice His only begotten Son.

- Verse 24 – You see that man is saved by faith that works, not by dead faith that has no works.

B. Faith knows when to wait

- As we talk about faith and works and quote these verses from James that make it clear that faith without works is dead, it's also important to say that sometimes faith is seen in what you don't do.
- Joseph received the promises of God but didn't see them fulfilled for many, many years.
- His faith was seen in his waiting patiently. His faith was seen in what he didn't do. He didn't give up, he didn't turn his back on God. He refused to give in to the advances of Potiphar's wife, saying, "How can I do this thing and sin against my God?"
- David had been anointed the future king of Israel, but had to wait many years for the fulfillment of that anointing while a very unrighteous King Saul pursued him relentlessly.
- When an opportunity presented itself for David to take matters into his own hands and take Saul's life, he refused to do it. His faith was seen in what he did not do...

1 Samuel 24:10, 12, “I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord’s anointed... May the Lord judge between you and me, but my hand shall not be against you.”

C. Faith on the move also speaks

- The next example James brings up is that of Rahab. She was a harlot living in Jericho and when the two spies from Joshua came into the city, she received them, hid them, and then help them escape to safety.
- She did all of this because she believed that the God of Israel was the great God over all the earth and that Jericho would be defeated. But would you also notice that not only did she put action to her faith, she also put words to her faith...

Joshua 2:9, 10-11, She said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you this land... For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt... When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

- Jesus was crucified between two criminals. At one point one of them began to mock Jesus, saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save Yourself and us!” But the other criminal answered, rebuking him, saying, “Do you not even fear God? We are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Luke 23:42, And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come into your kingdom!”

- On the basis of those words, spoken by faith, Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise.”
- When someone comes to faith in Jesus Christ, we ask that they confess with their mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and the Savior that offers life.

Romans 10:8-9, “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- This is also why prayer is so important. It puts words to your faith and into your relationship to God.

- If you believe, say it; if you have faith, speak it.
- Words spoken without faith is empty, but words spoken with faith are powerful.

James 5:16-17, The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

James 4:2, You do not have because you do not ask.