

## Is Your Faith Real? Part 2

*Epistle of James*  
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**Bible Text:** James 2:20-26  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 2. We'll be looking again at verses 14 to 26, a passage that we've been considering the last couple of times that we preached before, of course last Sunday with Sybrand de Swardt here. A wonderful message he shared from the Gospel and the glory of Christ. But now we return to where we were two weeks ago, James 2:14 to 26, and the question of the assurance of salvation.

The title of the message is the same as it was two weeks ago, "Is Your Faith Real?" Is your faith real? That's the main theme of James in these 13 verses, verses 14 to 26. He's trying to deal with the issue of false faith versus genuine faith. Essentially he's asserting that there are two types of faith. There is a genuine faith, a saving faith that results in eternal life, and there is a false faith, a shallow faith that is not real saving faith, and how can you know the difference? This is his pastoral concern and it's an important concern, I think for any Christian in any age throughout church history, this has been an important issue, the issue of Christian assurance. Is assurance of salvation possible? If we had been there when Luther was beginning to preach the Gospel and you had been a new convert, a new Christian, in the beginning of the Reformation, it would have been an amazing thing to consider that assurance was possible at all because the Roman Catholic error was that it was impossible, impossible to have assurance of salvation; that no one can know, that most everybody according to the Catholic doctrine still today, most Christians according to them, those that they would call Christians, will spend an extended period of time in a place called purgatory, burning and being purged of their sin so that they can then be ready to go into heaven. So had we lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and come to faith in Christ and the Gospel now made clear to us that we are able to be saved, to be justified before God by faith alone, in Christ alone, and we can know that we are saved, it would have been an amazing thing to be able to have assurance of salvation.

But in our day, we have the opposite problem. Most of us who have been in the church for long have probably been exposed to a totally un-biblical theology of the assurance of salvation and that is kind of an easy-believism. Some of the debate through the last 30 or 40 years has been between the free grace crowd on one side, and the Lordship salvation on the other. And the free grace side essentially asserts things that if you have made a profession of faith, if at some time you made a commitment to Christ, then it really doesn't matter how you live, you can know you are saved forever. And they believe that

that is what the Bible is teaching, but they are completely wrong. It's not what the Bible is teaching. The Bible teaches that, yes, you get saved in a moment in time when you place your faith in Christ, but that genuine faith is a living faith that will be evident in the way you live. True saving faith is not something that happens in your heart and is not evident, as Jesus said, "Unless you are born again, you shall not enter the kingdom of God." Well, to be born again means you have a new principle of life inside of you and life is always evident. If a plant is alive, you see it in its growth, the movement that happens as you watch a plant grow over weeks and months. When there is no life, there is no movement, there is no evidence of it.

And many of us have been exposed to this easy-believism. Even well-known preachers that we may find some of their stuff helpful, are really amiss in this area. I was reading some quotes from somebody that had meant a lot to me in my early years as a Christian, that's Charles Stanley. His book "Eternal Security," he is way off on this issue as are many even Baptists in this area. He says things like this in his book, "Even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever," listen to that, even if a believer for all practical purposes becomes an unbeliever, "his salvation is not in jeopardy. Believers who lose or remain in their faith will retain their salvation. Believers who reject their faith will retain their salvation for God remains faithful," page 94. He says you and I are not saved because we have enduring faith, we are saved because in a moment in time we expressed faith in our Lord. I would say that we are saved because at a moment in time we expressed faith in our Lord and our faith endures. That's what the Bible teaches.

Now, as I said, a wonderful man in so many ways and helpful to so many and so much of what he teaches, but in this area, this is a very important area to be right on and what happens is you have in this debate, illustrative of a principle I shared a few weeks ago. I was talking about how when you try to have a doctrine of anything, you know, a doctrine of marriage, a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, a doctrine of assurance of salvation, how do you have a biblical doctrine of the assurance of salvation or the doctrine of marriage? You let all that Scripture says inform your doctrine. You don't take some verses and ignore others. You let them all come into the room and have something to say. I used the illustration of like a large conference table. You know, you have a large conference table and people all stand around and you work together to make a decision, right? You get different opinions. You weigh things in. You talk about things. You come to a decision. Well, theologically that is an analogy, a helpful analogy to think of when you are going to have a doctrine of some truth, like the doctrine of marriage, you let every verse in the Bible that speaks on marriage into the room and you hear it and you form your position on what marriage is and from a Christian standpoint, hearing all of it. You don't rule some out of order because you don't like them or because they apparently disagree with something else. If they apparently disagree, because you believe the Bible is the word of God, you know the apparent disagreement is merely in appearance only. There can't be a real contradiction between God and his word because God does not lie.

So you wrestle with them to bring them together and I shared that heretics historically throughout church history are people who ignore Scripture at the expense of other Scripture. Jehovah's Witnesses, they know a lot of scriptures about the submission of the

Son to the Father, but they miss all the Scriptures that talk about the equality of the Son with the Father. And they use those verses to rule the others out of order so that their theology of Christ is deficient because they shut out large portions of Scripture from having any discussion.

The same thing is true with Reformed theology, the doctrines of grace versus the Arminian understanding of salvation. Arminians, that is people who believe that salvation ultimately depends upon man, you know, whosoever, they focus on verses like, "whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved," and they let those verses trump other verses like that, "you were chosen in him before the foundation of the world." You see, the Reformed position seeks to hear both sides of that. Everybody, every verse gets to speak to the issue, and when that happens, you then have a view of divine sovereignty and human responsibility because everything is there. And we know that, as someone has said the illustration, I think a good illustration of how the doctrines of grace work together with our responsibility, because you are responsible to repent and to believe the Gospel. The Bible teaches we are responsible for our decision. Yet the Bible also teaches that we are dead in trespasses and sins and cannot choose Christ unless he changes our hearts first. So ultimately it's not the man who runs or wills, as Paul says in Romans 9, but it's God who makes the determination.

Well, the illustration is on the outside of the door, the door of salvation, it says, "Whosoever will." That's the threshold of the door. You walk under the door into salvation and then you look back and it says on the other side of the heading of the door, it says, "Chosen before the foundation of the world." You see, it works together and so we need to have in all of our doctrines everything coming to the table. Well, when it comes to the assurance of salvation, the folks in the free grace side rule out a lot of passages and they ignore them and they sort of like use the verses on assurance and just trump and beat down the other verses and ignore them. That's how you come up with the position like I just said was articulated in that book, "Eternal Security." How can you say that you can have a saving faith that is not an enduring faith? When you read verse after verse after verse that says things like in Hebrews 3, "If we continue to hold fast our assurance firm to the end, then you know you are a believer." There are all these verses throughout the Scripture, they all have to speak.

So the Reformed position is that salvation when it truly happens, if you truly repent and believe the Gospel, you cannot be lost, but the one who is truly saved and cannot be lost will have a faith that perseveres. That's the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. The true believer will persevere in faith throughout his life. Jess was just reading from 1 Peter 1. Paul says that your faith will be proved genuine through your suffering and some people's faith will be proved to be false through their suffering clearly by implication. So everyone who has had an experience or think they are saved because they prayed a prayer according to the New Testament, they are not all saved. And isn't that consistent with what Jesus said when he said, "There will be many in that day who come to me and say," he said there will be many in that day who come to me and say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name? And I will say to them, 'Depart from me, you who work lawlessness. I never knew you.'" You see, all of

that has to come into our theology of assurance and James is providing us a key passage that needs to be let into the room to speak to the assurance of salvation.

The subject is the assurance of salvation. The title is "Is Your Faith Real?" And this is James's heart. His pastoral heart is to make sure that he helps the professing believer to not hear those dreaded words from Jesus, "Depart from me." It's the loving heart of God for us to be challenged to examine. Like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5, he is writing to Corinthians, professing believers, and he says, "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the household of faith." He doesn't say just assume that you are because you prayed a prayer, because you have been baptized. He says examine yourselves. This is exactly what James is saying verses 14 to 26.

Let's read God's word together. We'll be focusing on verses 20 to 26 but to get the context, we'll start at verse 14.

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you 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? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But 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." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that you might grant that the entrance of your word would give light into our hearts and that in your light we might see light, that you might search us and know our hearts, try us and know our thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. For Jesus' sake, in his name. Amen.*

Is your faith real? That's James's concern. He is dealing with the outward evidence of faith. The first message I preached on this three weeks ago, we dealt with the fact that James is not contradicting Paul. Now on the surface of it, it appears that he is. At first glance without careful just attention to what he's saying, it appears that he is, but the

reality is James is using the word "justified" in a different way than Paul is when he says, Paul says we maintain that "a man is justified by faith apart from works," Romans 3:28. James is saying basically in verse 24, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." It appears to be a contradiction. I dealt with this three weeks ago so I'm not going to rehash the whole thing. I encourage you to listen to that, but just to remind you that the determination of what a word means is from its context. In certain contexts, a word meaning can be radically different. An example of this might be the word "negative." You might say to someone, "You know, you really have a negative outlook. You're being so negative." In other words, "You're really being a downer. You need to pray and get your heart right. You know, we should be thankful, joyful. Where is the joy? You're just too negative." But in another circumstance you say to someone, "I heard that the results from your CAT scan were negative. I'm so sorry to hear that." You wouldn't say that, would you, after that? Because the result of a CAT scan or a PET scan or any kind of test like that looking for cancer, if the results are negative, the word "negative" doesn't mean negative, it means fantastic, right? There is nothing there.

So the word changes based on the meaning and you don't infuse the same meaning into different contexts. You realize that words change based on the context. James is not talking about how a person comes to have saving faith. That's what Paul is talking about in Romans 3:28, how a person comes to have saving faith. You come to Christ by faith alone apart from works when you come to have saving faith. James is talking about, well, Paul also talks about in other places, how can you tell if someone has saving faith after the fact? That's what he's talking about and in that case, he's saying a faith that truly has justified someone in the past, if they are justified by faith at a moment in time in the past truly, the sure evidence of it is good works in the present. That's what he's saying. So he's using the word "justified" in a different way than Paul is and just careful attention to the context just tells you that.

So let's look at this, verses 20 to 26 today. I want us to gather our thoughts around three points. The first is the proposition that James is asserting; and the second is the proof. He's going to assert a proposition, then he's going to prove it, and then he's essentially going to apply it. So the proposition, the proof and the application.

The proposition. What is James asserting in this passage? He is asserting essentially that the sure evidence of genuine saving faith is the fruit of good works. That's what he's saying. The sure evidence of genuine saving faith is the fruit of good works. Now, he is assuming, of course, that you understand that you believe the Gospel. He's not saying that if you're a Buddhist and you happen to have some good works, you're saved. Of course not. He's saying you understand that Jesus Christ came from God. He's eternally God. He became a man. He lived a perfect life. He died an atoning death on the cross. You're placing all your faith in him for salvation that by his stripes you were healed, through his resurrection you now have his righteousness. You're trusting in the Gospel. Now, assuming that and you assert that you believe in him, the true evidence of saving faith is good works.

So that's the proposition, the sure evidence of genuine saving faith is the fruit of good works. Another way of saying it would be the sure evidence of saving faith is a changed life or the sure evidence of saving faith, maybe more precisely, is a progressively changing life. The sure evidence of genuine saving faith is a progressively changing life. It doesn't mean, now we can't include the opposite from this, we cannot say that if we don't see good works in someone's life that we know they are not saved. We don't know. The Bible gives other, we have to let other verses into the room and ultimately the Scripture teaches that we cannot know with certainty about anyone else's salvation except our own. 1 Timothy says the Lord knows those who are his. Those who profess faith, the Lord knows the ones that belong to him, ultimately he alone.

Now, the Scripture teaches us that we can come to have assurance. So like the Reformers, as I said, if we had been saved early in the Reformation, we would have come to understand this amazing reality. Yes, you can come to have biblical assurance. You can have assurance of salvation. That's a wonderful treasure, but the balance is you can only be assured of your own salvation. Romans 8 says that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. You can come to have assurance of your own salvation but it is not the necessary result of just believing. It takes labor. It takes time. It takes prayer. Sometimes it comes more easily for some than others. Sometimes disposition is involved. Some folks tend to be more introspective and so over analyze themselves and struggle with assurance throughout their lives.

You may have heard the story of William Cowper. His name is spelled C-o-w-p-e-r, but it is Cowper, a hymn writer, a wonderful hymn writer. He struggled with assurance all his life and that is sometimes the lot of some people. Part of that, I think he was just subject to depression. You know, he needed to have more faith, yes, but there are some people that it's just easier for some people than others to just take God at his word and trust him, and then walking with him over time. I mean, we are all sinners, we remain sinners. The beauty of the Gospel is that you are justified and yet a sinner. That's what Luther came to understand, that when you repent and place your faith in Christ alone for salvation, you are at the same time a sinner and righteous because you have the righteousness imputed to your account by Christ. But to have the true assurance of that salvation is something that's a little more complicated than many of us have been taught through the years. It's not just write that down in your Bible the day you got saved. It is continue to follow Christ and that those who follow him, just like John says, remember in 1 John? Those who went out from us. Remember he says, "Those who went out from us were not of us for if they had been of us, they would not have gone out from us." That is, the true mark of the believer is he perseveres. He continues with the people of God. He continues following Christ.

So the proposition, the sure evidence of genuine faith is the fruit of good works. This is what James says essentially in verse 20, "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" If faith, if there is a profession of faith but there is no works beside it, he says that faith is apparently not working. In fact, the word "useless" means literally "not work." It's translated "useless" by all three of the major translations except for King James. That's the NIV, ESV and New American Standard

translate it "useless," but literally it's alpha privative, the "a" in front of a word which negates the meaning, and it's the word "work." In the Greek it's "no work." So it's like faith without works is no work. Faith without works doesn't work. It doesn't produce anything. It's not giving you what you hoped it was giving you. It's not going to produce the fruit of eternal life. If there is faith without works, there is no assurance.

He says that in verse 20. He says it again in verse 26, "so also faith without works is dead." If there are no accompanying works, that faith is dead. Now, we're going to see as we bring other Scripture to bear in our lives, we need to understand that Christians many times will have less fruit. I mean, there are differences in the amount of fruit that we have and there are periods where Christians can backslide, yes, and there are periods where Christians can doubt and wonder and even depart from the Lord. But the one who truly belongs to Christ, according when you put the whole New Testament together, will come back to God. The pattern of their life won't be just barrenness and barrenness and barrenness. There may be periods that are barren but the true believer will persevere and you will see faith over time. So we have to be careful at any point in time, we can't know for sure about someone but that the New Testament is telling us, "Hey, let's help one another to persevere. Let's love one another enough to say, hey, come on, let's go together and follow Christ. This area of my life that is not manifesting the fruit that it needs, help me." And God has given us the means to bear fruit and there are some practical things that we have to do. We're going to talk about that at the end, that's the application. I'm jumping ahead.

So the proposition, the sure evidence of genuine saving faith is the fruit of good works. That's his proposition. Now he proves it. The proof, the second point, and he offers basically three pieces of evidence. It's like exhibit A, exhibit B, and exhibit C. Exhibit A in verses 21 to 23 is Abraham. He says the sure evidence of saving faith is the fruit of good works. The way that you can know someone's faith is genuine is good works. The way that you can really know is good works. Exhibit A, look at Abraham. Verse 21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." James says, "Let's look at Abraham's life. Let's look at his profession of faith and let's see what we can learn from him." Remember, he's writing to Jewish believers so to lift up Abraham was the prototypical Jew. "Yeah, let's see what Abraham does teach us about this."

How can we know that we have a genuine faith? That's his heartbeat. Well, you look at your life, and he brings up in this passage something that happened in Abraham's life near the end of his life when he offered up Isaac on the altar. That's actually from Genesis 22. In fact, we're going to turn there. Go ahead and you might want to hold your place and we're going to come back and forth. So hold your place in James and let's turn back to Genesis 22. And it's important to see just the first verse of Genesis 22 and see how James's thinking is informed by the Scripture.

"Now it came about after," this is Genesis 22:1, "Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" Now the first thing to note is the key word "tested." It came about that God tested Abraham. This word in Hebrew means "to put to the test; to do an experiment; to try something to see if it's genuine." It's actually interesting, it's very much like a word, well, the Greek word, you know, remember the Old Testament is in Hebrew but then they translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek in the second century BC, and that Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. Well, the Septuagint translates the word "tested, after these things God tested Abraham," with the word *peirazo* actually, and *peirazo* is a key word in James. James uses that word seven times in chapter 1 and it's the word he uses in chapter 1, verse 2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." It's the same word in verse 12 when he says, "the one who perseveres under trial," James 1:12. Or four times in verse 13, the word "tempt." "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." And we talked about the word *peirazo* can be positive or negative. Negative, Satan tempts, more specifically he tempts, he tests, and the idea of the tempting is basically the negative side of *peirazo*, okay? I'm going to test it to try to trip you up and destroy you. That's Satan. God tests but not to destroy those whom he loves, but to prove them genuine which is exactly what he was saying in the passage we read earlier in 1 Peter 1 that Jess read, remember? That the testing of your faith produced, proved genuine. It's the same idea, this idea of trying something to prove it genuine.

So that's what God is doing to Abraham in Genesis 22:1. He's testing him to prove the genuineness of his commitment. This is exactly what James is talking about. This is why this is so relevant. He says, "Do you want to know if your faith is genuine, is your faith real? Look what God did to prove Abraham's faith real." Now, did God know that Abraham's faith was real? Of course he did but he's letting us see Abraham, what real faith looks like.

Well anyway, so he's testing Abraham and look at how he tests him. "'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take now,'" verse 2, "'your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.' So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day," a three day journey, "Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.'" Now we know from there the story continues that Abraham walks on with Isaac and Isaac, probably maybe 12 years old, we don't know for sure, we are not told, but he's big enough to carry the wood. Abraham lays the wood for the fire on Isaac, so here is Isaac walking with the wood. Abraham has the fire and the knife and the 12-year-old boy born to this man who, how old is Abraham? He's 112. He had waited 25 years for a son. Remember, he was 75 when God called him and his name Abram, remember it was Abram before it was Abraham, Abram in Hebrew meant "exalted father." That was just a name he had. "Let's name our



boy, we'll name him Abraham." Well, remember the Jews, it was sort of like, more like Indian names. You know how Running Bear, right? You know, Strong Eagle, something like that, right? The name means something. Our name is just, you know, Ted, Ty, Jess, whatever. It doesn't mean anything. It's just a label. Well, their names meant something so Abram was like, "Hey, here's my friend, Exalted Father. Yeah, he's the one over there with no kids."

So he has his name, it mocks him through his life. He and Sarah are barren and childless, 75, 65. This is when they lived to be about 150 so it's not quite the same as 75 today but still, he's like a middle aged guy. He's more like my age, 53. I mean relatively speaking. And no kids and his wife is probably at the time of menopause, that you would expect that she might be there and they haven't had any kids and so it's not like they're going to have any kids and the Lord says, "I'm going to make you a great nation." He's 75, she's 65. They wait 10 years and they haven't had any kids. Ten more years and at 85, the Lord comes to him and makes a promise to him and says, "Do you see the stars?" First of all, he appears to Abram. This is Genesis 15. I'm going back now in time, okay? Genesis 15, he says, Abraham says to God, "You know, Lord, I still don't have any heir in my family." He's basically graciously bringing up, "Hey, you know, you promised me I was going to be a father of a great nation. At 75 when I thought it was already kind of unlikely, you said I was going to be the father of a great nation. I don't have any heir." The Lord says, "Abram, look at the stars. So will your descendants be." In Genesis 15:6 it says that, "Abraham believed the Lord and it was reckoned to him," or credited to him, "as righteousness." He believed the promise of God that God was going to make him a great nation, even though he was 85 and his wife was 75.

Well, they have trouble waiting on the Lord and so the next year Sarah cooks up a plan with Hagar, and we know how that worked out. Fifteen years after that, the Lord comes to Abram at 99 and says, "Next year you're going to have a child and Isaac is going to be his name." So after all this time and all this confusion, at 99 years old he is told he is going to have a son when he is 100 years old. His son is born. Sarah is 90. And his name is Isaac because they laugh, Sarah laughed in derision at first. "There is no way this is going to happen." The Lord chastises her. Then they name Isaac out of the joy and the laughter when God blesses. How amazing is it? I bet they did spend a lot of time laughing. You know that wonderful laughter of, "Can you believe this? This is just too crazy? I'm 100 and you're 90 and here we've got a little baby." I mean, I bet it was tough for them to get up in the middle of the night with that baby. I never thought about that before. Praise God, he gives grace when you need it.

So there was laughter. They were rejoicing in what God had done. The boy is 12 years old now. Abraham was given an additional promise in Genesis 21 when he was told to let Hagar and Ishmael depart, to push them away. God said, "Send them away," and he told them in Genesis 21:12, "Through Isaac your seed will be named. All the descendants that are going to come from you, that I told you about, are coming through Isaac." Now, this is when Isaac is probably a year old or so. We don't know exactly because it's the conflict that happens between Ishmael's mocking the young lad.

So he now knows, God said, "You're going to give me descendants as numerous as the stars and now you've just confirmed it's going to be through Isaac, not through Ishmael." Eleven years later, fast forward 11 years, and God says, "Abraham, tomorrow I want you to go and offer your son on the mountain that I will tell you, as a burnt offering." "The son that we have waited so long for, the son of promise, you're now telling me something that doesn't make any sense at all," but Abraham gets up the next morning, immediately, early, and he takes off and he brings his servants with him and he goes to obey the Lord.

Now, what is God testing? God is testing does he really believe the promise. Now, God knows he does. What he's doing, the reason the Lord tests is to prove and to make more genuine. It's pure gold under there but how does gold get more beautiful? It gets in the fire purified. The impurities rise to the surface. They are crossed off and the metal becomes pure and more glorious and so the Lord is purifying his faith. And James says if you have saving faith, the effect, the evidence of it will be perseverance in trials. That's the good works that he's talking about. It's not going to be that a true believer will say, "Yeah, I went down front. I got saved at an event. I was really emotional at the time. I know it was genuine. You know, I changed my life in some small ways but then I've got no use for God. I don't care about going to church. I don't care about being in the word. Or I go to church but I don't really care how I live. I don't care that I get angry all the time. That doesn't mean anything. You have works, I have faith." James is writing to that foolish person that he said back in James 2:20, "Are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" Foolish fellow, you empty fellow. I think there's a play on words going. You're empty in your head, you don't have good understanding, but your life is also empty of good works and the work of God, and are you going to sit there and maintain in your position that your faith is able to save you? Aren't you willing to recognize, he's basically saying, "Do you want evidence that faith without works is useless? I'll give it to you," and then he gives him three points, first with Abraham.

Now, back in James 2 because we are back there now. We'll go back to Genesis so hold the place there too. He says, verse 22, "You see that faith was working with his works." When Abraham offered up Isaac, he's demonstrating the reality of his saving faith. He's demonstrating that he was truly justified by faith 25 years before, 27 years before, because it happened at a point in time. That's what Genesis 15:6 says. We can look at his life and we know with certainty because we have God's word telling us. When Abraham looked at the stars, he believed God and at that moment it was credited to him as righteousness. Paul takes this same, Genesis 15, not Genesis 22, Paul takes the Genesis 15 event and uses it in Romans 4 to explain the how that we get justified. You believe the promise of God and you put all your hope in the promise of God. You don't trust in your own works, you trust in his finished work, in his promise. That's how you come to be saved, justified.

But James is saying, he's not arguing with Paul at all. What he's doing is saying, because he quotes Genesis 15:6 too, but he is basically, he quotes that after Genesis 22. He says Genesis 22, Abraham offering Isaac is the perfection, the completion, the fulfillment of Genesis 15:6. It's not the fulfillment in the sense of adding something new. No, Abraham

had saving faith. If you really could parse this out with James, this is what he would say, "Abraham had saving faith in Genesis 15. Yes, he did, but the evidence of it is in Genesis 22. It is persevering faith. It's a faith that would continue to follow God even through dark days." This is the beauty of saving faith. It evidences itself, it becomes stronger when things are more difficult.

Now, it doesn't mean that true believers, they can be shaken. That's why there are so many exhortations and that's why we have this kind of passage. I mean, when you go through the circumstance, Abraham was not, it wasn't an easy thing for him to do and it's not easy for Christians to hold on when things are falling apart around them. It's not easy to hold on, like I was talking with William Cowper, through severe depression and these kind of things and a suicidal kind of thing that he dealt with. It's not easy to hold on. God's not saying it's easy but he's saying that the evidence of true faith is that more often than not what you're going to see in believers' lives is the perseverance. At times you won't see it but then you'll see it again generally. This is what we need to be aware of.

So the proof is there and he adds to it. Let me just quickly because I think, to me he puts, he front loads his argument. He puts exhibit A is like the clincher, and then he adds exhibit B and exhibit C, because I was tempted to reverse the order. I was like, "James, I would do exhibit C, exhibit B, exhibit A." But, you know, he's inspired by the Holy Spirit so I'm not going to argue with him but I am going to deal with it according to how he deals with it. He spends a lot of time on exhibit A. I mean, 21 to 23, and then 24 sums up. Really 21 and 24 is exhibit A, then verse 25 is exhibit B, verse 26, exhibit C. I remember that the are three pieces of proof: exhibit A, exhibit B, exhibit C. Exhibit A is Abraham. Exhibit B, this is the proof, the second point, point B: Rahab.

Verse 25, "In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?" Remember the story of Rahab. This is when after the 40 years in the wilderness, Moses is dead, Joshua is leading the people, they are crossing into the Promised Land, and they are beginning to scout out the land to conquer it, and they send in some spies who go in and they go to Jericho and they are spying out the city and they run into a woman named Rahab, the harlot, or Rahab, the prostitute. She meets them and she says in Joshua 2, "We heard about what the Lord," what Yahweh, "did to the Egyptians and the terror of Yahweh is upon us." She's basically saying, "Listen, there are many here who have heard the story and I believe that your God is God." I don't know the God the people in Jericho worshiped but they didn't worship the Lord. But she basically is saying, "I want to be a worshiper of the Lord. I believe he's the true God."

Now, how do you know her faith was real, James says? She could have just said that, hedging her bets, you know. This is very polytheistic, you know, like the Romans. Hedge your bets. You know, they would conquer a land, they had their gods but they let those people keep a god too because maybe that god is a god. So let's just let them worship them too. So Rahab could have been like that but she wasn't like that. She was devoted to Yahweh and how do you know it? She hid the spies and sent them out another way. The people in Jericho were looking for them. The king of Jericho had heard they were there.

They were looking for them. She hides them and then she sneaks them out and tells them how to avoid the guys that are out looking for them and that proves she really believed in the Lord. It's clear and obvious.

Then he adds exhibit C, verse 26, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." When someone dies, their body is still there. They have just passed away, you see the life leave them. Think about the body now without the spirit. It's essentially of no value. You don't keep a dead body in your house for years, you know, by a loved one. No, that's crazy. The body without the spirit is dead. It's worthless. He says so is faith without works. So is faith, that is faith in word only, faith that says it believes but has no animating – listen to this – faith that says it's faith but has no animating life principle in it. True faith is alive. It's a living faith. Saving faith is a living faith. That's what James is arguing and, you see, this is why you have to let James into the room to talk about assurance. To have the view I mentioned earlier, the false view of easy-believism, you have to say, "James, I don't want to hear what you have to say." And you have to also say that to Paul in a lot of places, and Jesus. You've got to basically edit your Bible. Now, people don't think they're doing that, of course not, but I really believe they are unwittingly not listening to the whole counsel of God. We need to listen to the whole counsel of God.

So he basically lines up these three points of evidence and says, "Listen, if you want to argue that you can have a faith that is in word only and that you think that that's going to save you, look at these examples. Example. Example. Example." No, saving faith is different. There is a sense in which I want to come back to the animating principle of true faith. A couple of key words he uses. In verse 22, "as a result of the works, faith was perfected." You see that faith was working with his works, talking about Abraham, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. When he went and did what he did by getting up in the morning, heading off toward the place the Lord had told him to go, chopping the wood, all the way to raising the knife, all of those works were evidence of his faith and his faith that he had, it was already there. It's not that these works are not adding to his salvation. No, they are demonstrating his salvation. They are not adding to it. It's not faith plus works, the Roman Catholic system. No, it's faith alone. But genuine faith alone in Christ will not remain alone, works will follow.

So that he means that his faith came to its fuller end. Maybe it's an image of you plant a seed. We don't do this very often anymore. I don't like doing that myself. I'd rather go to Home Depot and get a plant and stick it in the ground. I don't have enough faith, I guess. But actually that's not about faith, that's just about common sense and how bad I am with plants. But, you know, you plant a seed in the ground and the seed is alive, it germinates, and it grows up until you have a tomato on it. You see, I would have gone and got the plant already but if you planted the seed, somebody had to plant the seed in the first place, you plant the seed and now you have a tomato. James is saying essentially Abraham's faith in Genesis 22 is like the tomato. It was there in a saving way in Genesis 15:6, 27 years earlier, but you see it continuing to grow and continuing to bear fruit and you see the evidence of a living faith.

And think about how that is true and it's beautiful because what was the essence of his faith was about God is going to give me as many descendants as the stars in heaven. The seed, God is going to save through the seed that's going to come through me. Ultimately he was looking to Christ but the idea was, "My descendants, salvation is going to come through my seed and my seed is going to come through Isaac." So when he went off on that three-day journey and he lay his son on the altar after Isaac had said, "Where is the offering? Where is the lamb?" And how hard that must have been. Abraham said, "The Lord will provide." "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Verse 7. Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them, they walked on together. They come to the place which God had told him. Abraham builds the altar there, and arranges the wood, bound his son Isaac, laid him on the altar on top of the wood, stretched out his hand, took the knife to slay his son and the angel of the Lord called him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham." "Here I am." He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad. Do nothing to him for now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld from me your son, your only son from me." You see, now your faith has been demonstrated. Your faith has been made evident.

Your faith, what was your faith in? That you would make through Isaac all the descendants of the earth, all the descendants, my seed would come through Isaac, salvation would come through Isaac, his descendants. The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 11:17 to 19 says this, that when Abraham offered up Isaac, he so believed the promise of God, he so believed that God through Isaac your descendants will be named, the author of Hebrews bring this up, he knew God was telling him to kill Isaac. Isaac is a 12-year-old boy, has no children. Through Isaac's descendants your seed will be named. He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead. Now, think about that and look with me at verse 5, Genesis 22:5. Verse 4, "On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. Abraham said to his young men," now he knows why he's there, he's going to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. "Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.'" Even if God has me kill him, I believe his word. He said through Isaac my descendants shall be named. He cannot lie. So Abraham walks believing in the same faith he had in Genesis 15:6 is growing up and manifesting itself in a glorious way. This is what our faith is meant to do.

So he makes this case, ironclad case but the application of it, James is not doing it to discourage us in our walk with God, his purpose or the application is to shake up complacent believers, people who say they believe and yet they don't really seem to be concerned about their life, honoring God. He says, James is saying, "Listen, you need to not presume that you have saving faith if you don't care about holiness at all." And the exhortation itself is meant to awaken those who are truly saved because Christians can be like that. We can quit caring about holiness. We can quit caring about purity. We can start giving in to the flesh and God wills us that we not do that and he gives us this passage to be a corrector to us, to be kind of a pop on the head, the shepherd hitting us with the rod. No, saving faith cares. So wake up. It's to motivate lethargic Christians, those who profess to have faith, to motivate them to persevering faith.

You say you have faith, where is the outward evidence? Now, don't be merely those who say, "It doesn't matter whether I have outward evidence. I know my experience." James says that's not valid. "I know I have faith. The guy when I got saved told me that." That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches there will be outward evidence or you shouldn't have assurance without outward evidence. It doesn't mean that there won't be outward evidence in every case. Sometimes people die before that's available. We don't know. We can't see and outward evidence is in many forms.

It's like Jesus tells to the Ephesian church. Remember he says to the Ephesian church in Ephesians, not in Ephesians, Revelation 2, "you have forsaken your first love." He's basically saying to them, "Wake up. You have a form of godliness but is it real?" And what does he tell them to do? He says, "Go and do the things that you did at the first." You see, God loves us enough to wake us up and stir us up and say, "Go and do the things you did at the first." If you're doubting your own salvation or you're concerned and the Lord is working on your heart today, he's saying to you, "Go back to Christ. Do the things that you did at the first. Focus on the Gospel. Get in the word. Pray. Ask the Lord to have the energy and the follow-through to deal with issues in your life. Get involved with other believers. Help one another."

He would be, James would be telling us at this point, "Do what I said in verse 25 of chapter 1. Look intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty. Remain in it and don't become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer. That is, get in the word and what the word does is the word is the law, the law exposes what's wrong with me. Look at my life. Look at my heart. Look at the wicked desires in my heart right now. It should not be this way." What do you do? Don't be complacent. What do you do? Run to Jesus. You say, "Jesus, here I am again with these same sinful desires, the sinful selfishness, the same patterns I have. Look at this. Help me." You run to Christ, you receive from him the forgiveness of those sins, you receive from him the righteousness, the power then to live in victory over it.

But you run to Christ. The law will drive you to Christ and in driving you to Christ, to his word. You don't just go and just confess and say, "Thank you, do you forgive me?" You say, you confess, "Thank you that you have forgiven me now help me walk in truth. What does your word say? Replace these sinful desires with godly ones by walking in your truth."

And you meditate on the word. Like he says, you become an effectual doer. This is what the word says. "Even though I feel like doing this, I'm going to walk in obedience this way because I have the power of Christ in me. I don't feel like I do but I know that his word is true." And it's that kind of laboring to trust in Jesus all the way that produces life change and James is saying, "Listen, if you are truly a believer, you ought to want to walk with God, and if you don't, seek him. Pray earnestly. Lord, examine me." But the answer is don't be in despair. The answer is run to Jesus. Remind yourself of the Gospel and persevere in calling out to him and following him and then over time, you're going to find maybe today there is not the fruit there but if you'll seek him and trust in him and

rest in him, three months from now the Lord may remind you in a situation, "I'm different than I was three months ago in this area." And when affliction comes, there is a greater level of trust in him and as that happens, your assurance grows and that is biblical assurance and that's something that you can bank your life on.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank you for so great a salvation that you do take sinners like us and by the great sacrifice of your Son you make us righteous forever in your sight. Eternally secure, yes, we praise you for that but we thank you that you have also warned us that we need to examine ourselves and to see if the fruits of genuine faith are there. Lord, have your way in every heart. You know those who are yours and you know those who need to become yours today, and thank you that when you expose that someone is not yours, you're not doing it to cast them away, you're doing that to call them to yourself. Your word says today is the day of salvation. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. You are ready to save, so great is your graciousness and your lovingkindness. Father, help us all to build our assurance upon this solid rock of your word, the finished work of Christ worked out and understood through the teaching of your precious word, and let us exhibit more and more holiness and more and more genuine faith as we go through the trials that you bring. Let us rejoice knowing that even these, even this, is to purify my faith all to the praise of our Savior. We pray this in his name. Amen.*