

# Dead Faith

Sermon 8 in the James Series

## James 2:18-26

Today we take on one of the most controversial passages in the entire NT.

And I have prayed and thought long and hard about how to approach this passage in a way that is understandable without being simplistic – and thorough enough to cover the topic without belaboring it -- and not gloss over the subject – but not spend time answering questions that no one is asking.

### Introductory Observations

1. We believe the Book of James IS inspired and is part of the Word of God.
2. We do not believe that James could be presenting “another gospel” since it is inspired.
3. James is practical and pastoral more than theological and technical.

We can consider it a NT wisdom Book – similar in many aspects to the Book of Proverbs in the OT.

Paul is the great theologian of the church.

James is a great pastor in the church – and his exhortations are not at odds with Paul – as we will see – but they are the other side of the coin.

Faith will always produce fruit – 30 – 60 – 100 fold – Jesus and Paul say the same.

So faith w/o works is dead – it is not real faith at all – which is living. Works without faith is legalism and heresy, and trying to win favor with God by works/righteousness IS NOT what James teaches at all.

We are to be Christ-like.

Our hope is in what Christ has done for us.

James says the same **1:18**

## **Read 2:14-26**

Last week we dealt with verses 14-17

It is the first of 5 illustrations that James uses to illustrate his main point that  
“A FAITH THAT HAS NO WORKS IS NOT TRUE FAITH AT ALL.”

If we understand James 5 illustrations, regarding v. 17, we will understand the important truth that he is proclaiming.

1. Be warmed and filled
2. The demons
3. Abraham’s offering of Isaac
4. Rahab
5. A body without the spirit

## **I. The Argument Stated and a Challenge Issued 18**

It is critical we understand this hypothetical argument – because James answers the question by a variety of examples. We already saw the first example – what good does it say, “Be warmed and filled” and do nothing.

No one has ever been clothed or fed by good wishes.

So a test is set up.

Show me your faith – without your works.

Let me see this faith – prove to me you have it.

I will show you my faith – by what I do – and I’ll back that up with the evidence of others also.

### **1.Exhibit One -- The Demons 19**

The demons believe.

They do not doubt the existence of God.

They do not doubt the power of God.

They do not doubt that God is true.

THEY BELIEVE – IN FACT THEY KNOW – and they hate it!

What good is their belief?

What benefit comes from their “faith”?

Can THAT FAITH save them?

Back to verse v.14 -- “that” is valid.

We all admit – the demons CAN NOT BE justified by the things that they believe.

NOW they could not be justified by the things they do either – in fact – just the opposite – they are condemned and if anything FURTHER condemned by their works – because their works are evil.

But James is not making a positive point that they could be SAVED OR LOST by their works at this present time.

That is a fallacy that would follow if James was trying to prove SALVATION BY WORKS – he is making the point that their belief in ONE GOD – which is correct – is not saving faith.

## **2. Exhibit Two – Abraham 20-24**

This is the longest and most important argument.

James spends the greatest amount of time on it, and so will we.

But let’s look at the next two exhibits first.

## **3. Exhibit Three – Rahab 25**

Now, did Rahab HAVE FAITH?

We know she had works – that is undeniable – because we know what she did. But did she have faith?.

Turn to **Hebrews 11:31**

Again, a work is given as proof of faith – and “by faith” is given to us by the Hebrew writer – but faith in what?

### **Joshua 2:8-13a**

Once again, Pastor James has proven his point.

But let’s remember what his point is:

His point is NOT that works alone saves.

His point is that faith that is not attended by works does not save.

Suppose Rahab had said ALL OF THAT – to verse 11.

And then, turned the spies over to the Jericho authorities.

WOULD SHE HAVE BEEN SAVED?

Would she have been spared when Jericho fell?

No more than the demons – who believe and tremble.

His point is TRUE FAITH will always be attended WITH works.

### **4. The Final Exhibit – A Dead Body v. 26**

You can’t always turn everything around in logic.

The body can’t live without the spirit – true.

The spirit CAN live without the body.

Faith cannot be proven without works.

But works does not prove faith.

Lost men can do good works – it won’t save them.

Lost men can do works THAT LOOK good.

TRUE faith will bring forth TRUE good works.

But even then, that is ONLY THE PROOF of the reality not the reality.

Faith is the necessary first of all – then that faith must be able to have some tangible proof – or fruit attached.

## **II. James Conclusion 2:24**

Here is where the stumbling comes.

Taken alone and out of context – we would conclude this is wrong.

But James and Paul are not using the language of “justified” in the same way.

James’ practical point is obvious – a faith that has NO FRUIT is not real faith at all.

Paul’s theological point is – a salvation that includes any merit or works of men – is not real salvation.

### **Genesis 15:6**

*And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

How do we know Abraham believed God?

James quotes from Genesis 15 – and he is proving his point by the illustration of Abraham offering Isaac from Genesis 22.

He was called “the friend of God”. Where is that?

### **2 Chronicles 20:7 – In the prayer of Jehoshaphat**

*Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?*

### **Isaiah 41:8 – The words of God Himself**

*But you, Israel, are My servant,  
Jacob whom I have chosen,  
The descendants of Abraham My friend.*

Abraham was THE FRIEND OF GOD.  
Turn to James 4:4 – here is the opposite.

Which one was Abraham – and how do we know?

### **III. The Example of Abraham**

#### **A. The Faith of Abraham Explained – Hebrews 11:17-19**

The Hebrew writer tells us just how incredible Abraham’s faith was.

The writer obviously knew the account well.

Abraham was tested by God – we are told this in Gen. 22:1

Abraham offered up Isaac – “his only son” – not literally – but as Gen. 22 makes clear – HIS ONLY ISAAC – the only heir and the one through whom would come the promises.

God SPECIFICALLY told Abraham that Isaac would be the promised son.

But now, God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

The writer reads between the lines – in Gen. 22 – the account we are going to read next.

Abraham says to his servants that he will return to them with Isaac.  
Abraham knows he is being asked to sacrifice Isaac.

Abraham’s conclusion – and Abraham’s faith was such that:

Isaac was born in IMPOSSIBLE circumstances.

Evidently – when I slay him – God will raise him from the Dead.

Not wanting to speculate too much – and do understand that I am speculating -- but could Abraham have thought that maybe Isaac was MORE than just the son of promise?

How could a dead son bring forth offspring?  
He couldn’t, so a resurrection must be in order.

## **B. The Faith of Abraham Illustrated – Gen. 22**

Abraham is the Father of the faithful and the Father of the Great Nation.

-- In the OT we see Israel as that great nation.

-- In the NT we see Israel and Gentiles – THE CHURCH as the spiritual heirs of Abraham and the fulfillment of the promises.

### **1. Of what does a nation consist?**

**Offspring – Land – a Constitution – Leaders**

#### **OFFSPRING –**

*A physical nation has physical offspring.*

God would do that for Abraham, actually making him the father of MANY nations, but Israel would be the blessed nation.

*A spiritual nation is comprised of spiritual offspring.*

The Jews of Jesus day were PROUD to be Abraham's children. Christ told them they were of their father THE DEVIL. The New Testament fully reveals something that was ALWAYS true – even in the Old Testament –

Only those who come to God by faith are the REAL children of Abraham.

#### **LAND**

Obviously Canaan land for Old Testament Israel.

In a Spiritual sense – we, like Abraham, by faith, look for a city without human foundations, whose maker and builder is GOD – the New Heaven and Earth.

#### **A CONSTITUTION**

*Moses* would bring them the law in written form.

It was moral law , civil law and ceremonial typology.

We are blessed to have THE COMPLETED AND FINAL WORD REVELATION OF GOD as our only rule of faith and practice.

#### **LEADERS**

Israel had many leaders, until *finally King David* came on the scene, and then his sons reigned after him.

We have GREAT DAVID'S GREATER SON, who will never leave His throne – for His throne is an everlasting one.

## **ABRAHAM – GEN 22:1-18**

### **2. Abraham offers Isaac**

#### **Read and tell the story**

#### **v. 18 – Abraham obeyed**

He obeyed a command he could not understand – but had clearly been given to him.

He endured great difficulty and worked hard to fulfill this command.

He came right down to the crucial second – and then obeyed TWICE!

He obeyed by offering Isaac – The deed was as good as done.  
He obeyed by NOT offering Isaac – he stopped.

#### **How does the angel say he knows Abraham had faith?**

##### **v. 12**

Which, no doubt is why James uses this as his prime example that faith, without works is dead.

Abraham could have simply SAID that he believed God.  
Abraham PROVED he believed God – he proved his faith was real.

## **Romans 3:19-28**

Where is boasting? v. 27

Does Abraham have ANYTHING to boast about?

No

But Abraham DOES have faith.

A faith GIVEN and GROWN by God.



A faith tested and tried by God.  
A faith that is a real and true faith.

**4:1-8**

**4:20-25**

This SO GREAT SALVATION cannot be earned.  
And this SO GREAT SALVATION is not for the self-righteous.  
It is for SINNERS.

It is for those who will BELIEVE GOD.

It is for those who will repent of their sins – and put their faith and trust  
solely in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you know Him?  
Do you believe in Him?  
Are you FULLY trusting Him?

Focus on CHRIST and not YOUR OBEDIENCE and He will bring fruit into your  
life by His grace and for His glory.

PRAY

HYMN 731

Benediction: Romans 4:7-8