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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

November 18, 2012

Faith Without Works is Dead

James 2:14-24

Prayer: *Father, we do thank you and we praise you for the incredible gift that you have given to us, the gift of your Son, the gift of eternal life. Father, I thank you for the gift of faith. And Father, this morning as we look over these gifts, we are at that part in your word where we are examining anew and afresh the gift of faith, and I pray that your Holy Spirit would help us in this examination. I pray that you would guide us as we look into your word and there's much in there that is deep. Lord, I pray they we would have your Holy Spirit's ability to grasp these deep truths, that you would give us your mind, your heart, and especially your Spirit. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, as I alluded to in our prayer, our text this morning is one of the most controversial texts in the entire New Testament. Not because it's incredibly difficult to understand, in fact James' words here are remarkably simple, for the most part. It's just that individuals in whole denominations have argued for centuries over how to interpret these following simple words. This is from

James 2:14-24. James says: *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 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? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 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. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 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. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

Well, James is making a very simple statement. He's telling us that the proof of genuine faith will always have in its expression works. And if an examination of our lives reveals none of these works or works that are so phony and so empty as to suggest that a naked person magically clothed himself or a hungry person magically

get fed without us lifting a finger, well then, it's reasonable to conclude that there was no faith there in the first place.

The problem comes when people begin to compare James' words with the words of Paul. You see, Paul said this about works in Romans 4:1-5. He said: *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.*

Again, Paul is telling us some very simple facts. He is telling us that works alone will never justify us before a holy God, that we cannot in our own flesh earn our way to heaven by doing good works, and that God will never, never reduce the gift of salvation down to wages that are owed to a worker, and that the only way to be justified before a holy God is to appropriate by faith the only works that are acceptable to him, and that's the work of his Son dying on the cross on our behalf.

The problem is this: For literally centuries, people have been

trying to pit the words of James against the words of Paul, and they are speaking of two very different but highly related things. They are speaking about two different sides to the very same coin, and heads doesn't look like tails and tails doesn't look like heads, but they're both part of the same thing. The coin is salvation itself, the believing part and the doing part. As Martin Luther said, a true believer in Jesus Christ is someone who is saved by faith alone through a faith that is never alone. It is always accompanied by works. So the problem occurs here is when you draw conclusions by only looking at one side of the coin, because when you do that, it gives you an incomplete, a partial portrait.

This morning I want to look at some of those incomplete portraits. And first partial portrait comes from seeing the coin only from the perspective of works, and it produces two different types of doers of these works. There are proud doers, and there are terrified doers. A proud doer is someone convinced that he is justified by the good religious deeds that he does. And the Pharisees were classic examples of proud doers. They convinced themselves that merely doing religious works, many of which they just simply invented out of whole cloth, but doing these works made them worthy to stand before a holy God, so they thought. And Jesus said in Matthew 15:7: *"You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you,*

when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Well, you know, today's proud doer's not nearly so blatant as the Pharisees were. He's simply confident that when it comes to measuring his good deeds versus his bad deeds, that the good deeds is going to outweigh the bad, and somehow that will get him justified before God. The proud doer represents probably the largest cohort of people falsely convinced that they have a right standing before God. These are our neighbors, our friends, our relatives, our colleagues, our acquaintances, they may be sitting right next to you here at church, because they often go to church. It's one of the things that they think you have to do in order to be justified before a holy God.

You see, the proud doer, the proud doer is someone who believes he has the keys to his own faith in his own hands. In Matthew 10:39, Jesus challenges that notion. He says: *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* So when he asks the question what did Jesus mean by "whoever loses his life will find it," I mean, do you have to lose your grip on your own life to prove that you have this new life? Well, the answer is yes. Yes, you do. You see, Jesus is saying if you find

your life within yourself, within your own resources, your own abilities, your own good efforts, your own good works, you will be lost. Paul says this in verse 5: *To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.* Proud doers don't get that. They genuinely believe that saving faith can be reduced to a series of rules and regulations that they feel they are quite capable of living up to. I just try to live my life by the ten commandments or I just try to live out the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus categorically rejected salvation by doing alone. You know, at one point someone directly asked Jesus this question that we've been batting about. In Matthew 19:16, it says: *"Now behold, one came and said to him" -- that's Jesus -- "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* Now, do you remember Jesus' answer? This was the rich young ruler. A classic proud doer. Someone who was decent, moral, someone filled with much earthly goodness, and he wants to know what everybody wants to know. *"What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* And in response, Jesus starts laying out all of the commandments as an answer to the question, and the rich young ruler insists that he's done all of these things his entire life because that's what proud doers do, and that's what they think. I think we all know the story of what happens next. It's Matthew 19:21. It says: *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you*

will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

You see, the rich young ruler was a proud doer who had asked the wrong question. "What do I need to do?" You see, as soon as you reduce the faith you have in Jesus Christ down to a requirement or a series of requirements, you started down a pathway no different than this one the young man was asking about, you have turned a relationship into a regulation, and eternal life becomes a reward that you are given for an excellent spiritual performance, and God will not accept that. And you know, if we were just to take a step backward and consider the absurdity of comparing any human work to the work that God did, we'd see the folly of proud doing. God sent his only begotten Son, his flawless, perfect Son, who lived a flawless, perfect life and then offered that life up for us as a sacrifice for our sins, and on the one hand, we have the incalculable sacrifice of God himself and on the other hand we have whatever religious activities we think have merit. That's a lousy comparison. Just consider the very best things that you could do. You know, let's say that I feed the hungry, I clothe the naked, I visit the sick and in prison and they're all wonderful, godly things. But to put them even remotely on a par with what God has done is the height of insult to God. And Jesus did his works

perfectly. You and me, not -- not so much. To think that my works are enough to save, justify, and render me fit for heaven is an insult to spiritual common sense as well.

Now, those who reject that form of hubris, however, can fall prey to a very different partial gospel, a very different partial portrait of the gospel of works. Instead of the proud doer, they are the terrified doer. James says in verse 17: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* The terrified doer lives in constant fear that his faith is dead, or if it's not dead, it's moribund, very near to being dead. I mean, he understands that Christ has done a mighty work in dying on the cross for him, but he doesn't understand is that he is in no position to add anything to that work. The terrified doer is a doer who feels his life as a believer is to be about the business of justifying Christ's work by his own work. I'll certainly admit that that breed of Christian is pretty rare today, but it was very common when I was a brand new Christian, and in fact, the church that I went to unknowingly tilted in that direction. You see, we were -- we were constantly given good things to do, because if Christ died for me, the very least that I could do was -- whatever, just fill in the blank. You see, the terrified doer is constantly trying to justify the unjustifiable. The gift of God will never be matched by any human effort, and the driving force behind the terrified

doer is this nagging notion that somehow he has to do so or die trying.

In my first church, we would routinely go to downtown San Francisco to witness. We would go door to door. We would have localized evangelical crusades in our church, something, anything to prove to God that we were serious about this faith that we had in him. And again, these are not bad things at all. But there was this consistent attitude that you were to spend your life giving back, giving back to God what he had already given to you. You see what I was doing was I was unknowingly turning God's gift into a wage that I was trying to earn. I never realized that I was not remotely capable of adding to what Christ had already done because I was too busy trying, and that in itself was a form of enslavement. You know, if I was to witness door to door for three hours and lead others to Christ and grow the kingdom, then the logical question would be, well, if three hours was good, wouldn't four hours be better? Wouldn't five hours be better still? And if I shared the gospel for five hours with no results, who's to tell that if I did it for six, well, then maybe somebody would have come to Christ. I'm sure you can see where this was headed. But I never saw that.

The reason why the terrified doer is terrified is because he never

knows if his doing is enough. He knows that faith without works is dead, and instead of trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross, he places his trust in his own ability to be constantly working out his own salvation, and even the concept of working that way, no matter how holy and noble it may appear, it represents a form of enslavement, an enslavement that Paul railed against to the Galatians. In Galatians 2:16, he said: *Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.* Now, press a terrified doer, and he will tell you in no uncertain terms that he knows no one is justified by works of the law. He may well know that in his head, but he certainly doesn't know that in his heart, and because of that, he is subject to being enslaved all over again. That's why Paul said in Galatians 5: *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.*

Well, we've seen so far that the first partial portrait of salvation comes from seeing the coin only on one side, only from the perspective of works, and when you see the coin that way, it produces two types of doers; it produces proud doers and terrified doers. Well, now it's time to look at the other side of the coin.

The other side of the incomplete portrait, and that comes from seeing the coin only from the perspective of belief, and it produces the very hypocrites that James was speaking of when he said this in James 2:14: *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food 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? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Quite frankly, this side of the coin is far more threatening to us, because it is remarkably easy to confuse mere belief with faith, and that is precisely what James is getting at here. You see, this isn't the proud doer or the terrified doer. This is the phony doer that James is calling out. You see, for many, many years now, the evangelical community has preached a gospel that centered itself often times on a false premise that James is deconstructing in this verse. It was a gospel that said if you raise your hand, if you go forward at a meeting, if you simply say a prayer, you will be saved. I mean, after all, isn't that exactly what Bible says? I mean, Romans 10:9: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* But you see, what we are discussing here is

what James is trying to clarify, and that is what is God speaking of when he says, quote, "believe in your heart." That's a work that only God can do. It requires a heart transplant. I mean, do you honestly think the example that James has given us where faith is reduced to a cheerful slogan, "go in peace," and an exhortation to be "warmed and filled" is an example of faith that emanates from somebody's heart? Or is it the phony baloney faith that consists of a simple agreement to a set of facts? Jesus is Lord, Jesus was God, Jesus came down to earth, Jesus lived a perfect life, Jesus died and rose again. I can say "yes" and "amen" a thousand times to each and every one of those facts, and in terms of faith, in terms of genuine saving faith, it means nothing. I know people who absolutely can say an unequivocal "yes" to each and every one of those facts, and yet those folks give no evidence whatsoever beside those assents, that they're even remotely Christian. James himself makes that distinction in James 2:19. He says: *You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder!*

You know, believing in limited government and a strong military may make you a Republican, but believing that Jesus died and rose from the dead for your sins does not make you a Christian. Jesus himself made a huge distinction between simple belief which saves no one and belief which is rooted in the heart. It is a saving belief that will always, always express itself in works. You see,

works don't produce life but rather they are proof that life is already there. That's the distinction that Jesus makes, and it is the very same one that James does. It centers not on what we say. Talk is cheap. It centers not on what we say, but on what we do. Jesus said this in Matthew 7:21: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven"* but the one who says a prayer and gives his heart to Jesus? No. The one who only agrees that Jesus died for us and rose from the dead? No. *"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

Well, you could say, wait a minute, aren't we right back where we started from? Are we saying that faith is only about what we do? And if it is that, how can we avoid being proud doers resting on our good deeds as the source of our justification or terrified doers, who never know if they've done enough, they're worthy of salvation or worse yet, phony doers who give nothing but lip service to the poor and the hungry, all the while thinking they have genuine faith. Well, the answer lies in understanding what the true nature of faith really is. That's critical. And James this morning gives us a working example of it in our text. This is James 2:20. He says: *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father*

justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 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. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Okay. First thing you have to remember is that James is writing to a Jewish constituency, and because he's writing to Jews, his premier example of faith has got to be the father of faith which is Abraham. James quotes the heart of justification by faith when he says "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.*" But then he starts speaking about Abraham's greatest act of faith, that is, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. And he speaks of it in terms of works. He says in verse 24: *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

So now we come down to the crux of it. We say here, okay, is James contradicting Paul, or are they once again considering opposite sides of the same coin? In this case, the coin is Abraham. You see, there's a timeline that Paul speaks of when he speaks about Abraham, and it's very important to understand that timeline. Listen to you what he says in Romans 4:9. He says: *We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it*

counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believed without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well. See, James in our text this morning is referencing Abraham's fulfillment of what Paul just reported, that is, the righteousness that Abraham received from God, he received by faith well before he had done any of those works. That's the purpose of the timeline. That's what it's demonstrating. You see, Abraham believed God and was counted as righteous before he was circumcised. Paul was demonstrating that Abraham's righteousness had already been counted to him through faith before that work of faith ever produced the obedience that resulted in his circumcision. It is absolutely critical to understand that timeline. Again, in verse 10, he says: *How then was it -- that's righteousness -- counted to him -- that's Abraham. How was righteousness counted to Abraham? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.* And you know why that's so important? The reason why the timeline is important, because James underscores Abraham's works which took place only long after he had already been justified by faith as the ultimate expression of the gift of faith he had already received. That's why James says: *You see that a*

person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

You see, what justified Abraham's faith was not just words. It was an obedience that resulted in deeds. You see, every genuine expression of faith contains along with it a genuine desire to obey, and the proof that Abraham's faith was genuine was the obedience that it produced in Abraham, and it was that obedience that produced the works. It was on obedience that started when Abraham left his family. It continued when he circumcised his entire family, including Isaac, and it reached it's pinnacle when he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice, believing that God could raise Isaac up from the dead. Abraham's works flowed from his obedience.

And here's the critical part. You see, Abraham's faith did not come from his obedience. Rather, his obedience came from his faith. It is critically important to get that right. Let me repeat it. Abraham's faith did not come from his obedience. His obedience came from his faith. You see, empty faith, phony faith does not ever feel a need to obey. It never feels the drive to obey as Abraham obeyed when he left Ur of the Chaldees as Abraham did, to get circumcised as Abraham did, to offer up Isaac as Abraham did, because empty faith is about words alone. "Be warmed. Be filled." That's the faith that James is taking apart

in our text this morning. You see, living faith, the faith that Abraham had received as a gift will always contain within it a living drive to obey. Living faith always contains living obedience.

Let me go back to a scripture I've repeated endlessly about spiritual heart transplants. This is from Ezekiel 36. God says this: *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* That's a critical part, that last part. God says he will place his Holy Spirit within believers and that his Holy Spirit will make them -- quote -- "careful to obey my rules." You see, genuine faith always has with it a brand new, God-given will to obey. I'm not saying that all new believers obey perfectly. What I am saying, though, is all new believers have within them a God-given desire and drive to obey that they never had before faith itself was given.

Paul describes this obedience of faith in 2 Corinthians 9:13.

Listen to what he says. He says: *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ,*

and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. Peter describes this obedience in his introduction of his letter by saying this, in 1 Peter 1. He says: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. That obedience is a gift of faith.

You see, if you want to understand the relationship of faith to works, you have to understand first and foremost that God places within his sheep a desire to obey that is the benchmark of what a sheep truly is. That's why Jesus can say in John 14:15: *"If you love me, keep my commandments."* In verse 21: *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them, he is the one who loves me."* Verse 23: *Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."* Jesus says that because faith equals love equals obedience. His sheep hear his voice and do what? They follow Him. It's the very picture of obedience. The reason why James says that faith without works is dead, because all genuine believers in Christ will have a drive and desire to obey him that will inevitably produce in them what is known as works. And the works are not the source of life, but they are proof instead that life is there in the first place.

Jesus tells us that Abraham -- James, I'm sorry, tells us that Abraham offering up Isaac was simply the culmination of the spirit of obedience he had received when he became righteous through faith. That's why James 2:21 says: *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.*

You know, the simplest way to boil this all down is to understand it in physical terms. I've said this before, I'll say it again, faith is to works as breathing is to living. Actually, you know, the act of breathing itself is unique. Every other biological process or just about every other biological process in the autonomic nervous system -- do you remember that? It's automatic. You never have to think about it. You don't think about pumping your blood, you don't think about digesting your food, you don't think about fighting off sickness or disease, all those things take place without our active participation; but breathing, breathing is different. Breathing is actually unique, because it's something we all have to do and we -- we have to do it. You know, some 20,000 times a day your brain tells your lungs to inhale and exhale, but you know, nobody gets up in the morning says, "Oh, I've got 20,000 breaths to breathe today, how am I going to get through the day?" They just don't do it. You see, breathing is a work so inherently

bound to living itself that we do it without giving it a second thought. That's exactly what works is to faith. Exactly.

You know, I said many years ago there was a simple test that was administered on the battlefield and in hospitals where many people were sick or wounded. A nurse would just simply hold up a small mirror to the patient's nose, and if he was breathing, he would fog up the mirror and folks would know he was still alive. Anyone who knows that the simple way to look for a sign of life is to look for breathing. So when James says *faith without works is dead*, he, too, is describing a spiritual quest for signs of life, and just as breathing is a sign of life, so is works a sign of faith.

Breathing is to living as faith is to works. Breathing doesn't produce life, I mean, you can make a corpse breathe if you put it on a respirator. It is merely a sign that life is already there, and that's exactly how works works. Works are not faith. Works do not produce faith. They are merely a sign that faith is already there, and the proof that the believer is alive is his works.

That's all James is saying when he says: *So faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* 'Cause spiritually speaking, works are so inherently bound to the new life of the spirit we have in Christ to "*the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ,*" as Paul puts it, that they, too, like breathing, are something genuine believers do without giving it a second

thought. It is something so fundamental to being alive in the Spirit that James can describe the presence or absence of works in the same way we describe the presence or absence of breath. And if there are works, it's reasonable to presume you are spiritually alive. If there are no works to be found, if our faith consists of telling the naked and the starving "be warmed, and be filled," well, then it's reasonable to conclude what James concludes, that that faith without works is dead.

So let me just work our way through this text again. Let me just repeat what James, I believe, is trying to say. James 2:14 says: *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Well, such faith is in fact no faith. It is a corpse on a heart-lung machine, and you can get it to actually breathe artificially, I mean, that's what the Pharisees did, and even may have the appearance of life, that's what legalists do, but because there's no real breath, that is, there is no real works, it is in fact dead. In verse 15, he says: Suppose a brother or sisters is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go in peace; keep warm and fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

James is being practical as he can be. Instead of getting caught up in a lofty theological discussion, he's cutting right to the chase. Faith doesn't just speak; it acts. Verse 18: *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.* James is just looking to see if the patient is breathing. Verse 19: *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that -- and shudder.* James is telling us that belief by itself is not just absolutely useless, it is the very same faith that demons have. Verse 20: *You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?* You know, it's interesting what James is saying here. The text itself reads a lot closer to, "Hey, idiot," I mean, "raca, fool." James is not messing around here. Let's just say he's not being overly kind here because he's witnessing the danger and the folly of mere belief. And finally in verse 21, he says: *Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.* And again, James here brings out the big guns to point out that even Abraham demonstrated precisely what Ezekiel was

talking about when he pointed out that the supernatural infusion of faith that God provides will always include a careful desire to obey. Again, Ezekiel 36: *And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* Abraham was so careful to obey God's rules that Hebrews 11:17 says this: *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."* He considered that God was able to raise him from the dead from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

You see, Abraham was the Old Testament version of what Paul is describing in the New Testament as *"the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ."* It all goes back repeatedly to the very same simple notion. Faith is a gift. Faith is a gift, and the gift will always contain a drive to obedience which will always reveal itself through a desire not just to believe but also to act on that belief. Ephesians 2:8 says this: *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Here's Paul telling us that faith is a gift unrelated to works so that no one can boast, but then in the very next verse, he describes the result of the obedience that accompanies faith, and it inevitably results in works. In Verse

10, he says: *For we were his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* See, for Paul, it's simple. Faith is life itself, and life itself will always have breath, and breath itself is works, good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

So what is the bottom line? What is the bottom line for each of us when it comes to faith expressing itself through works? How do we know that our faith is genuine and not the kind of faith that will result in Jesus telling us "Depart from me, I never knew you." Well, let me just repeat what I said in the very beginning of this message. I said James is making a very simple statement. He's telling us that the proof of genuine faith will always, always have its expression in works. And if an examination of your life reveals none of these works or works that are so phony and empty as to suggest to a naked person that he magically clothe himself or a hungry person that he magically get fed without lifting a finger on your part, then it's reasonable to conclude that there was no faith there in the first place.

Now, the big question is this: Could it be that this is a description of you? I can't say, because I'm not you. I believe God moved James to write these words because many of us need to

face the real possibility that we may be kidding ourselves when it comes to genuine faith. So I'd like to spend some time right now at the end of this message in prayer, asking ourself what might be the most important question you will ever ask, three little words to ask yourself about faith, that is, "Is it real?" Let's pray.

Father, I would ask right now that you would examine each and every one of our hearts. Father, you have said, and your word says that when Jesus comes to separate the sheep and the goats, he's going to have the sheep on the right and the goats on the left, and he says this in Matthew 25: *"Then the King will say to those on his right hand 'Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.'* Then the righteous will answer him, saying, *'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or naked and clothe you? Or when did we see you sick, or in prison, and come to you?'* And the King will answer and say to them, *'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'*"

Father, we know that something just happened here to make all of this far more real than it has been before. It was what folks call an act of God, it was a dreadful Hurricane named Sandy, and it's an opportunity, it was an opportunity, it still is an opportunity to see whether or not our faith was real, to see whether we were the ones who were saying, "*Go in peace; be warmed and be filled,*" because through the miracle of television, through the miracle of the proximity we are to this horrible storm, we have seen not hundreds, not thousands, but millions of people desperately needing to be warmed and filled. And so Father, this is a wake-up call. If we could look at those desperate people needing to be warmed and filled, said "Well, they've got FEMA, they've got the government, they've got things to help them out," Lord, where is our faith? You have told us through your servant James that it is not there. We are staring face to face with an opportunity that is right out of your word. What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith and does not have works? Can that faith save him? No, it cannot because it is not real faith. So faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Lord, I pray that you would look into each and every one of our hearts, and again, there's a bad news, good news scenario in all of this, because I believe that your word is convicting. I believe that you are trying to get us to see those of us whose faith is either proud doing or terrified doing or phony baloney doing that's not faith at all.

Lord, if we do not have within us a drive and desire to obey you, to seek out what it is you would have us do and do it however imperfectly but still with that drive, then there's a very decent chance we don't have saving faith. There's a decent chance that the faith that we have is dead faith which does not save, which also results in the doctrine of demons.

But there is wonderful news as well. Dead faith can be made alive. Dead faith can come to life. Phony faith can become real faith. God can convict us, God ask move us to cry out, to confess our sin and to ask that we have the genuine faith that will respond to this enormous need around us without saying "be warmed and be filled" or "Go in peace," but by genuinely expressing the obedience that God has placed within us.

Father, if -- if you are speaking to hearts this morning, if you are trying to say to them your faith is not real, I pray that your conviction would penetrate. And Lord, the good news is that those who are feeling convicted and feeling like God is speaking to them, that's God at work. Those to whom this is just simple words, well, they may not have faith in the first place and I may be speaking to dead ears; but to those ears that are hearing and are convicted, I pray, Lord, that you would move mightily, that you would explain

and demonstrate and show that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to heal us and to restore us and to give us a faith that is alive and not dead. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.