

Faith Has Consequences

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Well, we come to God's word again this morning as we love to do at Truth Community Church. The tagline, if you will, for our church is teaching God's people God's word, and we believe that that's the purpose of gathering together, especially on Sunday mornings, is to feed the flock of Christ from the word of God and that's what we try to do. We aim our teaching at those that are believers. We welcome those who do not know Christ to our service, we want them under the teaching of the word of God, but we're not trying to cater things to the unbeliever in what we do here. This is a time where the saints that believe in Christ gather together to be fed from his word, to hear from the great Shepherd through the words of Scripture and so that's what we seek to do Sunday by Sunday. We're glad that you're with us here today and we look forward to this time in God's word.

Today is kind of a final postscript on a long series that we've done on "The Bible and Roman Catholicism," and this message isn't really going to address Roman Catholicism directly at all. We've already done that. We have a number of the CD albums out there. We invite you, we would love for you to take one of those. There is no cost to those. It's our gift to you. We want you to benefit from that teaching, perhaps to share it with others. But today we're just going to kind of address in a final way a passage that comes up in conversations from time to time with Roman Catholics and we'll read it to begin with. It's in James 2:14 and the verses that follow. If you would turn to the book of James with me. Starting next Sunday, we will return to our ongoing series on the Sermon on the Mount but we wanted to address these things here on Sunday to maximize their exposure to you.

James 2, beginning in verse 14 says,

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.

Now, as we come to this passage and we recognize that there is a difficulty that it creates for those that want to know the Bible, that want to understand it, and also that want to have a clear and precise understanding of the whole nature of Christian salvation. We saw last time that this text in James 2 is sometimes used to contest the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and we have taught on that in this series and if you pick up the albums if you weren't here when we were teaching on that, you'll find in that series the message that addresses justification by faith alone and that is what we teach and affirm here at Truth Community Church. Romans 3:28 says, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." And we taught that at great length in the series. What we said last time was that Paul as he speaks about justification being by faith alone, is addressing a different issue than what James is addressing here in James 2 and it is so vital for your whole understanding of the nature of salvation to understand this distinction. It's not simply knowing how to respond to Catholic objections to our teaching, that's incidental in some ways to our teaching here this morning, you need to understand the totality of what Scripture says about these things and when you understand Paul on his terms and when you understand James on his terms, you have a balanced picture of what true salvation is and what it looks like.

The Apostle Paul in Romans in that passage from Romans 3 as we said last time, Paul is saying this: he is telling the proud and the self-righteous that their works cannot save them. There is nothing that a sinner can do to earn salvation from God. There is nothing that we can perform, there are no rituals that we can do that obligate God to give salvation to us. Salvation is a gift, it is not a payment for things that are done and that gift must be received by a humble faith and a humble faith alone. Those that think that they are good enough to go to heaven, those that think that God would never condemn them to hell, are people that do not understand the first basic of Christian salvation. Salvation, justification, a declaration of righteousness from God is based on faith alone, more accurately, based on the work of Christ received through faith alone.

That's what Paul is teaching. James as we're going to see in greater detail here today, is talking about a completely different issue even though he uses some of the same terms that Paul uses. James is warning someone who is careless. James is warning the empty hypocrite that his empty faith cannot save him. James, let me say it again, warns the careless that empty faith cannot save them. And if you think about the totality of what Scripture says about salvation, you could understand why what James is saying must be

absolutely true. Salvation is a gift from God, Ephesians 2:8 and 9. "It is a gift of God not as a result of works lest any man should boast." Salvation comes, beloved, salvation comes through a powerful work of the Holy Spirit on a human heart that opens their eyes to the truth of their sin and that leads them to the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and energized by that work of the Spirit, the sinner responds in faith and receives Christ and rests in him as the completion of his salvation, understanding that as a sinner there are no good works that he could possibly contribute to his own salvation. We are not the master of our own destinies. We do not have the power to save our own souls. God must save you. Christ must save you through a work on your heart that is done by the power of his Spirit. Scripture says that when he does that, that we are born again; that we received a new nature; that we receive a new heart; that God changes us inside.

So from that power of salvation, from that work of God in your heart, from the reality of the new nature, from a human gratitude that you've been saved and delivered from your sin, new life flows. True salvation is a powerful work of God on a man. It is a powerful work of God on the soul that changes him and when his nature is changed, his life changes, and flowing out of that is a changed life, is an obedience, is a trust, is a devotion to Christ that is not done, "God, you owe me," it's not done to pay for sin. It's not done to earn God's favor. It's not done to earn salvation. It's flowing out of a complete change that God has done and what James is saying is that if that change, if that heart, that what flows out of a life is not present, then real salvation has not occurred to begin with. That's the perspective. Salvation is not by works. Period, end of statement, as taught to us by the Apostle Paul. Salvation is not by an empty faith as taught to us by James.

So we're going to take a closer look at James 2 here this morning, kind of building on what we taught last week. James here in James 2 is making one central point. He is making one central point and that is that empty faith cannot save a man. Stated differently, stated theologically: empty faith does not join a person to Christ. It does not change him and you can see this in three different verses right in this passage and sometimes it's helpful to isolate the verses to see the theme that is governing everything else that is set in a given passage. Look at James 2:17 where James says, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." Verse 20, "are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" Verse 26, "faith without works is dead." James is not addressing a living faith and saying that a living faith is insufficient to save a man, what he's saying is that a dead faith that has no impact on life is a mark of somebody that doesn't have real faith at all, and so you must understand that.

What James does in this whole passage, verses 14 through 26, is he makes this argument in two cycles. He states a question and then he illustrates his point and he draws a conclusion. He states a question, he illustrates it, and then he states his conclusion. James would have been a good preacher even today. So in this first cycle, there are two cycles, one from verses 14 to 17 is the first cycle, verse 18 to 26 is the second cycle, and just stay with me as we go through this in kind of an overview fashion; it helps you to see the pattern of his argument so that you can follow and see the conclusion that he is driving you to.

So in verse 14 he states his question. He says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" Can that so-called faith save him? Can a faith that has no impact on his life actually be the instrument of his redemption from sin? That's his question. Can a faith that is simply a verbal profession, "Oh, I have faith. I have believed in Christ. Jesus, Lord, Lord." And it's all lips, no life, is that real faith? Is that the true faith that saves? That's James's question and he illustrates the uselessness of that kind of faith by showing the uselessness of empty words in verses 15 and 16.

Look at it with me. He says, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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?" It's an illustration that everyone can relate to. You've got a person that's in genuine need, someone comes to them and says, "Oh, my brother, go in peace. Be warmed and be filled," and yet doesn't provide them with a blanket, doesn't feed them a meal, doesn't give them what would address the genuine, legitimate, physical need that they have, James says, "Consider that illustration and realize that those words of comfort are meaningless. They are empty. They are dead. They are useless." If there was a sincerity in their words, there would be action that would follow. The fact that someone would just emptily say, "Go in peace. Have your stomach filled," without giving him what is within his power to give, James says you can see that that's useless. That's dead. That's meaningless. That counts for nothing.

James says in his conclusion, he draws his conclusion from that, "Make the analogy, see the parallel between empty words in a physical situation, see the parallel to empty words in a spiritual situation." There is no love in this physical situation at all because if there was genuine love, there would be actions that follow. James says, "Take that analogy. Apply it in the spiritual realm and realize that a faith that has no impact on a man's life is empty. It's dead. It's useless." A one to one comparison that everyone can understand. That is useless and so he states his conclusion there in verse 17 in this first cycle, he says, "Even so," here's the conclusion that we draw from that, "faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

Now he follows that same pattern in the next section. Beginning in verse 18, he restates the question for your consideration. In verse 18 he says, "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.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow," here's his question as he states that, "that faith without works is useless?" Now at the risk of oversimplification, here's what he's saying and follow, follow this: James is establishing a dialogue between two people. Scholars debate and disagree over who is saying what here. We don't need to go into the details of that to see James's main point. He says, "There is a man here who claims that he has faith but there is nothing in his life to demonstrate it. He claims that he has faith without works." What James says is this, he says, "Let me contrast that unbiblical position with what true faith is." So he's about to give a positive illustration of what true faith does and what true faith looks like and he illustrates in verse

21 from the life of Abraham in the Old Testament. Verse 21, he gives an illustration, "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," or you could say it was completed, the goal of faith was attained. Verse 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." Verse 24, he says, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."

Now we're going to talk about this more a little later in the message but I want you to see something very important here to help you understand what's going on. James is not talking in the realm of the courtroom of God in this passage. He is not talking in the realm of the legal declaration from God that a man has been forgiven, rather, he is describing conversation going on on a horizontal level between men. Look at it with me, verse 18, "someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" This is an interaction among men and he says in verse 22, "You see that faith was working with his works." You see what is going on. Verse 24, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." He's talking in the realm of human actions. What is it, here's the question that he's addressing: what is it that displays before men the fact that a man's faith is real? What is it that would testify between men that someone had genuine saving faith? And James is saying you've got to go beyond a mere verbal profession.

Now think about it this way, think about it this way: God does not need to know whether faith is real or not because he already knows. He knows the human heart inside and out. The Lord knows who belongs to him. He knows those who are his. So God doesn't need this manifestation to verify what is true, he already knows it perfectly. However for us among men, human to human, horizontally speaking, how do we know, how do we measure whether a man's claim to faith is real or not? Both men say, "I have faith. I have professed in Christ." One is true and one is not. How can you get down to a distinction about it? Now beloved, let me remind you of something, a passage that we go to very often: Jesus made it plain that there would be many people who would call him Lord and would be sent away on the day of judgment, Matthew 7. Scripture teaches us that there will be tares among the wheat and sometimes it's very hard to tell the difference between the two, one a false grain, one a true grain. Jesus said there will be sheep and there will be goats all gathered under the outward visible professing church. Well, how is it that we know, how can we distinguish between a true profession and a false profession? Even more importantly for the sake of your own eternal soul, what is it that can help you see whether your claim to faith is real or not? Well, James is helping us see that true faith has an impact on life that carries out in the way that a man lives. It's not that that obedience, it's not that those actions contribute to his salvation, but they are the natural fruit, they are the inevitable outworking of the true change that salvation brings. That is what James is addressing and that's what's so vital to understand and he illustrates it with Abraham.

Now, we'll come back to Abraham in just a minute. For now I just want you to see the overall flow. He's making an illustration. In verse 25, he turns to a second illustration of his point. He says, "In the same way," here's my second illustration, "was not Rahab the

harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?" He's referring to Rahab in the story that is recorded in Joshua 2 when the spies from Israel came and she protected them and she sent them out even though she was a harlot. The reality of her faith was shown by the fact that she protected the messengers, the spies of God, as they were seeking out and spying out the land prior to its conquest. James says Rahab didn't merely profess to have a faith, that faith led to action. She aligned herself with the purposes of God. She aligned herself with the people of God and her faith had a demonstrable visible manifestation that was evident for all to see. She submitted to the message. She helped and furthered the purpose of God in that crucial moment in the history of Israel. The same way with Abraham. His faith was manifested in its reality by the fact that he was willing to sacrifice his own son. So it wasn't simply that Abraham said, "I have faith and I'll live however I want. I'm not giving you my son." No, James says the reality of that faith is shown by the fact of what he did. The same thing with Rahab. James says, "I have made my point. Here we go with my conclusion." In verse 26 he says, "just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Now step back from the passage for a moment. He has given us a negative illustration to make his point. "Go in peace. Be warmed and be filled." That's not real. He makes the point that faith is real in Abraham whose faith was shown by what he did, in Rahab whose faith is shown by what she did. So he has made his point in a negative and a positive way. He has restated his purpose three different times. He has made it clear that he's talking in the realm of, "You say, I say." How do we distinguish, how do we know what's true?

Now with that little bit of an overview, let's consider more closely three key words that James and Paul both use to show how they relate to one another, and this will give us a beautiful picture, this will give us a grand overview, this will give us the vista view of what true salvation looks like. First of all, let's start with this. If you're taking notes today, this can be your first point for this morning: there is a different use of the term "works," a different use of "works" put in quotation marks there. Paul in his writings as we saw last week, Paul is using the term "works" to describe a pre-salvation effort of obedience that is designed to earn God's favor. "I think I'm a pretty good person therefore I'm sure God will let me into heaven. By what I have done, I have earned favor with God." Paul says, "No, that's not the case. Justification is by faith alone. You receive justification, you receive salvation by a simple humble faith in Christ alone, not by anything that you do." That's Paul's point. You cannot obey your way into heaven. Forget it. That doesn't happen. That is a path to damnation because we are all sinners and we all fall short of the glory of God.

Now, with that point established, we realize and we remember what we said last week. Think about it this way, beloved: isn't it true that the Bible can teach more than one thing; that there is more than one doctrine in the Bible? Isn't it true that there is more than one aspect to true salvation? So it shouldn't surprise us to find that Scripture is teaching us different aspects of the nature of true salvation. James is talking about a different aspect than Paul is and it's shown in the fact that he is using the word "works" in a different way.

James is describing obedience that flows from a faith that is already there. The works of which James is speaking presupposes true saving faith. That is crucial and you can see that by remembering the life of Abraham in the example that he uses.

Remember this and we won't take the time to go back, perhaps we should, you can look it up later: Scripture says that God justified Abraham in Genesis 15. You remember that God told him, "Look up at the stars and count them and so shall your descendants be." And in Genesis 15:6 it says, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." Abraham believed God, by faith received that promise, trusted what God said, and at that moment God credited to him with righteousness. That is when Abraham became a child of God, so to speak, was in Genesis 15 when he believed that promise. Now, what makes this a little bit of a challenge as you read James, it's only a challenge if you don't think for a few moments and realize what's going on. When James says that Abraham was justified by works, notice something very important: he is referring to a different episode in the life of Abraham.

Look at verse 21. In verse 21 he says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works?" When? "When he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" It's a different episode. This episode occurred in Genesis 22, years later. James is describing an obedience that Abraham gave to God after God had already declared him righteous, after he had been saved, so to speak. God credited to him with righteousness in Genesis 15, James points to a later episode in Genesis 22 to make his point that works inevitably flow from true faith.

You must see that distinction. Yes, Paul and James both talk about works. Yes, Paul and James both talk about Abraham. But they are using different episodes from the life of Abraham in order to make different points. With Paul, Romans 4, Abraham believed God, it was credited to him as righteousness. That was when he was justified by God. God declared him not guilty of sin. God imputed righteousness to him in a way that resulted in his permanent, irreversible, immediate declaration of righteousness in the court of God. James is talking about something different. James is talking about a later episode of Abraham. And you'll notice a point that is often overlooked in this point, that even in what James is saying in verse 23, he refers to, look at verse 23 with me, he refers to the fact that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Verse 23, "the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" He alludes to the same point that Paul does, but earlier as he referred to the sacrifice of Isaac, he's referring to something later to make a different point.

So when James speaks of works, he is referring to the inevitable obedience to God which flows from true salvation, which flows from justification. The works that Abraham performed, his sacrifice of Isaac – watch this – did not contribute to the justification from God that he had earlier received. That was already done. It was over. It was in the books. But his faith had consequences when later things came up in life. James states and clarifies, he says Abraham believed God, it was credited to him as righteousness, he says, "Look at what happened afterwards. What happened afterwards is that his faith was so real, so genuine, so sincere, so living, so full, that he was willing to offer his own son at the command of God." They are using "works" in different ways. James is not discussing

the self-righteous works by which men try to earn their salvation. Paul condemned that. James would condemn that also. James is talking about what comes after the profession of faith. Paul says before a confession of faith, works cannot save you. James says let's talk about what happens after that profession of faith so that we can know if it's real or not. If you see that distinction, then you understand that these passages are in perfect harmony with one another.

Secondly, we'll find that Paul and James are using the word "faith" in different ways. Paul and James are using the word "faith" in different ways. When you read Paul in the book of Romans, Paul is describing a true faith that actually unites the sinner to Christ, a faith that unites him to all of the saving benefits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Go back to Romans and we'll just look at a couple of verses to make this point. In Romans 5, beginning in verse 1, you'll see Paul says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul speaking in that verse about the most important possession that any man or woman could ever have, speaking about the possession without which nothing else in life matters. If you have peace with God, if you have reconciliation with God, you have everything that ultimately matters in life no matter what happens in the meantime. No matter what the outworking of the course of your earthly dreams and aspirations is, whether it's success or failure, health or illness, prosperity or poverty, if you have peace with God, you have that which transcends everything else. If you do not have reconciliation with God, if you are still under judgment for your sins, if you go to hell when you die, nothing else in life matters. Nothing else in this brief 70 year window of time compensates for the eternal loss of your soul, does it? Does it? Nothing else could compensate and so we see that Paul as he speaks in Romans 5:1 is talking about the ultimate possession that a man could have, peace with God, sins forgiven, righteousness imputed, all judgment satisfied, the curse of God on sinners removed. That's what true faith brings to a man. That's why Paul can describe a changed status in the believer. This is real faith that effects that kind of change before God, peace with God, no longer the wrath, no longer an enemy. Not an enemy but a friend. Yea, still more, a child of God. That's real faith. That's what real faith does.

Look over Romans 8:1 as he also speaks of this. He says in Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This is what true faith results in, a change of status, a removal of condemnation so that as you go through life, you do not have to rehearse your past sins as a Christian, you don't have to worry about God slapping you around, judging you for your sins, because that has all been forgiven. God has pardoned you. God will not hold that against you any longer. All that God has in store for you is to receive you into heaven. That's what living faith, that's what true faith does, it changes your status before God and that's the sense in which Paul is using it.

James is using faith in a different way. Go back to James 2 with me. James 2. In James 2, it is obvious that James is describing those who merely say that they have faith. They are merely stating it with their lips. He's not affirming their claim to faith, he's refuting it. He's talking about something different than Paul is and you can see this plainly. Notice this in verse 14, for example. He says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith?" He's making a verbal claim. He's making a profession. "I walked the aisle 30

years ago. I prayed the Sinner's Prayer." As if those little momentary actions in an isolated event that had no context, that had no impact on subsequent life, as if a claim to that settled the whole issue and precluded any discussion or precluded any examination of whether the claim was true or not, whether it was real or not. James is addressing something different. A man says he has faith, verse 16, "one of you says to them." Verse 18, "someone may well say." You see, he's talking at a level of a human affirmation of human words that are spoken without affirming that that faith is real. In fact, his whole point is to show that it is possible for a man to make a claim to faith that is not real, that is not true, that is empty, that has no value, that cannot save.

Now, it could go a couple of different ways, I suppose. It could be a man who is actively trying to deceive someone else saying, "I have faith. I know I don't but I'm telling you that I do and you must believe that." It could be, as is common as seen in Scripture, that a man is deceived about, he is self-deceived, he thinks that he has faith, he says that he has faith but he really doesn't, and James writes to help him see the ludicrous nature of that claim.

So what James is doing here in James 2, he is challenging – watch this, this is in italics in my notes so it must be really important – he is challenging – here is the italicized part – a mere profession of faith, a mere statement of faith, a mere claim to faith that in reality is not true, that is not real, that is not genuine. In Paul, the faith is real as shown by the fact that it brings peace and reconciliation with God. In James, the claim is counterfeit. It is false and therefore you see that they are talking about two different things. The context is different, the way that they use the word "works" is different, the way they use the word "faith" is different.

Finally, point 3: they use the word "justified" in different ways. They use the word "justified" in different ways and this is the third and final point for this morning. They use the word "works" differently, they use the word "faith" differently, they use the word "justified" differently. Now, the word "justified" as we explained a couple of weeks ago and as we've said many times throughout the course of our ministry, the word "justified" means "to declare righteous." It is a declaration of righteousness. Paul and James are both using the word "justification" to talk about a declaration that is made; that the declaration, beloved, happens in different realms. It happens in different realms.

Go back to Romans 3 with me for a moment. Paul is using the word "justified" in the realm of the law of God, in the judgment of God as it is applied and a declaration of righteousness is made in favor of the sinner who has faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 3:21. Notice the law terms, the God terms in this passage. Verse 21, "now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Sin as Paul said in Romans 1, brings the judgment and wrath of God. Where is it that you find the removal of that wrath? Where do you find the forgiveness of sin? Paul says that it is received as a gift

through faith in Jesus Christ and God justifies the sinner. Though he is guilty of sin, God declares him righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.

That's the distinction. That's how justification is being used in Romans 3 where Paul said we are justified by faith alone. God declares a man righteous when he puts his faith in Christ. He justifies him in this sense: he pardons his sin; he forgives his sin; he erases the debt because it was paid for at Calvary; and he imputes righteousness to that sinner. He says, "I will treat you as though you were clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ." That is justification. It is a declaration that God makes, theologians will use the forensic justification meaning that it is in the realm of law where this declaration is made. God justifies us as a matter of legal right and legal standing and says, "I view you as righteous based on the merits of Christ applied to your soul."

That's how Paul is using it. James, by contrast, turn back to James if you would, James 2. James is using the word "justifies" in a different way. Justify, and we use words in different ways all the time, don't we? We could make the exact same statement in different context that look like they are a contradiction but in context you understand that they are perfectly consistent. Let me illustrate before I go into what James is talking about with a simple illustration that all of you can understand. If I was at the zoo and I was at the exhibit with the bears and I see a mother with her young, I could look at that and say, "Oh, look at that. I like the cubs. I like the cubs. They are cute. They are fun and this is just a delightful day. I like the cubs and I like being here. I like the cubs," I say. Go to a different realm. Suppose I'm in a baseball stadium and Chicago is playing and I say from the bottom of my heart, "I don't like the Cubs." You would know by context that I was talking about two different things even though there is a superficial contradiction to what I said. Just taking the words, isolating them from context, a severe critic who wanted to accuse me of being double minded could say, "Look at him. He said he likes the cubs, he says he doesn't like the cubs. How can you believe anything that he says?" Well, you just say, "Friend, look, it was different context, different things being said here." Understand that as simple and homely as that illustration is, we're simply making the point that words can be used in different ways in different contexts.

Here in James, James is using the word "justify" in the sense of meaning "to declare righteous," but he's using it in a completely different realm. He's not talking about and, again, context is the answer to everything when a scriptural difficulty comes up. Context is the answer to everything. Paul is talking about the court of God, James is talking about conversations between humans who have conflicting views of what true faith looks like. James is talking about how a life justifies a man before men. What is it about a man's life that declares to other men that he is righteous, that he belongs to God? And in verse 18 James says, "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.'" I will declare the reality of my faith, he says, I will declare the reality of my faith by showing you the evidence in my life that shows that it is real. You who have nothing in your life to show any love for Christ, nothing in your life to show any love for his word, nothing to show any sense of obedience, nothing that shows any fear of God, you say you have faith but

you have none of this, show me your faith. Declare to me how you can possibly be in righteous position before God.

That's the answer. It's one man talking to another and the point to summarize, in one way the point that James is making: the life of obedience affirms the testimony of the lips and if there is no obedience, if there is not even a hunger or desire for righteousness, Scripture says you don't belong to God no matter what you say. You see, this is really important. In fact, we could go back to...you don't need to turn there, Matthew 5:6, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Those who have those heart longings to manifest a life of obedience, those are the ones who will be satisfied.

So what does Paul say? Paul says faith alone brings justification from God. What does James say? James says dead faith does not save a man from God's judgment. They are talking about interrelated issues but separate issues. Here it is, beloved, as we wrap this up: faith alone brings justification, that's Paul. But it must be a real faith, that's James. Empty faith that is all talk and no action is no faith at all, and the different uses of these three terms harmonize the apparent contradiction between Paul and James. As one writer said and I quote, "James is not making works a condition of salvation but rather a characteristic of salvation. The one who is truly saved will possess a living faith that produces works of righteousness. These works do not earn a right standing with God but they exhibit it before people."

How can we apply all of this to our hearts? What does this mean for you and me? Well, let's approach it in three areas just very simply, very briefly as we close. Friend, do you think that you're good enough to go to heaven? Paul tells you to repent because only faith can save you and faith alone can save you. Faith alone is the means by which we receive Christ.

Secondly, friend, do you claim to know Christ when your life has absolutely no fruit to substantiate that claim? Do you claim to know Christ and have no love for his word? Have no affection for Christ? Have no affection for his people? Do you claim to know Christ and have utterly no interest in the word of God? No hope of heaven? Your whole life is bound up in your earthly circumstances and your earthly life and there is nothing that transcends that and yet you claim to have faith? James tells you to repent because empty faith is not the real thing. Empty faith cannot save you.

On the other hand, brothers and sisters in Christ, are you trusting Christ alone to save you as your hope of heaven? Is Christ alone your hope for the forgiveness of your sins? My friend, is your heart alive to Christ? Alive to his word? Alive to his people even though you fall short so often and so miserably? Do you desire holiness even though you often fall short? Is your heart different? For you, Scripture would say, take heart. Those kinds of desires, those kinds of affections, are the manifestation of true salvation. God has justified you. Your claim to faith in Christ is proven to be real by the changes that it has produced in your life. God has justified you and, beloved, note it, you will never find him reversing his judgment. When God justifies a man, that man is justified forever and no

amount of works that you do, good works, so-called, can improve that perfect standing with God because it's not based on anything that you do. It's based exclusively on the perfect righteousness of Christ and therefore it could never change. You could never improve it. Can you improve on the perfection of Christ? No, you can't. And when justification is based on the perfection of Christ, you can't make it any better through what you do.

Looking at it from the other way and as we sympathize with each other in the fact that we know that even as believers we all still fall short of the glory of God, we wrestle with temptation, sometimes we give into it, our thoughts, our words, our actions don't measure up, what you need to understand about the reality of justification is that even your sins as a believer do not diminish it. They do not reduce it. They do not take it away. Why? Because your justification, your declaration of righteousness before God is premised entirely on a righteousness that is unrelated to you in the sense that it is based exclusively on the perfection of Christ and your sinful life as a Christian does not reduce that status. It does not jeopardize the fact that God might reverse the verdict. You see, when you are truly justified by faith alone, the gift that God has given you and the gift that God has given us is unspeakably, eternally magnificent and great. He has given you a righteousness, he has imputed to you a righteousness that can never be lost. He has imputed to you a righteousness that frees you from a slavish sense that, "I have to keep this up or God is going to whack me nevertheless in the end." That's a wonderful place of peace. That's why Paul can say, "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This goes to the security of your soul and the permanence of your salvation and when God has justified you, he will never reverse his judgment. Close the door on the thought. We look forward with the certainty of Philippians 1:6, "that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

Let's bow together in prayer.

Dear Father, we pray that you would give clarity to our minds as we meditate on these things in the days to come. We pray for those whose faith is real, Father, and I know that this room is filled with people like that of like precious faith. I pray that you would bless them and strengthen them with the reality of the truth of justification by faith alone and that we could all grow in the wonder and the magnificence and the praise that we offer Christ, thanking him for such a great work that has dealt completely with our sins forevermore. Jesus, thank you for what you have done on our behalf.

Father, for those that are here having professed an empty faith, I pray that the arrow of your Spirit would pierce their hearts and that they would recognize, "That is me. I have said these things but it has never meant anything to me. It has never changed a single thought or thing that I did. My faith is dead and empty." Father, use that conviction not to bring them to despair but to awaken them to the hope that is still presented to them in the Lord Jesus Christ and may they rise and come in a living faith which alone can save.

Father, help us as we proclaim the Gospel to others to be clear. Father, give us compassion for the lost. Father, give us a humble heart for Christ that is renewed by the Spirit in our hearts day by day. We ask your blessing on your word as it goes forth now, your blessing on us as we soon go forth. Father, we ask your blessing on our church that we could proclaim the Gospel always until you return with clarity, with accuracy, with passion, and may you be pleased to bless that to the glory of Christ and the conversion of sinners until you call us home. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

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