

## Pt 8 James Series (Faith Made Perfect) – Abraham Justified by Works

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney 04-04-2018

† **James 2:21-26**

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Last week we began looking at James' argument that faith without works is dead. We saw where James gave a theoretical argument by someone trying to prove they had faith without having any works, but they were unable to.

Tonight, we will try to finish up chapter 2 and look at this section that deals with Abraham being justified by works.

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

So, **Abraham** is brought up. Anytime you want to get a Jew's attention simply bring up the name Abraham. He is considered the father of the Jews, and rightfully so. God made his covenant with the Hebrew people through Abraham. Naturally, since James is writing a Jewish audience, he is going to use Abraham for an example.

He asks the question, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works," Okay, let's stop there for a minute and get something settled:

The word **Justified** means "**to render righteous.**" We consider that to mean someone is **saved**. We get justified, sanctified, and glorified. If we are talking about the **justification of salvation**, that means that we are **made righteous before God**. But, is that what James is saying here?

This is the argument that most people have concerning this statement by James, is that they say he is stating Abraham was justified before God when he offered Isaac on the altar.

Well, let's turn to Romans chapter 4 and look at what Paul wrote concerning Abraham and justification before God: **Romans 4:1-5: What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.**

Here Paul is dogmatically stating that **IF** Abraham were justified by works he would have something to glory in, **BUT not before God**. It is very important that we understand this. If Abraham's works had made him a saved man he would be able to glory but he wouldn't be able to glory before God because it would mean that Abraham saved himself. Therefore, any glory that Abraham would receive for that would be before MAN, not God. Then Paul tells us how Abraham actually was

justified before God: **3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.**

Where does Paul get that from? Well, he goes all the way back to Genesis. In chapter 12 God had told Abraham to leave his home in the Ur of the Chaldees, he was 75-years old and Abraham obeyed and left his home and went where God told him to go.

Then it says in **Genesis 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.** Did you see that? This is the first teaching in the Bible that men are saved by faith. He was made "righteous," or as we call it "saved" because **he believed in the LORD**. By faith and by God's grace, Abraham was justified because God counted his belief to him for righteousness. It was not because of any work that Abraham did. I think this is about as clear as anything in the Bible.

So, we refer back to what Paul said in **Romans 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.** It is crystal clear that it is not works that save, but faith.

Paul backs that up in **Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**

Again, crystal clear that it our faith and God's grace that saves us, not works. Paul also indicates in **verse 10** that after we are saved we should do **good works**. But the works have no bearing on our salvation.

Now, go back to our opening text in the Book of James. James says:

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

Is James saying that Abraham was justified **before God** or "saved," when he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice? And if so, how could that be and wouldn't that contradict the rest of the Bible?

Before we answer that I want you to look at what James said in the next verse: **23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.**

James uses the very same Scripture reference as Paul did concerning what the Scripture say in **Genesis 15**, that Abraham was made righteous because he "**believed God.**" James says that because Abraham believed God it was "**imputed unto him for righteousness.**"

The word "**imputed,**" comes from the same exact word as "**counted,**" that Paul used in Romans chapter 4 and it means "**to account to.**"

Think of it like this: When we are lost, we are like an empty bank account but when we get saved, God makes a deposit in our account. He imputes his righteousness to us.

The fact is, James believes in grace through faith the same as Paul does. So, what is he talking about when he says; **21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?**

We've already established the fact that Abraham was saved at 75-years old when he believed the LORD by faith and it was counted unto him for righteousness. James agrees that too.

It is obvious that James is NOT saying that Abraham's works justified him **BEFORE GOD**. It's the same as Paul said, if Abraham was justified for works then he **hath whereof to glory; but not before God**. -- If not before God, then who? Isn't it obvious? **Before MAN**.

Remember the hypothetical man that James mentioned in **James 2:14** *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*

We stated that just **saying** you have faith means nothing because man cannot see your faith in words. We need to **see your faith in action** to believe it. I have faith that there is electricity running through this building, but I can't see electricity. The reason I have faith in electricity is because the lights are working. KUB can come and say, "you have electricity," but the only way to prove it is by seeing it work.

Sis. Brenda made a good point last Wednesday on the way out the door. She said "Salvation is by works, the works that Jesus did." So, even our faith in the LORD Jesus Christ is due to the work that HE has done. He proved himself when he died on the cross of Calvary.

Therefore, James is saying that Abraham was justified **before MAN** when he put his faith into action by offering up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. It was because he **proved his faith by working** – it wasn't just in lip service.

That's why James says in the next verse: **24** *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*. This justification was not justification before God, but before men. It shows that their faith is indeed a genuine faith and not just them stating they have faith. It is proven by their works.

Then James backs it up more by giving the example of Rahab the harlot. (By the way, she is Rahab the FORMER harlot now!)

**25** *Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?*

If you look in **Hebrews Chapter 11**, the great faith Chapter, you will find a long list of people there that the Bible says had faith. Rahab is one of those. It says in **Hebrews 11:31** *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace*.

Pay attention to how that was worded. "*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not*." Did you see that? She has faith because she was **NOT** one of those that "**believed not**." In other words, she was a believer. That is why she had faith. Then it mentions the work that she did because of her faith; "*she had received the spies with peace*." We all know the story how she hid them and allowed them to escape from her window down the wall by a scarlet thread. But it wasn't that work that saved her. She was saved because she believed. She worked because she had genuine faith.

If you study that entire Chapter you will find that to be the case for every single one of those mentioned in the Faith Hall of Fame. They all had faith in the LORD but because of their faith it caused them to act on it:

- **Abraham** – by faith offered up Isaac.
- **Isaac** – by faith blessed Jacob and Esau
- **Jacob** – by faith blessed both the sons of Joseph
- **Moses** – by faith refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. By faith he kept the Passover. By faith he passed through the Red Sea.
- **Rahab** – by faith received the spies with peace.
- **Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthae, David, Samuel, the Prophets** – by faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire.

On and on you find people with faith also have works that accompany their faith, which is an outward sign to man and the world that their faith is genuine.

That is the mark of a true Christian. That is the mark of true faith. That is why James continued by saying in verse **26** *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*.

He says it 3 different times in this chapter:

**Verse 17:** faith, if it hath not works, is dead,

**Verse 20:** faith without works is dead

**Verse 26:** faith without works is dead

It is James' desire for the listener to make a self-evaluation of their faith. Is the faith you have genuine? Or are you only fooling yourself? It is just as he said in Chapter one: **James 1:22** *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves*.

The scary thing is, knowing that it is possible for someone to believe they have faith but not really having it. How tragic to think of going through this life believing you have saving faith because you made some kind of profession one time but it was nothing more than mere words spoken, there was no inward change and no works that accompanied your so-called faith.

The truth is there is a faith that is not a saving faith. James says that is what the devils have. **James 2:19** *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble*.

You can believe there is one God. You can believe he sent Jesus here to die for the sinners of this world. You can believe all of that and still not have saving faith in Christ.

Nothing scares me more than to see someone who lives like the devil and when you ask them if they have been saved they take you back to that time when they were a little kid and they said they were saved or they got baptized when they were little so they are alright. Friends, I fully believe the Bible doctrine that you shall know them by their fruits. I fully believe in the Bible doctrine that faith without works is a dead faith.

How tragic to stand before God and this conversation take place: **Matthew 7:21-23** *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*.

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† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version