

James 2:21-26 – Abraham and Rahab: Faith that Worked

TSK, Lexicon, Rienecker, Ellsworth, Gaebelien, Adamson, Geneva, Robertson, Vincent, Trapp, Poole, PNT, JFB, Henry, Gray, Family, Calvin, Clarke
Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: You've learned that faith must work. Faith is not a theoretical thing. Faith must work in obedience...

Specifically, in the context of our passage, faith had to be seen in worship **AND** in **caring for the downtrodden, widows, orphans, foreigners, and poor.**

And to further illustrate how Christians ought to show their faith, even in difficult circumstances, even when it seemed Christians were working against their own self-interest, Apostle James used 2 historical situations.

These were 2 remarkably clear illustrations which taught the essential nature of showing a faith which worked.

Our headings are:

Abraham had a faith that worked

Rahab had a faith that worked

Our goals are: **That you will work hard to show your faith, even when there seems to be little self-benefit, and to do this in order that your Savior may receive the glory that rightly belongs to him.**

Abraham had a faith that worked

21 Was not Abraham **our father justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

1. Apostle James noted unequivocally that Abraham was justified by showing his good works.

2. How was Abraham justified by doing good works?

Abraham was told to offer his son, Isaac, his only son, the son whom he loved, the promised son, as a sacrifice to God.

He, of course, went in obedience to God to the mountain and was about to sacrifice his son – even gathering wood, and a knife, and tying-up Isaac. But God stopped him and provided a substitute animal for him to sacrifice.

This was the most counter-intuitive thing for Abraham to do. God promised Isaac his son would bring blessings to all the nations of the earth! And yet God then told Abraham to kill him.

It turns out this incident in Abraham's life was the most significant in expressing his faith, so this is why James chose this incident to teach about a faith that worked.

3. So how was Abraham really justified?

Apostle James confirmed Abraham was justified by his obedience. But was he really saved by his works of obedience? No!

Abraham was already a believer when he faced this test; his obedience didn't save him. He was already in covenant with God. He was already circumcised. **It was his unwavering trust in Jehovah that caused him to be willing to do what God told him to do.** Look at Abraham's faith before Isaac was born.

Genesis 15: 6 And he **believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

And he showed he was a believer (with faith in Jesus Christ) by his actions. **Jesus confirmed Abraham's faith in John 8.**

(It was on that same mountain range that the Lamb of God from heaven was sacrificed.)

John 8: 56 "Your father Abraham **rejoiced to see My day**, and he saw it and was glad."

By the deeds of the law no one is justified. Romans 3:20.

Romans 3:24 being **justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**

Abraham's faith could not be proved without actions!

22 Do you see that **faith was working together with his works**, and **by works faith was made perfect?**

4. Abraham's faith and his works had to be together, like a coin that has two sides...one side never separating from the other.

While good works didn't save Abraham, salvation (which comes through faith) is never apart from his good works.

Galatians 5: 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, **but faith working through love.**

And when his works were attached to his faith, it showed his faith was complete.
“Perfect” is best translated “complete.”

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.**" And he was **called the friend of God.**

5. Abraham's faith was directly stated and reconfirmed in the New Testament – multiple times.

Look at 2 cases in the New Testament.

Romans 4:3... "**Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.**"

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and **he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,**

Apostle James was reflecting on Abraham's whole life of actions that proved his faith. Abraham had left Ur of the Chaldees and all his relatives to go to Canaan because God called him there. He believed his barren wife would have a child in her old age and he would cause all the nations of the earth to be blessed. His faith moved him.

Abraham's justification was so clear he was described as a friend of God! There was no ambiguity about Abraham's spiritual condition. (See also Isaiah 41:8)

2Chronicles 20: 7 "Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and **gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?**

If Abraham had shown no good deeds, his faith would have been considered fake.

Abraham's faith was so real, he became a direct father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.
6. For good measure, Apostle James repeated his theme: A man is justified through faith, a faith that must be seen in good works.

Calvin summarized this perfectly: **Faith alone justifies, but the faith which justifies is never alone.**

7. And there was a reward for Abraham's good works of faith, confirming his faith was real.

Genesis 22:16 and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, **because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son —17 "blessing I will bless you**, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. 18 **"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed**, because you have obeyed My voice."

8. All Jews, as Abraham was, had to show faith by doing good works before the Father.

Jews who argue for salvation based on genetics are missing a most valuable truth. They are lost.

9. Lessons:

a. What proof does the world have that you were justified by faith and are now a child – a friend of God – a child with the hope of heaven? What godly acts of righteousness do they see in your life daily?

John 15:14 "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

b. What proof does the Lord have that you were justified by faith in Jesus Christ and are now his child? Does he see self-denial? Does he see love of this other children? Does he see you using your time, tithes, and talents for him?

c. There is not a conflict with what Apostle Paul said in Romans 3:28 (you are saved by faith apart from works) and what Apostle James said (faith must be accompanied by works).

Apostle Paul was concerned about **how one came into the kingdom** and Apostle James was concerned about **how one lived in the kingdom**.

d. Those who say they have faith but no one can see their works are living in self-deception. Avoid being close to them.

Rahab had a faith that worked

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

1. Apostle James pointed out that Rahab, the former prostitute who became a proselyte, was justified by showing her good works.

2. So how was Rahab specifically justified?

First, Rahab, the ex-prostitute, does not seem to be the best one to emulate, but Apostle James wanted to emphasize that it doesn't matter how far a person may have fallen into sin, he still is required to be justified by faith, and that faith had to be seen in good works.

Rahab was justified by faith! She was justified by faith by hiding the 2 spies of Israel, sending the enemy off in the wrong direction to look for the spies, and then sending the spies of Israel in safety.

She risked her life to do that. She would have been seen by her family as a betrayer of their faith! Her own nation would have accused her of treason.

But was it her good works of hiding the spies and deceiving her own wicked people that saved her? No. Rahab already had faith in the Lord when the spies came. She simply proved her faith by her works. Look what she said:

Joshua 2:11 "And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Keep in mind these lies she told were a justifiable act of war! It wasn't a sin, but an act of faith!

No one is saved without having faith in Jesus! We don't know all the details she knew, but there is no other way to be saved.

3. The New Testament confirmed Rahab had faith in the Lord Jesus and it did so multiple times.

It also confirmed that her work was grounded in her faith and expressed in good works.

Hebrews 11 that proves OT saints were saved by faith in the Lord Jesus and was seen in good works.

Hebrews 11:31 By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

“Receiving” the spies with peace meant Rahab protected them.

It was unlawful according to Canaanite law...but it was moral according to God's law.

4. All Gentiles, as Rahab was, had to show their faith in Jesus Christ by doing good works.

5. Rahab's faith was so real, she was chosen to be one of the direct mothers of the Lord Jesus.

She came under the wings of God and into the house of Israel, incorporated as a member. And she went right to work to prove her faith! **She didn't even have a church yet!** She probably didn't know how to properly worship...but she showed her faith!

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

6. Apostle James then summarized the 2 illustrations (Abraham and Rahab) for his readers by saying

A corpse does not move, does not breathe, does not eat, and is therefore presumed dead. There are no signs of life in the body. A corpse had no value. A corpse looks like a person, but it isn't! So is the one who has no faith...even though one might think he has faith.

His so-called faith has absolutely no value!

7. Lessons:

a. It doesn't matter how low your state was before you became a Christian...how bad you might have been...Jesus justifies all kinds of people. Murderers, idolaters, adulterers, thieves...he welcomes all who would receive his work by faith. There are no classes or races with him! Isn't that wonderful?

b. You show real faith by good works...worship, and witnessing to the goodness of Christ. But there is more. **You show real faith by caring for the widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor!** Because you are a tree that is receiving sap from the Lord, you will, and must, bear fruits. If you don't do both of these things your faith is valueless. You need to ask God for real faith.

c. There are times doing good works of faith will set you at odds with the world, but you have to keep doing them. The world may hate you and threaten you for what you do, but faith will throw out fear and cause you to be obedient.

So if you are told to stop worshipping, worship!

If you are told not to spank your children, do.

If you are threatened with arrest to compromise your body, don't.

If your family turns against you, that's normal. You have another family.
If someone wants advice about leaving a perverted lifestyle, give it.
If people call you names for speaking against the murder of children, accept it.
Let your faith work!

c. Keep in mind God's enemies may not stop you from worshipping (only the brazen like our Premier might), but God's enemies may more likely try to pressure you from doing good works of faith outside of the church. Living as a Christian in a post-Christian society can be very challenging, but you must show your faith!

Conclusion:

Abraham, Father Abraham, had a faith that worked. It was evident to God, to his children, and to the world. Rahab, Mother Rahab, had faith in God and it was evident to God, to her family, to the Jews, and to the Gentiles. Abraham and Rahab then did true works of righteousness that confirmed their true faith.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Those who show no signs of living for Christ are not Christians. Don't get too close to them. Don't marry them. Don't trust them.

2. There are many things in our society that are leading us to less signs of godliness...showing less evidence of faith. People want shorter worship services. People want to sing less Psalms. People would like to have a couple fewer laws – maybe 7 or 8. People would rather a 5% tithe so the poor are ignored. Selfishness is now an epidemic. But you are called to show a true understanding of what Jesus did for you on the cross by doing works of faith. You can't say you love your Savior and not be ready to stand up for him in a fallen world.

Finally: If you are not a Christian, know this: Without faith it is impossible to please God. You need faith to receive what Jesus did for you on the cross. If you don't have that faith, ask God to give it to you. And then show you have that faith by loving and living for him.