

## Faith that Works

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James 2:14-19

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Recently, I preached to you out of the first chapter of James. It was a message about the plan of God in the hard times. I just want you to think back to the people to whom James is writing this letter. The Pharisees and the people of Israel were coming in violent force against the church in Jerusalem. We have at least a few accounts of this but none so jarring as the account we find in Acts chapters 7-8. Stephen, one of the first deacons, was preaching the Gospel boldly that the Sanhedrin took notice. They dragged him into their chambers to account for himself. Stephen, knowing full well that they would murder him, preached one of the most powerful sermons that we have in the Scriptures. He went all the way back to Abraham and traced through the Old Testament giving the plan of salvation and he ended with the charge that the blood of God himself was on the hands of these pious politicians. They covered their ears, screaming and charging toward him. They dragged him out into the city and they made an example of him. They stoned him to death. After this, Saul (later the Apostle Paul) raided homes all through the country arresting and killing men and women who professed the name of Christ. So in fear for their lives, the Israeli church scattered all over the world... It's to these terrified and exiled believers that James writes this letter.

The first chapter spoke to people who were so afraid of the consequences of their faith that they were considering abandoning Christ altogether. We are reassured that God's promises are sure and that all suffering in this world is according to plan and that because a true Christian believes this, true faith, saving faith, perseveres until the end. In this chapter, he is writing to a different group within the scattered Jewish church. He is writing to those who became nostalgic for Judaism in light of their persecution but they did not want to abandon the faith entirely. They figured that they could have one foot in Judaism and one foot in Christianity. They stopped doing ministry in the name of Jesus and returned to their comfortable lives in the synagogues where they could pay lip service to Jesus while they were around Christians but they could still deny him publicly and they could thereby live with the world's approval. They synthesized a comfortable, lazy Christianity that could easily be lived out in secret. American church, does that sound familiar?... If you receive the word that God has for you this morning, it will not only challenge you; it will change you completely.

Let's read-

*"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.*

## Dead Faith

As we wrestle with this passage, I want to make something clear from the very beginning. James says that faith without works is dead. That doesn't mean that it is inactive. It means that it is a type of faith that is absolutely unable to save a man from God's wrath. For years, I read this passage and thought that God was simply telling me to try harder. So I would commit to a devotional plan, I would turn from my television addiction and I would do my best to tell people about Jesus if the opportunity ever presented itself. I would do my absolute hardest to grit my teeth, clench my fists and white-knuckle against sin to the best of my ability. I got accountability partners and we would talk candidly about our problems with lust and idolatry and when I pillowed my head at night, I would do so patting myself on the back... Day by day, I became a better Pharisee... This lasted for a few weeks then I found myself back where I started but burnt out on trying to look Christian. Is this your experience? Is your experience of the Christian life nothing more than surviving from one emotional experience to another knowing practically nothing of the Holy Spirit's drawing you towards holiness day by day?

Here's the problem. James isn't saying that if you are a Christian, that you need to try harder. He is saying that if you say that you are a Christian and it is not evident in the way that you live, YOU ARE NOT SAVED! The JUST shall live by FAITH! Bible studies, accountability partners and potlucks are all well and good but if you do not see enough evidence in your life to convict you of being a follower of Christ, you are still dead in your sin and this morning, as you sit in your pew, you are still on your way to Hell!

You say that you are saved! What on earth are you saved from?

Are you saved from lying? Are you saved from lust? Are you saved from greed? Are you saved from laziness, anger, hatred? Come on, what have you been saved from? And it is the nature of our flesh that right now, you are pointing fingers at every other false believer that you know and you may even be getting upset with me. Listen, this passage is God talking to you. It calls you to honestly examine your life. The Gospel is the POWER of God unto salvation! What does that mean?! It means that once a sinful man meets with an all-powerful, Holy God, he will never be the same. You can NOT remain the same.

Imagine that I showed up an hour late this morning and Rob was furious with me. He would ask me "What on earth were you thinking? Don't you appreciate the privilege that it is to preach to our church?" And I was to say "Oh Pastor Rob, I'm so sorry. You see, I went to the Balkan Grocery for breakfast and as I was crossing Minnesota to come back here, I dropped my phone in the middle of the street. As I went back to pick it up, a Mack truck going 120 miles per hour came and ran me over. So that set me back about an hour." Rob would either think that I am insane or that I am the world's worst liar. There is no way that somebody can have an intimate encounter with a moving Mack truck and walk away unchanged. We can consent to that about a truck but we say that man can become a follower of the crucified Christ without changing a THING! When you live for self instead of the Glory of Christ, behold the size of your God; he is smaller than a truck. He is smaller than you. Church, we have made a God who fits in our pocket that we can take with us anywhere and forget about him. If anybody asks, we can pull him from our pocket and say "Look how precious He is!" Do you want one of your very own? A

portable little God who will whisper assuring little messages in your ear? All you have to do is repeat this prayer after me” ...

You’ve got to ask yourself how we found ourselves in this mess! How did Evangelical Christianity in America go so far from what the Bible says about the power of salvation? It was a slow process. But it went something like this – At the turn of the last century, liberal theology was gripping the church so an group of believers from a bunch of denominations came together and asked the question what are the doctrines one must believe in order to be called a believer? How will we identify sound teaching from heresy? They came down to five fundamentals – The inerrancy of Scripture, the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, the blood atonement and the physical death, burial and resurrection. Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Brethren, we all held these things in common. The first generation knew that these were things which Christians believed... but as generations passed, we eventually came to the point where we said that one could become a Christian simply by believing these things as true. Do you see how subtle that is? We say that because a man can nod his head at the right places and repeat a prayer, somebody will pat him on the back and say “Congratulations, brother. You’re saved. Don’t let anyone ever tell you any different.” This man takes his children to Sunday school and as they sit there coloring a picture of Jesus, the teacher asks “Who loves Jesus” and of course all the kids raise their hands. And then she asks “Who wants to go to heaven? You don’t want to go to that dirty old Hell while there is a great, big heaven waiting for you?” Of course, all the kids raise their hands. “Alright” the teacher says “ Repeat after me - Dear Jesus, please come into my heart. Thank you for saving me. Amen. Now you’re all saved! If there is ever a point in your life where you think you might not be saved, all you have to do is think back to this day and remember that you said a prayer. Hooray!” This child moves on to the youth group where they play fun games and the music is pretty good and the Youth Pastor brings funny, 20 minute sermons that use illustrations to illustrate illustrations without ever wrestling with the Word of God. This child leaves the youth group disillusioned, runs off into the world and lives like the devil and we STILL we hold this person’s hand and reassure them all the while that they are going to heaven because they said a prayer. CHURCH! Have we forgotten the cost of following Christ?!

Jesus says “If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.” The call of Christ is not “Come to me so you can stop worrying about Hell. Pay me lip service and I will make your life easier.” Jesus says “COME. AND. DIE.” Die to yourself. Die to your sin. Die to your rights. If you have been reborn by the Holy Spirit, you cannot HELP but be radically changed. You will turn from sin; you will cherish the time that you spend in God’s word! You will develop a prayer life! You will love Jesus with your dying breath and every breath until then! This is not a matter of try harder; this is the question. Does your life prove that you have been reborn of the Holy Spirit? The answer to this question is SO important. Eternity hangs in the balance...

Let’s continue reading verses 18 and 19...

*“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!”*

## **Demonic Faith**

The demons were once angels. There is not one person in this room who knows their theology better than a demon ever will. They believe in the Trinity! They believe every word in the Bible. They even believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose again for the sins of man but they remain demons still because they live in defiance and rebellion to all of these things that they know.

James says "Don't you see! Believing the right things about God is NOT enough! Simply assenting to facts about God is NOT enough!" If you are here and you made a profession of faith at some point in your life, it was only that – a profession. You professed to have faith but if you don't have the works to evidence that you have been reborn, you should take NO confidence in that faith! It is not the type of faith that can save you!

You get chills when we sing Amazing Grace. You tear up when you hear about revival. You may have even responded to an altar call or two. God says that your emotions, if not accompanied with action are DEMONIC. Look! The belief of demons draws an enormous emotional reaction from them! They tremble. They fear God... but, they do not love him. They do not serve him. They only serve themselves and THAT is why they were exiled from God's holy Heaven... because Heaven is NOT a place for people who are afraid of Hell. It is a place for those who love Jesus.

But Pastor Rich, where is the love in your preaching?... Your best friend is the one that tells you the most truth. I know that I will not be the most popular preacher in the world for preaching repentance and the Holiness of God but the church today is so... SO deceived! Don't buy into what the self-centered mega-churches and televangelists are feeding you! I hear people say that they want to get our numbers up here; they want to see us have a greater evangelistic impact on the community; they want to see revival come to us. Those are all good things... but first, there needs to be a movement of God the Holy Spirit within these beloved walls. He needs to grab the people here, maybe even people who have been coming here for the entirety of their lives. If you have no efficacy in your ministry, if you have no power over the sin that infests your life, the question of this passage comes again – HAVE. YOU. BEEN. REBORN? Ask yourself - are we making a pretty little church for pretty little people or are we hungry and thirsty to see the authority of God almighty descend upon us? If you have been reborn of the Holy Spirit, your comforts, your benefits, your complacency SHOULD'N'T MATTER! The single prayer of the Christian's heart is "Father, do whatever it takes to bring glory to yourself through me! Crush me if it would please you! I want nothing from you but to serve you and love you!" That is why we look forward to heaven, not because it is a rest and an end but because after death, we will sing God's praises forever. It is ALL about the glory of God. You want to see a real revival in this place? Stop focusing on the blessings and glorify the Blessor with your whole self!

You may say "Rich, you are preaching works salvation! Paul says that salvation is by faith alone!" ... Paul does say that but James qualifies it in this passage. You see in Romans, Paul was writing to people who believed that they could have good deeds apart from faith and he says that there is NOTHING you can do to earn your way into God's grace. All of your works of righteousness are like filthy rags. James is talking to those who believe that they can have faith without good deeds and he says that a faith that

has no evidence is dead, demonic and useless because it is not the TRUE FAITH! Can that type of faith save a man? No way... You see, that kind of faith believes about Jesus but it cannot trust in him. It cannot love him. It cannot live for him, in him or by him.

### **The Good News**

Here's the good news. God is not dead! He is reigning from the throne and as long as there is breath in your lungs, He is holding back his righteous wrath and calling you to come to repentance! Our God is holy. He sits in the heavens and does what he pleases and even though we have sinned against him, even though we have cheapened His Gospel by the way we live our lives, even though we have discounted the blood of his Son with our dead and unbiblical man-centered doctrines, it nevertheless pleased Him to crush his Son! His perfect, divine Son who had done no wrong laid down his holy life to die for you so that his holy wrath would be satisfied. This morning, He is still crying out to the ends of the earth and right here in this building "COME! REPENT! THERE IS MERCY FOR YOU! YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN!" Oh church, it is my sincere prayer that you would taste and see that the Lord is good. That you would have the kind of fruitful life that screams beyond the shadows of doubt that the glory of God is your highest joy! Let's be done once and for all with gratifying the desires of our flesh and perverting the Gospel. See the holiness of our God, honestly look at the sin in your life and realize that you are still in desperate need of a Savior. Rend your heart. If the Spirit is stirring in you now, when we play our closing song, cry out to God right where you stand. Pray that you experience the miracle of being reborn so that you can live for him. Pray that he places a true faith in you. Friend, you have been a Christian by name only for so long, surrender to God's authority. Come to Jesus and die to self so that in him, you may truly live!