

Can Your Faith Save You?

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- [0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. It's great to be here with you. My name's Josh. Let's turn to James chapter 2.! Open our eyes to behold the wondrous things in your word.
- We pray that through James, you might teach us the good news about faith and salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.
- Amen. All right, James chapter 2, verse 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. 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.
- [1 : 2 6] 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. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.
- For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. So friends, this morning we come to the very heart of James' letter.
- [2 : 3 0] And to a very important and personal question for each one of us. As I say, there are a lot of technical details in the passage this morning. But the take home is very simple.
- And it could not be more important or kind of merely academic. The question is, can your faith save you? Can your faith save you?
- You see how James begins in verse 14. What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?
- Literally, is it able to save him? Is it powerful? Does it have any power to save him? What we see in this passage is that James distinguishes between two kinds of faith.
- On the one hand, the faith that is powerful to save. And on the other hand, a kind of faith that is powerless to save. And surely, brothers and sisters, this could not be a more important question for each of us to consider.
- [3 : 3 2] Considering for one, the salvation that James is talking about. And he's talking about salvation from the wrath of God. Right? Salvation from sin and death. And from God's wrath on the judgment day.

Remember, we've just been talking about the judgment day. Back in verse 12. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged. Right? We are all going to be judged. We're all going to meet God one day and stand face to face with him.

And that's why in light of the judgment day, we all ought to be interested in salvation. Now, James affirms, of course, that faith is what saves us.

Notice that. So sometimes I think people misunderstand James because they think that he is pitting faith against works. Right? Are we saved by faith or by works? And many of you will know that sometimes the Apostle Paul gets embroiled in this misunderstanding.

You'll hear people say that Paul teaches salvation by faith while James teaches salvation by works. But notice even from the outset that actually James is very clear about his question.

[4 : 39] He's not asking about faith or works, whether faith or works saves a person. Now, he is asking about what kind of faith saves a person. Right?

In other words, he's actually affirming right along with Paul that we are saved by faith. There's no question of that. But he wants to distinguish between the kind of faith that saves and the kind that doesn't.

The kind of faith that will be rewarded on the judgment day and the kind of faith that won't be. That won't rescue you from the punishment we deserve for our sins. This, of course, should be very interesting to a community that is marked by faith.

We are a community of faith, first and foremost, aren't we? And again, you'll notice throughout this passage, James never mentions people who don't have faith. Right? So we're not talking about believers versus unbelievers in this passage.

People who have faith and people who don't. No, he's talking about people here who have a kind of faith that saves. Who have, versus people who have a kind of faith that can't save.

[5 : 48] So they're all going to be in the community of faith. You see, there's a faith that is powerful and a faith that is powerless. Or, as he goes throughout the chapter, he'll say, there's a faith that is alive and a faith that is dead.

And as I say, this is the theological heart of James' book. And I think I've noticed over this week, actually, how perhaps wrong it is to characterize James as the kind of book about works.

And again, I think very simplistically in my own head. I've done this too many times. You know, I just sort of think to myself, Paul is all about faith. Maybe Paul's all about theology as well. And James is about works.

And he's about being practical. But actually, I think that completely misses the point of the book. Now, James is all about faith, right? From start to finish.

So if I could sum up the kind of tagline of the book of James for you, I think here it is. James is all about the power of God's word to bring about wholehearted living faith.

[6 : 55] James is all about the power of God's word to bring about wholehearted living faith. So remember the opening exhortation, for instance, in chapter 1, verse 2.

What does James want to talk to us about? Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James is a book all about faith. Faith that is proved and improved and ultimately perfected, made complete by testing.

We'll come back to that in a moment. But you remember how James describes sin in chapter 1, verse 15. Look down at chapter 1, verse 15. He says, Sin is something that grows in the heart, and then when it is fully grown, it brings forth death.

Now James is going to contrast that with the implanted word that also grows in our hearts or makes faith grow in our hearts, God's powerful word.

[8 : 06] So just as sin grows in our hearts and brings forth death, so the word of truth, he calls it in verse 18, or the implanted word in verse 21, and in verse 21, notice he says, the implanted word is able to save your souls.

In other words, the word is like a new seed that displaces sin in our hearts, and then like a seed, it begins to grow. It starts to produce in us faith and righteousness, righteousness, and this is what our passage this morning is really about.

It also produces works. Right? So faith and works are always together, growing up inside us from the same seed, growing up inside us by the life-giving power of the word.

Okay, now I've stolen my own thunder, okay, so we're not reaching any more, there's no more intriguing climax, as it were, that we're going to reach at the end. That is the point of this passage. Right? That is what James is going to press home this morning.

As he asks the question, what kind of faith saves us, can a faith without work save us? And he says, no, because of course that kind of faith is dead. That kind of faith isn't the fruit of the life-giving word that's at work in someone's heart.

[9 : 29] Does that make sense? Okay. But to begin with, he gives us an illustration, okay, of the kind of empty faith he's talking about. Look at verse 15. 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. So this is an illustration, it's not an example. James is saying, faith without works is like a pious well-wisher who doesn't actually do anything to help the poor.

Now, I think it serves quite well as an example, kind of on the side too, you know, of what James is talking about. Don't get me wrong, James obviously wants to keep hammering home the point that for his readers that they should care for the poor.

But first and foremost, he's using it as an illustration. He's saying, what good is that? What benefit would that do? What help? What advantage? What use? Would a kind of pious well-wishing be for the poor without practical application?

You know, and obviously his answer is that would be of absolutely no use. That wouldn't help at all. It does no benefit, it does no good. So pious wishes, a kind of faith, you know, a kind of prayer, you know, may God look after you brother.

[10 : 53] Pious wishes are weak and powerless to save the poor from their distress. And James says in verse 17, so also, you know, or in just the same way, faith by itself, if it doesn't have works, it's dead.

It's always dead. It has no power. I think, in fact, a better translation here, and I'm going to have to say this a few times, unfortunately, this morning, but I think a better translation would be faith in itself.

Faith according to itself. Faith in itself, if it doesn't have works, it's dead faith. It just doesn't have any life in it. His point is not that works make faith alive, you see, but that living faith always intrinsically has works in it.

Like the seed. You know, if you plant a seed in the ground and you water it and so on, you care for it and it grows, you know it's alive. But if it doesn't grow, you know it must be dead. It's not that the fruit makes it alive, but that the fruit proves it was already alive.

It had life in it. So faith that doesn't bear fruit in good works, well, it must be dead. And therefore, it cannot save anyone. That kind of faith has no power.

[12 : 09] Okay? But in verse 18, James introduces an objector or an opponent. Right? We're probably used to this kind of thing from the Apostle Paul. It was very common in the ancient world.

You see verse 18. But someone will say. Right? So James is introducing an imaginary sparring partner and as James debates with this sparring partner, this is going to give him a chance to preempt any objections, potential objections among his readers.

Now, before we look at the objection though, okay, so don't look down at your Bibles for now. That would be cheating. Before we look at the objection, I just want you to have a think.

If James is arguing that faith without works is dead, what would you expect an opponent to say? What would you expect an opponent of that position to say?

Why don't you turn to the person next to you and tell them? Don't look at your Bibles. It's just cheating. All right.

[13 : 19] Does someone want to put forward a suggestion? Peter? What about the thief on the cross? What about the thief on the cross? That is a great objection because he seems to have faith but no works.

Great. Exactly. What about the good works dogma? What do you mean? Maybe I'm not as familiar with that as you are, brother.

Okay, yeah, sure.

Yeah, thanks. I think I get what you mean now. Right, okay, yeah, quote back.

So you'd be quoting from Paul. Something like that. Hold on a minute. How can I do anything good? I'm just sort of obeying what my master has commanded me.

[14 : 27] It's not like positive. Like Jesus' words, when you do what you're told, that's just what's expected of you sort of thing. Okay, yeah, sure. Anyone else?

Do you want me to go back to do work so I can prove my faith? Go back to do work so I can prove my faith. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Okay, good. Look, now, I love telling evangelicals not to look at their Bibles. It's just so shocking, isn't it? But normally I would say don't go to a church that does that.

But let's look back at our Bibles now. Please have a careful look now. This all will have gone terribly wrong. So the objective, but someone will say, you have faith and I have works.

So you, James, you have faith and I have works. Now, do you see the problem? And this has caused considerable consternation among the commentators.

[15 : 33] The problem is that James doesn't seem to be, James' objector, sorry, doesn't seem to be playing his part. Right? He seems to put, if I can put it sort of very simply, when you expect him to put James on the work side of the equation.

James has been arguing that, you know, for works. For faith without works is dead. And put himself on the faith side of the equation. Like, you know, I can have faith alone. If James is the one all about works, faith without works is dead.

Then why does his opponent say to him, you have faith, James, and I have works. You would think it would be the other way around, right? You have works, James, but I have faith.

I still have faith. Do you see? Now, you do see, right? This is a big problem. And I totally read over it first, by the way. And then Lachlendingwell had to point it out to me.

So anyway, MTS is good for something. The second problem, though, is that basically no one really knows where the speech marks end.

[16 : 43] Okay? So they didn't use speech marks back in James' day. That's just the convention that we have in English. So listen to how the NET footnote describes the problem.

The NET always has excellent footnotes. There is considerable doubt about where the words of the someone end and where James' reply begins. Some see the quotation running to the end of verse 18, others to the end of verse 19, but most punctuate as shown above.

The someone is then an objector, and the sense of his words is something like, Some have faith. Others have works. Don't expect everyone to have both. Does that make sense?

So you'll notice from the punctuation in the ESV that they believe that the objector is only given a very short line in verse 18.

You have faith, and I have works. And then almost immediately, we revert back to James' own argument to refute that comment. Now, I don't want you to get lost in all the ins and outs and the technicalities here, but unfortunately, I think the majority view is wrong.

[17 : 50] I'm going to have to argue against it and try and persuade you of what I think. You know, I could be wrong, but I'll tell you for why, what I reckon. The first problem with the majority view, I think, is basically that James doesn't say, Some have faith, and others have works.

And he could very easily have said that. But instead, he says, You have faith, and I have works. And in fact, in the Greek, it is very emphatic about the I's and the you's in this verse.

He says, You, you have faith, and I, I have works. So I think that it just won't do to sort of basically change the meaning of a verse, because what it actually says doesn't fit with our understanding of the rest of the passage.

Okay? And effectively, that is what they have done. Secondly, notice how the I's and the you's actually flow throughout the passage kind of very organically.

Right? So James' opponent begins, You have faith, and I have works. And then with no indication that the speaker has changed, I think he continues.

[19 : 01] Show me your faith, apart from your works. And I will show you my faith by my works. See how the sentences just flow quite organically together.

Continuing to use the appropriate pronouns, I and you, according to who would have them. Whereas in the majority view, I think just because they don't understand the meaning of the passage, they arbitrarily have suggested that we should change the grammar of the passage, ignoring the flow of pronouns, and suggesting a change of speaker, even though there's no indication in the text.

I just find that very dissatisfying. Okay, but instead, what I think is happening, actually, is that James' objector, instead of stopping halfway through verse 18, I would go for the one where he's actually speaking all the way to the end of verse 19.

And then James starts arguing back in verse 20. So in verse 20, for instance, notice how he addresses his opponent with a word of reproach. Verse 20, you foolish person.

I think that's a helpful indicator of a change of speaker. You would expect that, wouldn't you, for James to address his opponent as he begins to refute them. And also, there is a little word in the Greek of verse 20 that is not translated in the ESV.

[20 : 31] It's the word depth. It is sometimes translated as now, or and, or but. Basically, this little word indicates just a little step change.

A little progression, or development, or a turn in the argument, without necessarily indicating the direction of that development. So that's why sometimes it can be translated and, or sometimes but.

But it's sort of just indicating a step change, without telling you necessarily the direction. Like a new point, maybe a bullet point, or a new paragraph. Okay?

So James uses that little word in verse 20. And I think in a language without speech marks, that that actually gives us the best clue that the change of speaker is in verse 20.

Okay. So this is a new paragraph because it's a new speaker. That's what I think is the structure of the passage. Then let's go back and think about the content then. What is the objector actually saying?

[21 : 31] And of course, if I'm right, it means now we have to rethink what verses 18 and 19 are all about. Given that this is not an argument for James' position, but an argument against it.

So remember, the essence of James' argument is that faith without works is dead. Faith without works is powerless to save. In light of that, I think it will come as no surprise.

I think the objection here is basically meant to prove that no, faith without works can be very powerful. Faith without works can be very moving.

To begin with, I think we should take the first sentence very straightforwardly. James' imaginary opponent says, You have faith and I have works.

Now I think what he's saying is, James, you, you the works guy, right, the works guy, the guy arguing for the importance of works, you also have faith.

[22 : 27] And I, I the supposedly faith alone guy, I also have works. Right? In other words, we both have faith and works.

Right? We both have faith and works. But, and now here's the kind of the kicker, and again, I'm going to have to just reluctantly disagree with the translators, but there's a little preposition here in Greek that the ESV translates it by, the NIV translates it from.

The basic idea is of separation from something. It's the word ek, and we get words like exit from that, or external, or ek. Okay, it means outside of something, or separate from something.

And so I think the opponent is continuing to speak in verse 18, and he says, So you have faith and I have works, but you can show me your faith apart from your works, and I can show you my faith apart from my works, or sort of extracted from my works too, separated out from my works.

See, he's saying, even though we both have faith and works, we can disentangle the two. We can separate them, distill them maybe, into separate containers. So that you can show me your faith apart from your works, and I could show you my faith separated out from my works.

[23 : 52] And then I think in verse 19, James' opponent continues, and he gives two examples trying to back up his argument. Right? James is not trying to straw man him.

James is trying to steel man him. Give him a good argument. The first one is, You believe that God is one. You do well. Now again, if you take the majority view, you have to load this verse with irony.

Okay? You do well. James must be being sarcastic. But I don't think that's what our opponent is saying. And you see, he is quoting from the Shema, okay, the famous Jewish confession from Deuteronomy chapter 6.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Right? It would be a bit like saying, You believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. You know? Or you believe in that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.

You know, you believe in the absolutely central orthodox tenets of our faith. James is saying, sorry, the objector is saying, You do well.

[25 : 00] That is a good thing. Is it not, James? James, are you saying that believing the Shema, right, is worthless? Is powerless?

Is just a nothing? What a ridiculous, almost blasphemous thing to say. That can't be right. Right? That's what the objector is saying.

And then example number two, he says, and again, I think the word even should just be translated with a simple and, which is the more usual translation. Example number two, and the demons believe and shudder.

Now, I think the question we should be asking ourselves here is, what would make a demon shudder? What could make a demon shudder?

I think of an exorcism here where someone is using the name of Jesus to try and drive out a demon. What could make a demon quake with fear? And James' opponent is saying, faith.

[26 : 09] They believe, right? They simply believe, actually, they believe in the Shema. They believe that God is one. They believe in, say, the Lord Jesus. But of course, and of course, it's just mere faith.

Demons don't have works. They don't have good works. So because the demons don't do good works, it might sound like a strange example, but it's actually a perfect example for James' opponent.

Right? They are a perfect example that distills faith from good works. Right? And yet, his point is, even though they don't have any good works, their faith is extremely powerful.

The faith kind of grips them and convicts them and terrifies them. It is actually an explosive kind of power that then drives them out during an exorcism, during a power encounter.

Does that make sense? Okay. Sorry, I didn't think it until this week anyway. Okay. But I don't think there is even a hint then of sarcasm or irony in this passage.

[27 : 18] I don't think you have to keep reading in a tone or something like that. I think you can read it fairly straightforwardly. I think it fits the grammar and ultimately the logic of the passage better. So James' opponent is trying to put forward the case that faith apart from works is not powerless, is not weak.

Here are some examples of powerful faith without works. Okay, but then in verse 20 it's time for James to argue back and there's a little pun that's worth pointing out. Literally, James says something like, do you want to be shown, you worthless person or you empty person, that faith apart from works is workless?

Right? It doesn't achieve anything, it doesn't work. Faith apart from works doesn't work. It doesn't have the power to save you. And then James backs up his argument with two examples, Abraham and Rahab.

First, Abraham, he says, was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? Now, at this point, those of us who are more familiar with Paul might say, no.

Right? Of course, Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God's promise in Genesis 15. You remember when Abraham was in his late 70s or early 80s in Genesis 15, God had promised him many offspring, but since he was still childless in Genesis 15, he was having his doubts.

[28 : 49] So God brought him outside and said, look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be.

And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. Let's just talk about justification for a moment.

That last little phrase means that God considered it an act of righteousness. When Abraham believed him, God considered it an act of righteousness.

Okay, so that's what that phrase means. Fairly often in the Bible, God is pictured as having a kind of big book where he records, it's a metaphor, of course, but God is pictured as having a big book where he records all of our good deeds and our bad deeds.

He has a righteousness column and a wickedness column. And what this verse is saying is that when Abraham believed God, God wrote down in that big book, Abraham's faith as an act of righteousness.

[29 : 51] The same phrase, for instance, is used in Psalm 106, verse 31, referring to Phinehas. You might remember Phinehas was around during Moses' time. And Psalm 106 reflects back on Israel's history.

Let me read from verse 28. Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor and ate sacrifices offered to the dead. They provoked the Lord to anger with their deeds and a plague broke out among them.

And Phinehas stood up and intervened and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever.

You get the idea. In other words, God wrote down in his big book of unrighteous deeds, it's like a big ledger, right? In his righteousness column for Phinehas, he wrote down, Phinehas intervened and killed the idolaters.

Now in Abraham's righteousness column, he wrote down, Abraham believed me. Now think about this, friends.

[30 : 59] This is really important. What Genesis 15 is telling us is that Abraham did the right thing. He believed the Lord.

And when you think about it, that's fairly intuitive, isn't it? What's the right thing to do when God makes you a promise? The right thing to do is to trust him, of course.

And Abraham trusted God. He did the exact opposite, the exact opposite thing that Adam and Eve had done in the garden when they rejected God's word. They didn't trust God and they believed the snake instead.

This is why trust, faith, belief, these words all basically mean the same thing. This is why faith is so important in the Bible. It's not just some arbitrary thing or some trivial thing that separates the saved from the unsaved, you know, as if God could have just sort of made up anything, you know, as long as they're religious or as long as they're something.

No, this is absolutely the key thing that God cares about first and foremost. It's that we trust Him. That's why this separates all humanity between the believers and the unbelievers.

[32 : 16] Now, of course, Paul, when he wants to highlight this, he will say, see friends, that's when Abraham was justified. That's when we heard God's judgment upon Abraham. The word justified means to declare something righteous.

Right? So Abraham was declared to be righteous before God in that moment, which, of course, he was and James is not denying that. But now, notice what James is saying.

He wants to say that there's also another passage to think about, brothers and sisters. It's Genesis chapter 22 when Abraham offered up Isaac on the altar.

Because in Genesis 22, about 30 or 40 years after Genesis 15, God also declared Abraham righteous. So let me just read to you a few snippets from Genesis 22.

As the chapter opens, Moses writes, after these things, God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham. And he said, here I am. He said, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

[33 : 30] Now, I think the first thing to notice is that this was a test. From the very beginning, Moses tells us that this was a test of Abraham's faith. Now, again, just think back to James.

This is why it's so important, a passage for James, do you see? Because James is all about faith and how faith is perfected through testing. Faith grows and improves by trials.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and lets steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

So James is interested in faith that grows and reaches perfection, completion, through testing and steadfastness. And so he goes to Genesis 22 when Abraham had to face this enormous test.

And then when Abraham passed the test, skipping down to verse 12, Genesis 22, verse 12, God said to him, Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to harm him, anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

[34 : 45] Verse 15, And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son.

I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven. Notice the connection back to Genesis 15 there. I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

So you see, God reiterates the promise in Genesis 15 that Abraham will have as many offspring as the stars of heaven and this time God says that it will happen because you obeyed my voice.

So now he doesn't use the language of righteousness or justification here exactly but the meaning is the same thing. He's saying to Abraham, You did the right thing. You obeyed me.

And because you did, I will bless you. So what James is really interested in, you see, is the connection between these two passages.

[35 : 58] He begins by referencing Genesis 22, the near sacrifice experience of Isaac. And then in verse 23, he quotes from Genesis 15 when Abraham believed God and was counted righteous, you see.

And the key word, I think, in verse 23 is the word fulfilled. See, James is saying that what God had said to Abraham 30 or 40 years earlier, when God justified Abraham 30 or 40 years earlier, that was fulfilled or completed or it reached its maturity in the great moment of Abraham's testing.

when God commanded that he offer up his son Isaac on the altar. Now again, notice all the language in verse 22. James is not trying to argue that Abraham was justified by works alone or something like that.

Of course not. He's not trying to argue that Abraham was partially justified by faith and partially justified by works. You know, he's not trying to say that Abraham was initially justified by faith and then eventually justified by works or anything like that.

You know, these are all heresies to steer clear of. Right? That all presupposes this kind of idea that you could distill faith and works into separate containers.

[37 : 27] That's what his opponent was trying to do. And James is saying that the kind of faith that justifies is living faith, is faith that works.

It's the kind of faith that works and has works organically, intrinsically, inherently within it. So in verse 22, he says, you see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works.

Literally, verse 22 has this funny phrase, faith was co-working with his works. Right? Faith was co-working with his works. Right?

So faith, apart from works, is workless and worthless. But it's workless is what James has been saying. Right? It doesn't have any power to do any work, to do the work of saving you.

And now faith that has works within it, that kind of faith, is workful. You know, it's full of works. It co-works. It actually does something. And of course, what it did was it saved Abraham.

[38 : 33] It was Abraham's living, working faith that God approved of when he justified him in Genesis 15. And it was Abraham's living, working faith that God approved of when he justified him in Genesis 22.

Now, secondly, James uses an illustration from Rahab. He says, and in the same way also, in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.

Now, I think he's choosing Rahab because people, you know, might be tempted to think that she was saved by a kind of faith without works. After all, she was a prostitute. And it's not like she trusted God, like Abraham, for decades and decades and decades, like Abraham did.

In fact, I think she is the thief on the cross from the Old Testament. Right? Moments before the judgment upon her city, she turns around.

She changes teams. Right? How did she get saved at the last minute? Surely she didn't have any works. James says, no, of course she did. Rahab wasn't saved by a kind of faith without works.

[39 : 52] No, Rahab too had a living, working faith. From the moment she expressed faith, it started working. It was filled with and brimming with works intrinsically in it. Think about how she treated the messengers.

Think about how she welcomed them, how courageous she was, how brave she was when she let them go free or when she put that little thread outside of her window, didn't she? So Rahab's faith was a working, living faith too.

And just as an aside, but I think the thief on the cross shows exactly the kind of thing, doesn't he? Initially, are they both heaping insults on Jesus? But then, he seems to flip, change his mind, I think this is how you harmonize the different accounts, and then he changes his mind, and immediately he argues against his opponent on the other side of his Lord, doesn't he?

So he immediately, even though he doesn't have time to go out and do and help the poor, he immediately starts expressing his faith in how he behaves. Because living faith always expresses itself like that immediately.

Okay, so it's time to wrap up. As we reach the end of the passage, James has one final helpful illustration, I think, to understand what he's been saying. And I think this one is really striking and compelling. I hope it sticks with you.

[41 : 03] Take a look at verse 26. James says, For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Now again, this is one of those verses where I think you have to slow down and read it carefully because you probably expect it to say the opposite thing. Right? Wouldn't you think that kind of works?

They're the kind of tangible bodily thing. And faith, maybe faith is the kind of intangible thing that animates our works. James says the exact opposite. Notice how faith is like a body.

Right? Faith is like a body and works is like the spirit that enlivens and fills that body. Now again, notice James isn't saying that people who don't have works don't have faith.

Right? Again, I think that's often how this passage is misunderstood. Slightly, we rush too quickly and we assume that. But that would be like saying bodies that don't have spirits don't exist.

[42 : 18] You know, that's not true. Right? What James is saying is that faith without works is dead like a corpse without a spirit.

It's useless, empty, powerless. It cannot save. Faith and works in a sense cannot be disentangled any more than a body and a spirit could be disentangled.

If we're going to have a living and active faith, a faith that actually saves us, then it needs to be filled and brimming with works because that is the only kind of faith that really is alive.

And that is the only kind of faith that God declares righteous in His sight. Both now and on the judgment day. Okay, which brings us back of course to where we began.

I do hope you haven't got lost in the details and some of the technical things this morning. I know it's been tough. I had to live it all week. It's a really tough passage.

[43 : 21] Okay. But the punchline is pretty simple. Can your faith save you? This is a question we should all be interested in answering. Can your faith save you?

Both now from your sin, can your faith save you now and from God's wrath on the judgment day? Is God going to smile upon your faith and say righteous in my sight?

Or are you going to have to experience the wrath of God for your sins? Are you justified before God now and forever? James' answer is God only justifies those who have a living faith in Him.

Those who have a working faith. God only justifies the kind of faith that works. Right, let's pray.

Loving Father God, by your powerful word at work within us, grow this living faith, this living working faith. Help us to receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save our souls.

[44 : 34] Oh Father, we do pray that you would help us to trust you always and that that would overflow in many acts of love and kindness and good deeds to one another, especially to the poor, to those who are vulnerable, widows and orphans and those who need our help and assistance.

We pray that it might be so obvious that we are your disciples and disciples of the Lord Jesus. By the way, your powerful word brings love and righteousness into our hearts.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.