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Good Works, Evidence of a Saving Faith

JAMES 2:14-26

Introduction

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1. Many of the hymns we often sing have “faith” as their focus:

- a. **FAITH IS THE VICTORY (469)**

“Faith is the victory, we know, that overcomes the world”

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith” (1 John 5:4, NASB95).

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- b. **LIVING BY FAITH (560)**

Living by faith, in Jesus above,
Trusting, confiding in His great love;
From all harm safe in His sheltering arm,
I’m living by faith and feel no alarm.

“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”
(Hebrews 11:6, NASB95)

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- d. **MY FAITH LOOKS UP TO THEE (586)**

My faith looks up to Thee,
Thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine:
Now hear me while I pray;
Take all my guilt away;

O let me from this day be wholly Thine.

“and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1b-2, NASB95)

e. **'TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS (679)**

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take Him at His Word,
Just to rest upon His promise, Just to know, “Thus saith the Lord.”
Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him! How I’ve proved Him o’er and o’er!
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus! O for grace to trust Him more!

2. In James’ letter to those Christian Jews who had been dispersed throughout Asia Minor because of the persecution which originated with the stoning of Stephen, he wrote to his readers about the nature of their faith.
3. Specifically, that true faith is a faith which works.
4. Tonight, I would like to draw your attention to the last half of the second chapter of James letter as we look at what he has to say about faith and its relationship to works.

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I. The Danger of Faith Without Works

A. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS A DEAD FAITH

1. Two rhetorical questions:

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” (James 2:14, NASB95)

- a. James asks two rhetorical questions, both of which expect negative answers.

- b. In his first question, James, refers to a hypothetical person who “says he has faith,” but this person “has no works (deeds)” which accompany his faith.
- c. James begins this first question with “what use (gain, profit) is it?” In other words what benefit is there in such a faith?
- d. His expected answer: None.
- e. His second question is “Can that faith save him?”
- f. Again, James’ expected answer is “No, that faith cannot save him.”
- g. Some will argue that Paul and James are at odds with each other, but that isn’t true.

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- h. Paul’s teaching on faith and works focuses on the time prior to our conversion (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8-9)

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” (Romans 3:28, NASB95)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8–9, NASB95)

- i. James’ focus is after conversion, he is a faith which minimizes the necessity of works after a person obeys the gospel.

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- 2. A hypothetical illustration.

“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?” (James 2:15–16, NASB95)

- a. James went on to provide his readers with a hypothetical situation which illustrates his point.

- b. In his illustration, there is a brother or sister in Christ who worships with the congregation.
 - c. This person is cold and hungry, he or she desperately needs the necessities of life.
 - d. A member in the church who claims to have faith goes to this brother or sister with an offer of good wishes, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled” (v. 16).
 - e. However, nothing is done to fulfill their physical needs.
 - f. James’ question is, “what use is that?” Of course our answer is “None at all.”
3. The apostle John, in his first letter had something to say about this (1 John 3:18).

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“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” (1 John 3:17–18, NASB95)

4. James makes his point: “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (James 2:17).
- a. Faith which is not accompanied by action is dead.
 - b. Anything with life produces fruit.
 - c. Faith in Jesus produces fruit, actions which reflect the nature and character of our Lord.
 - d. This is what the early church did.
 - 1) In Acts 6:1-4 we find the brethren in Jerusalem selecting men to make sure the widows among the Grecian Jews were not overlooked in the daily serving of food.
 - 2) In Acts 9:36-43 we find the Christians sending for Peter to come

raise Tabitha from the dead, a woman who had done much good for the community.

- 3) In Acts 20:34-35, Paul reminds the elders from Ephesus of the need to help the weak and Jesus' words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

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B. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS USELESS

"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, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:18–20, NASB95)

1. Real faith shows itself by its deeds.
2. There is no example of real faith that does not show itself in works.
3. You cannot have one without the other.
4. The Jewish Christians to whom James was writing believed that "God is one."
5. It is the basic creed of their Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4–5, NASB95)

6. The demons believe the same truth.
 - a. The demon who indwelt the man in the synagogue in Capernaum spoke to Jesus saying, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (Mark 1:24, NASB95)

- b. Likewise, the Gerasene demoniac said to Jesus, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:7)
- 7. James said that the demons not only believe this, but they also “shudder” at the fact.
- 8. However, their belief does not cause them to change.
- 9. Real faith is more than mental assent to truth — it includes an active response to that belief.

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II. Examples of Faith That Works

A. ABRAHAM

- 1. To this point, James has made three points:
 - a. “Faith, if it has no works, is dead” (v. 18).
 - b. “Faith without works is useless” (v. 20)
 - c. Faith which has no works cannot save us (v. 14)
- 2. Now James presents to us two examples of people who showed genuine faith by their deeds.
- 3. The first of those is Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation.
- 4. James asks the question, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” (v. 21).
 - a. The word “justified” (δικαιόω) means to be declared righteous.
 - b. This is a reference to Genesis 22:2, when God told Abraham to take his only son Isaac and offer him up to God as a burnt offering on a mountain in the land of Moriah.
 - c. Abraham took Isaac and went to the place of which God had spoken.
 - d. There, Abraham built the altar, arranged the wood, bound his son

Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (Genesis 22:9).

- e. When Abraham raised the knife to slay his son, Isaac, an angel of the Lord called to him, instructing him not to harm his son (Genesis 22:12).
- f. James points to Abraham's total obedience to God as evidence of his faith.

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5. From this James makes two points about Abraham's faith:

"You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected" (James 2:22, NASB95).

- a. His faith and his actions were working together: "You see that faith was working with his works" (James 2:22a).

- ☐ Abraham's faith prompted his obedience (good works).

- b. His faith was made complete by what he did: "as a result of works, faith was perfected" (James 2:22b).

- ☐ Abraham's obedience demonstrated the existence of true faith.

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6. James sums all of this up with these words: "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." (James 2:23, NASB95)

- a. The Scripture which James speaks of as being fulfilled was from 30 years prior to this incident.
- b. In Genesis 15, we find Abraham and Sarah still childless.
- c. God told Abraham that his heir would come from his own body and then instructed him to look up at the night sky and count the stars if he was able.
- d. God then said to Abraham, "So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:5).

- e. It is in Genesis 15:6, that we read these words: “Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”
 - f. James tells us that it was at this point that the Scripture was fulfilled.
 - g. It was also at this point that Abraham “was called the friend of God” (James 2:23b).
7. From this example, James makes the declaration: “You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24).

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“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? (James 2:25, NASB95)

1. James’ second example of good works is the woman Rahab.
 - a. She was a Gentile and a prostitute living in the city of Jericho prior to its fall to the Israelites during the days of Joshua (Joshua 2:1-14).
 - b. Matthew lists her in the genealogy of Christ (Matthew 1:5).
2. She hid the two Israelite spies whom Joshua had sent to spy out the city, and then deliberately misled those sent by the king of Jericho to capture them.
3. Had her deception of the king been found out, it would have resulted in her death and perhaps even the death of her family members.
4. James makes clear that it was Rahab’s faith in the God of Israel which caused her to protect the spies.

Conclusion

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1. James provides us with another analogy:

“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26, NASB95).

2. **In Genesis 2:7, Moses records these words,** “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7, NASB95)
 - a. **The union of the spirit and the body produces a living human being.**
 - b. **In Ecclesiastes 12:7, Solomon tells us that at death,** “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”
 - c. **Our body without our spirit is a lifeless corpse.**
3. **In the same way, if our faith does not result in good deeds, then it is a spiritually lifeless faith.**
4. **I want to challenge each of us here tonight to demonstrate our faith by letting our light shine before others** “in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).
5. **What about your faith tonight? Is it a vibrant faith, or is it on life support?**