

~ Effectual Faith ~
(A Faith That Works)

Text: James 2:14-26

Theme: If any man says he has faith but that faith never effects change in his life and never produces fruit in his work, then his faith is empty and worthless. Such a faith is a dead faith, for there is no life producing power in it.

Main:

- I. **Faith Evidenced by Works** (Vs 14-19)
 - A. The emptiness of faith without works (Vs 14)
 1. Faith that saves and then works.
 - a. Is James saying that our own good works can contribute to our salvation?
 - i. The short answer is, "No!"
 - ii. The longer answer is that James is not saying that a man is saved by works. After all, **Ephesians 2:8-9** say, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."*
How then can James raise the question, *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"*
 - iii. James is emphasising the fact that faith must produce something or else it isn't real faith at all. Saving faith, the sort of faith that receives salvation as a gift of God's grace apart from good works, this faith which is effectual to save is also effectual in producing new life in the possessor of it. Such a faith will be evidenced by good works. Therefore, faith without works is dead, but faith that produces works reveals that it is a living faith.
 - b. What benefit is there in a faith that is undetectable?
 - i. Can a hidden, unfruitful faith really obtain grace from God unto salvation?
 - ii. "It seems to be a tendency inherent in most of us to go to extremes in matters of doctrine. This is true in regard to the question of our salvation as well as in other things. Some insist that we are saved by character; that only as we do good works and consistently obey the law of God can we be justified. At the other extreme are those who

rest solely upon an historical faith for their acceptance with the Lord, ignoring the need of that inner change which the Saviour described as a new birth, and which is evidenced by a life of practical righteousness.”¹

- iii. The Apostle Paul was used by God to explain that salvation cannot be obtained through good works. Now James writes to tell us that genuine faith unto salvation must produce good works, or else it is proven to be ineffectual in obtaining salvation also.
 - iv. “James... makes it plain that the faith that saves is a faith that works, and that no one is justified before God who is not justified practically before men. What profit, he asks, if a man says he has faith and his behavior belies his profession? Is this the kind of faith that saves?”²
 - v. To put it simply, you say you have faith, but if you never act upon it, then you don’t really have faith at all. Genuine faith will always produce a result that is consistent with itself.
 - If I have faith in God then I will act upon that faith in trusting him for salvation and evidence that lifechanging salvation through my daily living.
- B. The evidence of faith by works (Vs 15-19)
- 1. The example of empty faith (Vs 15-17)
 - a. James draws a practical picture of faith that is empty, or dead.
 - i. James asks us to picture our brother or sister as being in desperate need of food and clothing. This naturally should make us empathetic toward that person. He then asks us to imagine that our response to this predicament is to say, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” but we don’t give that brother or sister any food or clothing.
 - ii. The question is, “What good have we done by saying the words but not fulfilling the actions required in order to make those words a reality?”
 - If you say, “be warmed and filled” but you refuse to give any food or clothing so that your words might become a reality, you have revealed that your words

¹ H. A. Ironside, [*Expository Notes on the Epistles of James*](#). (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947), 28–29.

² H. A. Ironside, [*Expository Notes on the Epistles of James*](#). (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947), 29.

- are empty, lacking any real substance, and they show that your heart isn't in them.
- b. "Even so, faith without works is dead, being alone."
 - i. Now the parallel is drawn for us and it is undeniable. If a man says he has faith, but his actions don't match his claim to faith, then his faith is actually empty, lacking any real substance, and his heart is not convinced of the faith his mouth professes.
 - ii. Again, it is not that we are saved by faith, but that a man who professes to have faith but lives like the faithless is a liar, because true faith has the power to effect real change.
2. The evidence of living faith (Vs 18-19)
- a. Faith without works cannot be proven or tested
 - i. James says here, "You may come to me and say that I have works and you have faith, but you demonstrate your faith to me without your works, and I'll demonstrate my faith by my works."
 - ii. How can you prove your faith apart from acting upon it. Acting upon your faith is the only way to validate its existence. If you never act upon it then it was never really there.
 - b. Faith must have the right focal point in order to be effectual unto salvation.
 - i. Notice that the devils believe in God and tremble, but their faith was not acted upon when they were in their original, perfected state. Instead, they chose to reject God even though they believe in Him and fear Him.
 - ii. For faith to take effect it must be placed in the one true God, it must produce a healthy fear of God, and that fear of God must drive us toward God in dependence upon him for salvation, rather than away from God in rejection of Him.

II. Faith Perfected by Works (Vs 20-26)

A. The production of works by faith (Vs 20-21a)

1. The example of Israel's father Abraham

a. God tests Abraham's faith. (Genesis 22)

- i. In Genesis 22, God commanded Abraham to take his son, Isaac, and travel to a place that God would show him. He was told that upon reaching this place he would need to make an altar and sacrifice his only son on that altar.
- ii. God used this to test Abraham's faith in God, to see if Abraham was willing to trust God even when he couldn't see the outcome beforehand. Hebrews 11:19 tells us that Abraham obeyed God because he *"Account(ed) that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."*

b. As verse 22 tells us, Abraham's faith wrought works.

- i. In other words, because Abraham believed God, his faith led him to obey God. Thus, his faith produced good works which of themselves gave evidence of the faith that produced them.

B. The perfection of faith by works (Vs 21b-26)

1. Our faith is perfected when it is put into practice.

a. Because Abraham trusted God, even in testing, his faith was proven to be real and strengthened through exercise.

- i. Verse 22b tells us that it was by works that Abraham's faith was perfected or brought to full maturity.
 - We often say, "the proof is in the pudding." Which is to say, wait until the pudding is tested before you declare it to be good.
 - The same goes for faith. Don't take my word for it when I say I am a man of great faith. See what I do when God asks me to exercise that faith by taking action, then you will know how genuine my faith really is.
- ii. Notice that verse 23 emphasizes that it was Abraham's faith that was counted to him for righteousness.
 - Yes, he was a man who did good works, but it was justifying faith that produced those works.
 - God saw Abraham's faith and counted it to him for righteousness.

Romans 3:28 *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."*

- iii. There are two extremes to be avoided then:

- There is the crowd that says faith is all that is needed for salvation and that it doesn't matter if there is no fruit or evidence of faith as long as the individual says they have faith.
 - The other crowd says that faith is dead without works, so good works must be the basis for obtaining salvation.
 - Both are wrong. Faith is the beginning of salvation, but it is by faith that we enter into a whole life of faith that produces good works.
2. The final example James gives us is of Rahab.
- a. Rahab put her faith into action and chose the God of Israel over Jericho.
 - i. When Rahab received the two spies into her house and hid them from the soldier of Jericho, she was putting her faith into action by siding with the people of God.
 - ii. Rahab's declaration of faith is found in Joshua 2:9-11
 - **Joshua 2:9-11** *And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.*
 - iii. It was faith put into action that led her to side with Israel. She believed that God was going to accomplish what he has promised and that led her to act in opposition to everything she had known in order to side with God.
 - b. The conclusion that James draws is quite simple, but powerful.
 - i. Just like the body without the spirit inside it is dead, so faith without works is dead.
 - Works are the evidence of living faith. They reveal that something about this faith has power to produce good works.
 - If your faith does not produce good works, then it is no better to you than a body without a spirit. It is dead and therefore, worthless.

- ii. *“Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”*³

Conclusion:

1. Saving faith, the sort of faith that receives salvation as a gift of God’s grace, this faith which is effectual to save is also effectual in producing new life in the possessor of it. Such a faith will be evidenced by good works. Therefore, faith without works is dead.
2. For faith to take effect it must be placed in the one true God, it must produce a healthy fear of God, and that fear of God must drive us toward God in dependence upon him for salvation, rather than away from God in rejection of Him.
3. True faith leads us to obey God even when the outcome is either unknown or unclear. Faith is believing and **acting** upon the Word of God. *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him.”* (Heb 11:6)

³ [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#), Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Jas 2:18.