

Dead Faith James 2:14-26

Hebrews 11
Joshua 2

This week we are going to be looking at a controversial passage in scripture. It is a passage that I believe has been greatly misunderstood, and misused by many, to teach doctrines that are false, and unbiblical. So today we are looking at the end of Chapter 2 where many believe that James is teaching a works salvation, or faith by works. This text is used by Catholics and the like to justify their doctrines, but they are wrenching it out of context and abusing it. Our challenge is to take this what appears to be possibly a passage that contradicts with the teaching of the rest of scripture and try to understand it and put it in its proper context. For scripture interprets scripture, and no passage should be taken alone on its own merit.

Before we jump into it this week though I want to remind everyone to whom it is believed that James is writing to and the purpose of his writing this letter for I feel it is important and helps us to establish some context into what he is saying.

It is believed by most scholars that James is writing to a group, or groups of people who had attended the churches in Jerusalem but fled under the persecution that they were having to endure. Many believe that what James is doing in this book is responding to some things he has heard coming back to him from those groups of people. This book was believed to be written sometime in the mid AD 40s, before James' meeting with Paul that was recording in Acts. We have already gone through that a few weeks ago during the introduction to this book so I am not going to go through it all again but rather just mentioning it as a reminder. Some believe that James was hearing reports of Paul's teaching, and the effect that it was having on the churches, but from the writing of this letter here, and because of its seemingly contradictory nature to Paul's gospel many believe that James was responding to Paul's teaching without fully knowing what was being taught. Only receiving information 2nd hand.

Another option that could explain the tone in this part of the book and his focus on christian works, is that he wasn't so much correcting something he misunderstood but maybe he was correcting people who misunderstood Paul's teaching and took it to far. Either way, I believe that is why we see such a focus on the outward works of a person here when most of the new testament teaching has to do with the inward work of God on man.

Last weeks message really leads into this weeks. James was warning them against partiality, or favoritism, and treating others in the faith differently. It really goes down again to how do we act as Christians and what should our Christian walk look like. James warns us that if we treat people within the church, or who come into the church in such a way that it elevates one over the other it isn't just a simple matter of preference, but rather it is a sin.

As Christians the way that we should act and treat one another is as brothers and sisters for we truly are, having been adopted into God's family through Christ making us all have the same spiritual father. We are not to be a divided family, but a holy, just, devout family of God. That is why if there is partiality within this family, it is sinful for we are all equal, we are all redeemed sinners who were destined for Hell until God replaced our sinful heart of stone, with a heart of flesh able to love, able to obey, able to worship our father God.

This is an interesting point that we will come back to shortly, for it pertains exactly to this passage we are looking at today, that because of Christ's death on the cross, and God's sovereign grace toward us we are able to love, act, and be what we are and what we should be.

I find it interesting that people find such a contradiction between this book and the teachings of Paul. There has been of course some debate, and I think there are probably still some today that take such a hard line in this that they believe this book shouldn't be included in scripture, or if it is included that it comes with some caveats. I think that for me there is no doubt as to whether this book should be included, much of what James is saying here is echoing Paul's teaching, just from a different perspective. We see it very clearly in verse 8 of chapter 2. He says If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture "You shall love neighbor as yourself" This is the same thing that Paul said in Galatians when he said that the whole law is fulfilled in this, "to love your neighbor as yourself" Both Paul, and James are quoting Leviticus 19 verse 18. and both are saying that it is the chief law, it is the one that all the rest hinge on, it is the one that all others are fulfilled in.

I think that goes back again, to having the new heart, able to love, but not just love as the world loves, or as what is common among mankind but a deeper love, one that not just cares for another, but cares for another to the point of being willing to lay your life down for that person. Now I don't think any of us here can claim that we are willing to do that with very many people in our lives, definitely probably not with neighbors, coworkers, people we don't know, or people who annoy us...but that is exactly what God is calling for us to do....to love as Christ loves, to love those around us, those in our lives as Christ loves. If we are to do so with our neighbors, should we not so much more so love our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Yet so often we see churches destroyed by slander, backbiting, gossiping, and selfish pride. These fit more into the category that Paul lists in Galatians as works of flesh, and not works of the spirit. Now please, do not misunderstand me... I do not mean to say that because a person does these things that it makes them not a part of God's family, but it definitely is not living out a life in Christian love and conduct toward each other. It is sinful, shameful, and damaging to the body of believers and should not be, but we live in a fallen world, and we are fallen people saved by grace.

I think that goes right into what James says in verse 14 about judging without mercy. If we judge without mercy, how can we expect to be judged with mercy? Our lives are to reflect Christ, is not Christ merciful? How horrible it is, and how awful of a sin it is to be unmerciful, to slander, to lie, to cause division, contention, in the family of God. Yes, we are human, yes we are not perfect and we sin, we can be prideful, arrogant, and show partiality but we should not be okay with it, or excuse it away saying that is just how I am. It is a sinful behavior that we should be on our knees begging forgiveness for.

We need to guard ourselves against such partiality, favoritism, racism, pride and arrogance. Paul says that those who are of the spirit show peace, love, and long suffering, patience, kindness and against such there is no law, for these people are fulfilling the royal law, the law of liberty, loving your neighbor as yourself, showing Christ like love to those around you. Paul tell us that this is what a Christian's life should look like, and James tell us in verse 12 here that we are to speak, and do so as those who will be judged by this law of liberty. We are to conduct ourselves in such a way that it is apparent and obvious to those around us that we are a part of the family of God.

That sets it up helping us to understanding the last half of chapter 2 here. Verse 14 James says, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? James is setting up a question which is going to answer in the following verses. Can one have faith without works? Is there such a thing as a faith in God yet shows no outward sign? I think we already answered that question leading up to this but non the less that is what is being asked here.

There is an idea of a no Lordship faith. A faith that saves you from hell, but it is nothing more then believing in God, and some would even say believing that Christ died. Yet, if you look at their life you would not know it. The use foul language, given to drunkenness, partying, revelries, and the like as Paul would say. They are doing a lip service to God, claiming him as savior, but not as Lord. The idea that God doesn't care how you live your life here on earth as long as you believe in him. If you want to talk contradictions, that is a contradiction to scripture if I have ever heard one. The idea of a no Lordship salvation is not found anywhere in scripture, yet it seems to be much of what we see in the world today.

James is refuting this very idea with a metaphor in verse 14, trying to show how important works are with Faith. I think the type of Faith that James is arguing against is pretty rampant in Christianity today. He says, if a brother or sister is naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

I call this the Facebook faith. Is this not what we see passed off as christian faith? Empty words, devoid of meaning. Empty promises, if you Love God share this! Show your support by putting this as your status. None of that really makes a difference, just as telling someone in need to be warmed, be filled, and we do nothing to provide such. It is empty words, with no meaning. What about a faith with no works? No outward showing of it? Isn't it just empty words?

Jame says that such a faith is dead. If you are claiming Christ, if you are claiming faith in him and your life doesn't show the works of the spirit I am sorry.. but that faith is dead, it is empty, it is false. It is no different then the person who promises food and clothes and does not provide it and claims that they have helped that person. Empty words, with no meaning. If your life is not reflecting Christ, and his love you need to seriously give your faith, and your belief some serious thought. Do not deceive yourselves, We must be doers of the word, and not hearers only. A faith that saves, is a faith that works, it is faith that loves, and is central to our life and conduct as believers.

I find it interesting that people want to point out this section of James and say it contradicts the rest of the bible, yet they are okay with everything he has said up to this point. This description he uses of a dead faith, a faith without works..is it not the same as the man who looks in the mirror and forgets who he is when he looks away. He said that if we are hearers only, and not doers of the word...meaning if we just listen to the words, use the language, the terms, the words but do not do them..do not have the work then we are deceiving ourselves. If we look into the perfect law of liberty and continue in it and are not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work this one will be blessed. Not the one who hears, and forgets..but the one who hears, and who does.

Then he goes on and says in verse 26 of chapter 1, “if anyone among you think that you are religious, and you do not bridle your tongue, you deceive your own heart and your religion is useless.”

James is not saying anything here in the later half of chapter 2 then what he has already said. If you don't continue in the perfect law of liberty, if you do not bridle your tongue, if you are not a doer of the word and a hearer only your faith is dead, it is not a saving faith, it is a false, dead faith and you are deceiving yourselves.

verse 18, he says: "But someone will say, you have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

This is a hard text to understand and there is some disagreement over exactly what James means here. But I think one of the points that we can take away from this, is that faith, and works are not 2 different coins, but rather 2 sides of the same coin. I think it is much like what he has been saying up to this point, you say you have faith that's great...but how do I know? Do I just take your word at it, like the man who says go, be filled, be warm but gives no food or clothes? You claim faith, but have no works, I claim faith and my works prove that it is true.

He continues on, and says, You believe that there is one God well..that's great! You do well, that is a step in the right direction...but do you not know that even the demons believe in one God...and they tremble! Your belief that God exists will not save you. The Facebook faith, does not save. Satan and the demons believe that God exists, what does it profit them? Just believing that there is a God, doesn't do you any good. The idea we mentioned earlier of a no lordship faith, is a dead faith. All of this goes hand in hand.

He then goes into another example using Abraham. He says in verse 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? How do you think God would have responded if Abraham just said.. okay God, I will do it...and then never did. Would Abraham have acted under faith if he just said he would but didn't actually do it? If Abraham did not put the load of sticks on Isaac's shoulders, walked up the mount, built an altar, bound his son and raise his hand to sacrifice him...he would not have acted in faith, his words would have been empty and meaningless. But he didn't. Abraham acted out his faith, God told him to sacrifice his son, his only son, the son whom all the promises were given and Abraham does it. He tells his Son..."God will provide a lamb for his offering."

What faith! As a father I think on this, and a tremble. God has not asked for my children, but if He does...what will be my response. This faith that we have is real, it is vibrant, and lives in us. It acts out, it works in us righteousness to do our fathers will.

Verse 22. Do you see that faith was working together with Abraham's works, and by his works, by actually heading up to offer his Son on an altar to sacrifice that through these works his faith was made perfect and scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God."

Friends, this isn't a dead faith, Abraham didn't just believe that God existed. He believed God's promises, even to the point of sacrificing his son and heir. This marriage of faith and works is what it is all about. True saving faith in Christ, will have good works, you will do the will of your father, because he has not only commanded it, but he has given you the ability, the desire to do so.

As if we needed more, James uses the account of Rahaab, the harlot, who hid the Israelite spies. Who

God saved when he destroyed the city of Jericho. We read that account this morning She said, the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Rahaab's faith had action, it had works. She did not tell them go hide and then turn them over to the ruler. She believed these men were from the one true God and she did what she could to protect them.

As we read through Hebrews 11 this morning, recounting the faithful, did you notice that their faith was always paired with action. By Faith, Abel Offered, By Faith Noah prepared an Ark, by faith Abraham obeyed and left his home, by Faith Abraham offered Isaac, By Faith Moses refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter and instead choose to suffer with God's people Israel, and it goes on and on..each person of faith proving that faith through their actions.

In closing out his argument here, James says in the last verse of chapter 2, Just as a body without the spirit is dead, so is faith without works dead. This is his final example showing that if your faith does not produce good works for Christ, then your faith is just like a dead man. Empty, void of the spirit.

We need to take what James is saying here to heart. We should make sure that our faith is one that is true. Do we do good because it flows out of us to do so, or do we do good to attempt to make ourselves appear holy? As I mentioned before, I think in our society today there are many who are claiming Christ, but do not have the spirit, do not have this vibrant, true, working faith.

Matthew 7 says to Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. People who appear to be holy and just, but inside are dead, and in fact are seeking to cause harm to the sheep. Verse 16, You will know them by their fruits, Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

This is all that James is saying. He is not saying that your works themselves justify you as some believe this passage to be saying. Some believe that James here is arguing that doing good works is how we are justified, But just as faith without works is dead.. works without faith is dead also. James entire argument is just as Matthew 7 says...this is how we know that our faith is real, when it produces good fruit. And it will produce good fruit, for that is God's design, that is his purpose and his plan. Our works through faith is not of us, it is Christ working through us...if our works are our own to gain merit before God, we are in a very bad place. Matthew 7 verse 22:

“Many will say to Me in that day, Lord Lord have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name and done many wonders in your name, and then I will declare to them, I never knew you, depart from me you who practice lawlessness.”

Let us not be this person, do not deceive yourselves thinking that you can claim Christ with words, but not live your life with him as your Lord. Also let us not think that our actions and works will produce faith as the person in the example of Matthew 7....did I not do all these works for you Lord? Let us not hear the answer Depart from me, I never knew you. It is a sobering thought, but we have been given the promises of God, If we are his, we will not be lost, we will be given the crown of life. I ask today: Are you His? Is **your** faith real?