

A Faith Diagnostic

James 2:18-26

May 26, 2024

If you turn in your Bibles to James chapter 2, James chapter 2:18-26, that's going to be what we look at today. Last week we started into this section beginning in verse 14 of James 2. It is one of the most famous sections of the book of James and probably one of the more famous sections in all of Scripture. And though there is a sense in which the entirety of the book of James has to do with the character of true, saving faith, this is the section that states it the most plainly, the most strongly.

Just a kind of quick recap of the book: After beginning his letter by teaching this early Jewish Christian congregation how true faith responds to the testing of trials, James then goes into a section essentially on how one with true faith ought to respond to the Word of God. So if you truly believe that the Bible is in fact the Word of God, then you will be careful to read it with the intention of obeying it. And in the last couple

of verses of chapter 1, James begins to set us up for some of the stronger things he is going to see.

You can kind of see him laying the groundwork, laying out the differences between one who claims to be religious and one who is a practitioner of "pure and undefiled religion before God," is what James says; and in those verses he points out that the mark of true religion is seen in actions, in works. And then in the first 13 verses of chapter 2, he shows us the absolute incongruity of one who claims to hold the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus while also holding an attitude of personal favoritism. This, too, is a section that really demonstrates the difference between true and false faith, how it makes absolutely no sense in light of the gospel that a Christian would claim to believe, to say that you believe the gospel and then still show sinful partiality to another person, essentially based on nothing more than that person's value to you. That's essentially living in denial of the gospel.

So he really has laid out the groundwork well for the incredibly strong statements about the nature of faith and works

that we see here in the second half of James chapter 2. So we shouldn't really be surprised at all by the statements saying that essentially there is a type of faith that one can possess that is useless and dead. There is a type of faith that claims to believe all of these wonderful gospel truths that we kind of rehearsed last week, the divine purposes in the life, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a true belief or a true intellectual affirmation in those things that is useless and leads to death and not life.

And this is James' main point in this section of scripture that we started on last week. And it is a main point that he does not try to hide. You don't have to do a deep dive into commentaries and Bible study resources to understand what James is saying, here. Even though we might struggle a bit with the bluntness of it, the meaning, the point, is right on the surface, repeatedly restated.

And so let's remind ourselves of that and pick it up again and read the entirety of the section, James 2:14-26. James says, "What use is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but

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he has no works? Can that faith save him? 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? Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself. But someone will 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?

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see, the faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And 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? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

Again, like we pointed out last week, four times the main point is essentially restated. James is not hiding it. Verse 14: "Can that faith save him?" Verse 17: "Faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself." Verse 20: "Faith without works is useless." And verse 26: "Faith without works is dead." James is teaching that there is such a thing as a dead and useless faith. And again, notice he isn't actually arguing no faith at all. He's essentially letting his audience hang on to a certain kind of concept of faith, and he's just pointing out that that's a dead and useless faith. So there's a type of faith that leads to eternal condemnation, and there is also one that is living and saving, and James is saying that you can tell which type of faith you have.

Last week we began our study in this section by looking at verses 14-17. We spent a little bit of time talking about how what James is teaching, here, should not be, as it often is, set against the teaching of Paul, that salvation is through faith apart from the works of the Law. I spent more time on that last week than I will this week, so you might want to go back and listen to that sermon if you haven't heard it. But we'll spend

more time in that today. We won't rehash all that right now. More of it will come up in the text this morning.

But what is going on in this passage isn't James actually attacking faith. He's not attacking faith. He's defending faith. He's defending the true faith from those who would slander what he calls faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ by defining it in a way that allows them to essentially live unchanged by the gospel that they claim that they believe. As we said last week, and the case is made by, again, multiple commentary writers, that Paul and James should be seen as soldiers in the same army, standing back-to-back, defending true faith from attacks that are coming from opposite directions.

So last week we isolated verses 14-17, which kind of flow out of that section on sinful partiality, as that section is primarily on how a dead and useless faith might treat or not treat brothers and sisters in Christ. He points that out in verses 14-17. So we saw the picture in that passage that someone who claims to have faith, but while interacting with brothers and sisters in Christ, they might demonstrate that they are

actually most concerned about themselves and about their own life, about their own issues. But, you know, they still try to at least use some type of words and express the types of sentiments that at least make it sound like they actually care, like they're actually Christians.

So today we're going to finish our study in this passage, as now James kind of expands on that concept of a dead faith by moving beyond how one might speak to and respond to others as a demonstration of true faith, to how one might speak about and respond to God himself. And we're going to do that by looking together at just two points today, two points: point one, the empty confession of a dead faith; and point two, the exemplary action of a living faith.

So point one, the empty confession of a dead faith, the empty confession of a dead faith. And we'll see that again in verses 18-19 where James says, "But someone will 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." Now,

right away when I was studying these verses, I discovered that this happens to be, something I didn't know, one of the most difficult-to-translate sections in the New Testament. As I entered the commentaries, I discovered that there is just a ridiculous amount of debate that I had never known before, all over something that I'd never actually thought about. But since it's such a big deal, we should take just a moment and talk about it before we go any further.

So you see in verse 18 James doing something that's actually common, you see Paul do it a lot, but common among writers at this time, by introducing an expected argument to what he has just been saying, by placing the argument in the mouth of a imaginary objector. You see that when he says, "But someone will say." And the issue that takes up many, many, many pages of commentaries has to do with where we are supposed to see the end of the words for this fictitious objector. Essentially, where should the quotation marks go? That's it.

Even though most translations place quotation marks in certain places here to try and help you, the quotation marks



themselves are a translation decision as the Greek text actually doesn't have any such identifying punctuation. And I really have no desire to dig deep into this with you. But it's important for you to know that you might see some of the differences in your translations. You should just know going into this, I spent a disproportionate amount of my study figuring out these next three minutes.

There are essentially three main views. Some see the quotation marks extending all the way through verse 19, and therefore the introduced fictitious objector is actually an ally arguing on behalf of James. And while this works well with the use of the pronouns in the Greek, this passage would then become the only place in all writings from this time where someone was introducing an expected argument using the fictitious objector, something that was common, but instead of making it an objector, making it an ally. It would be the only place in all of this time where that was the case. So that interpretation is usually dismissed, and you won't see it held by many translations.

All right, the second view, which is seen in the NAS and the LSB, is that the quotation extends through the entirety of verse 18, with James returning to his argument, to his speaking, in verse 19. This view sees the argument from the potential objector as a stronger argument that is very close to what James is saying, but still not quite right. In this case, James is seen as being gracious and representing a good argument well. And the strength of this view, and perhaps the only reason why it exists, is because it makes the most sense grammatically. It makes the most sense of the pronouns you see here. When you look at it, it seems really weird that this potential objector would come in and be the one arguing that he is the one with works and James is the one with faith.

So in this view, it's argued that it only makes sense that someone would object to James' argument speaking like this, the way we see this, if they just had a slightly nuanced view, but one that was still in need of correction. Again, just looking at the actual grammar in the Greek text, this view makes maybe the most sense, and that's why you see it represented in the LSB and the NAS.

However, the third view, the one that the ESV, the NIV, the CSB, and the NKJV all take, and the one that actually most of you probably had coming in here today, is the one that I think is the best. This is the view that sees the quotation end immediately in the middle of verse 18. So the quotation is just "You have faith and I have works." And then James resumes his argument. This just seems to make by far the most sense when giving weight to the grammar and the context. The seemingly odd use of pronouns can then be explained by James just kind of recasting the objection into his own perception. So saying, "You, the objector, say you have faith, while I, James, say that I have works." Also, when you see it this way, you kind of understand that it changes the argument ever so slightly from one trying to argue for faith against works to one essentially making the argument of, "But does this really matter? You have faith and I have works."

When it is said with the opposite pronouns of how we would expect James to say it, it gives the impression, then, that the person has kind of heard James' argument from these first four verses; and the response is kind of similar to someone saying something like, "Okay, I hear that. Agree to disagree, though,"

that type of argument. Works are important to some, faith is important to others, and we see many modern-day arguments that are similar to this, right? You might even have some of these arguments in your own heart.

Maybe you even have them right now. We show ourselves to be thinking along these types of lines whenever we kind of excuse ourselves from what we know we ought to be doing or from examples that we know that we ought to be following, or we just dismiss maybe the warnings that we are given from elders in the church or from other church members, just kind of dismiss them.

You're confronted with something. Maybe it's a direct sinful pattern in your life. Maybe it's living in some way or doing something that's unwise. Maybe it's being a bad steward of your life. And you hear it, but then you just kind of brush it off as something that maybe you'll just get better at as you mature in the Lord. Or maybe you just have the attitude that, "Well, this just kind of how really serious Christians see things, people who get really into this Christian thing. That's how they live. It's not necessary for everyone. Is it actually

that big of a deal if I don't order every area of my life around God's Word, around his church, around his people? They have works. That's how they live. That's what's meaningful to them. It's meaningful to them in ways that just aren't as meaningful for me. What's actually important though, is that I do have the same faith."

And it's to this type of attitude that James then replies, "Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works." "Oh, you do have the same faith, do you? Just with no works? Oh, that's a relief. That is great to hear. So if you would just go ahead and show that faith to me, I'll go ahead and leave you alone then." It's kind of a sarcastic way of speaking, there, but James is doing the same type of thing that pastors and parents and fellow church members are doing all the time with people they're concerned about, lovingly probing them, asking them to explain how their belief is being worked out in their life in some certain area, not just letting their confession pass from their lips without also asking, "How is that confession changing you?"

And when this takes place, when this takes place, without exception, at least eventually, what you see is that believers appreciate the accountability, appreciate the extra effort, and unbelievers end up just kind of getting frustrated that you won't just believe their confession and the legitimate excuses they have for why you don't see the actions you expect.

It's important, again, to see in this verse that James is not arguing against faith and for works. He is arguing for the inseparability of the two. And to make the point even stronger, he gives this illustration in verse 19: "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe and shudder." When you hear that phrase, you, of course, should recognize the importance of that confession here at the beginning of this verse. It's kind of a rewording, or it's taken from the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one, God is one." You believe that God is one.

So keep it in mind that this is a congregation of Jewish Christians; this isn't just some half-hearted confession, similar to someone just saying that they believe in God. This is

part of an essential confession of belief in the one true God. This was an important confession that had to be made in Israel, and it's something that all who would claim to be in Christ must also be able to claim.

James is not saying that there is anything wrong with this confession. He's not saying that's a bad confession. It is a true and right confession. If you believe that, he says, "You do well." There's an affirmation of this truth. "Good, you should believe this." What James is doing is showing something similar to the example from the previous verses. Just as someone might offer the true and good sentiment, "Go in peace, be warmed, and be filled," to an impoverished brother, knowing that this is the right type of sentiment that a Christian ought to have, but then not actually caring to give any effort of their own; in a similar way, so, too, someone might offer this true confession to God without actually doing anything to demonstrate that he truly believes it.

And to show the futility of putting your trust in the fact that you believe true things about God, no matter how good the

true things you believe about God might be, James points out a striking reality: "Even the demons believe." Having correct orthodoxy, believing all of the right things about God, being able to say that you believe every word of the Bible to be true, even to the extent that you can say that you understand, affirm, and you can sign off on the 1689 London Baptist Confession, that puts you in the same starting spot as demons. James makes the point, here, that demons believe true things about God. They believe every true thing about who God is and who Jesus Christ is. Aside from any personal pronouns that we may use in our confessions and our creeds and how these true things are applied to us personally, demons would be able to sign off on all of it.

Again, James is not discounting the necessity, and I'm not either, the necessity of believing true doctrine. It's absolutely necessary. And there are many times where belief alone is the main point of separation between true Christians and false Christians. No, what he's just saying here is that while beliefs might separate you from false teaching and from false teachers, they don't necessarily prove that you have saving faith any more than the demons who believe all the same true things have saving faith. It's meant to get at the comfort



level of those of you who are just, "Yes, I found a church that teaches truth, and I'm good."

Notice what else he adds. Notice this: He's not just saying your faith is no better than the faith of the demons. He's actually saying that the belief of the demons is actually stronger than your faith because what they believe actually has an effect on them. So "the demons also believe." And what? "And they shudder." They shudder. In other words, they seem to really believe these things because unlike you, whom it doesn't seem to have an effect on, they respond to their belief.

The word that's translated here is "shudder." It's used only here in the New Testament. And it literally means to have one's hairs stand on edge. The demons, you know, don't have hair. But the picture here is one of absolute terror and fear that the demons have because they truly believe that God is who he says he is, and that he's going to do what he says he's going to do. And therefore their fate is going to be exactly what God has declared their fate to be.

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Remember the scene when Jesus healed the demon-possessed men in Matthew 8? The demons cry out to Jesus, saying, "What do we have to do with you, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?" So listen, they rightly recognize Jesus as the Son of God even before any human has acknowledged that title for him in the chronology of the gospels. And notice what they say. They recognize him as the Son of God. And then they say, "Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?"

So these demons understand that there is a time of torment that is appointed to them. They know it's coming. They believe this, and according to James, it causes them to shudder, to be terrified. So you should be able to see the concern, here. You can see the irony, even. The belief that Jesus truly is the Son of God, the belief that Jesus truly is Lord with all authority in heaven and earth, causes the entirety of the demonic realm to shudder as they await their eventual day of torment.

And yet that same supposed belief causes almost no change whatsoever in millions who claim to have been saved from the

torment of hell through Christ, as they continue to acknowledge Christ with their words, maybe just finding a slightly more moral way to continue to live for themselves. When the demons shudder, they show that they have a greater trust in God and his Word than the so-called Christian whose life doesn't really look much different from everybody else's. This is the empty confession of a dead faith, saying, "Jesus is Lord," but not really doing much with what the one you call Lord has told you to do, not living for what he has said you should live for, not prioritizing what he has said you should prioritize, not treasuring what he has said you should treasure, not really living like what he has said matters much at all.

Okay, so now that we have seen what a dead faith looks like, that's the negative example. And James then moves from there into the positive examples of what true faith looks like. That brings us to our second point: the exemplary action of a living faith. The exemplary action of a living faith. James transitions into this with verse 20. Look at verse 20. "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" Once again, stating a form of his main point for the entire section: Faith without works is useless. He

refers again to this fictitious objector as "a foolish fellow." The word for "foolish," there, is literally the word for "empty" or "vain." He's saying, essentially, this argument is vain. It bears no weight, it doesn't work, it's empty.

In this transition verse, James uses a play on words that we can't see as well in the English, but he places similar sounding words next to each other. The words translated as "works" and "useless" are similar sounding. So it says *ergon argai, ergon argai*. You can kind of hear that, there. But it's a word structure that kind of serves as a way to grab attention in order to make the point that would undermine the argument just by the way it sounds. So it's kind of like he's saying something like, "Let's talk about the workless work of your faith," or "Faith without works doesn't work." Something like that, something that kind of grabs you by using similar sounding language.

But he uses this statement to move into his final kind of slam-the-door-shut arguments for the necessity of faith and deeds working together. And he does this by giving two well-

known examples from the Old Testament: Abraham and Rahab. So first, let's look at the example of Abraham. You see that in verses 21-23. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works and as a result of the works, faith was perfected, and the Scripture was fulfilled, which says, 'And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.'"

So Abraham is brought up, he's given the title of "our father," and even though it's certainly true that Abraham is the father of all who have true faith, here it is most likely in relation to his Jewish audience. James could not have picked a more significant example for this audience. But what James ends up saying here has the potential of throwing us off in a direction that James is not going. Saying that Abraham is justified by works when he offered up Isaac seems to be in direct contradiction to what Paul says about Abraham in Galatians 3, but especially in Romans 4.

And while there is a chance that James has in mind here some who have misunderstood and misapplied some of Paul's teaching, there's actually no chance that James has the word of Romans 4 in mind when he says this because James has written so much earlier than Romans and likely before any of Paul's letters. But it's very hard for those of us who have read Romans and are familiar with that section of Scripture to not think that James is taking up this argument.

We don't have time to look at the entirety of Romans 4 and Paul's teaching on Abraham being justified by faith. But let me just remind you of the main text that comes to our mind from the beginning of that chapter, Romans 4:1-3. Paul says, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.'"

So you can see the similarity in the wording, and it makes sense because both Paul and James are quoting from the same

verse, Genesis 15:6. Paul's point, here, is that it is impossible for Abraham to have been justified by works because he goes on to point out, if you look at the rest of Romans 4, this declaration that "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness," was made before the sign of the covenant was even given to Abraham.

So it's important that we see that James is not in fact and cannot be denying this truth from Paul. And that's actually seen clearly in the example from Abraham's life that James draws our attention to, which is the offering up of Isaac. The declaration that "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness" takes place in Genesis 15, again, when Yahweh is making a covenant with Abraham. Yahweh makes a covenant with Abraham, still known as Abram at this point, that an heir will come forth from Abraham's own body, and that his descendants would be so numerous that you won't be able to count them, as numerous as the stars in the heavens. And upon hearing this, even though Abraham is quite old at this time, he believes God. He believes what God says, and we're told that God counts that belief to him as righteousness.

This is a declaration that takes place, notice this, at least 40 years before the event that James draws our attention to in the life of Abraham, which is found in Genesis 22. James knows this. He's not stupid. He quotes the declaration of righteousness and then points to the evidence of Abraham's belief 40 years later. So James is not using the term "justify" as a synonym for "saved" the same way Paul is. That's where we get hung up.

But instead, he intends the other usage of the word for "justify," the word *dikaioo*. There's another usage of it which means "to show" or "to prove right," and this is a perfectly acceptable way to use this term. In fact, Paul himself uses this word this way, the same word in the chapter just before Romans 4 in Romans 3-4, where he's quoting from Psalm 51 and says of God, "that you may be justified in your words." So clearly we believe, we know, that God is not saved through his words. Rather, they are the proof of his righteousness. They are what show him to be right.



Similarly, in Matthew 11:19, this is a helpful cross-reference that you might want to mark down if this is throwing you off, where Jesus is pronouncing woes on the unrepentant sinners, he says, "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." That word translated as "vindicated" is that word *dikaioo*. *Dikaioo*. It's that same word for "justified." Jesus is using it here in almost the exact same way that James is in our passage. Just as the deeds that Jesus was talking about give evidence of the presence of wisdom, so, too, the deeds that James is referring to give evidence of faith. That's what's being said here.

So with that hopefully cleared up a little, let's get back to the point that James is actually trying to make in this text. James refers to the story of Abraham's act of obedience when he offered up Isaac, what's known as the Binding of Isaac. This is one of the most revered actions of obedience in the Old Testament. This particular act is brought up again not only in the great chapter of faith in Hebrews 11 that we just read, but it's also revered and brought up in lots of other Jewish literature of the time. The apocryphal Book of 1 Maccabees references this event as a central act in the life of Abraham that we should emulate. And the Jewish thinker and writer Philo

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of Alexandria, who was also writing about the same time as James was, referred to the offering of Isaac as the greatest of Abraham's works.

So go ahead and turn in your Bible to Genesis 22. Turn your Bible to Genesis 22. Let's remind ourselves of this story. Genesis 22:1-18. Genesis 22:1-18. "Now it happened after these things that God tested Abraham, and he said to him, 'Abraham,' and he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Take now your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac, and go forth to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.'" That's the command.

And here's the response: "So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son. He split wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from a distance. And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey, while I and the boy go over there, and we will worship, and we will return to you.'

"Then Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and put it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Then Isaac spoke to Abraham his father, and said, 'My father.' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' And he said, 'Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' And Abraham said, 'God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.'

"So the two of them walked on together. Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built the altar there, and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac, and put him on the altar on top of the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham.' And he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the boy, and do nothing to him, for now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your son, your only one, from me.'

"Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw and behold, there was a ram after it had been caught in the thicket by its horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place 'Yahweh will provide,' as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of Yahweh it will be provided.'

"Then the angel of Yahweh called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, 'By myself I have sworn, declares Yahweh, because you have done this thing and have not spared your son, your only one, indeed, I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore, and your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have listened to me.'"

So when you actually read this story with it fresh in your mind, there is nothing here that is out of place with what James is saying. What he's trying to point out is that you see in this action, this action, that Abraham's faith is active. James actually says, "It is working with his works. Abraham's faith is

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working with his works." Those are the words he uses, and that's what's clearly going on. Abraham doesn't just say that he believes God. He demonstrates that he believes him. A three-day journey to Mount Moriah after he's been commanded this by God, all that time to reflect and think about what's been commanded.

It's important for those of you with sensitive hearts who are going to hear the strong things that we're saying here, we're about to say, about true faith. It's important to remember that up until this point between Genesis 15 and 22, Abraham's faith failed several times. He wasn't perfect. What's important to see here is that in the end, no one looking at the life of Abraham as a whole would doubt his faith if they examined his life.

So again, back in Genesis 15, God promises Abraham that he would have this heir. And Abraham believed God, and then forty or so years later, he has this heir. It's his beloved son, Isaac. And in this account we see that Abraham truly believes everything, everything that God has told him. And this is shown beyond doubt in the fact that he is willing to put his own son,

his only son, to death. Hebrews 11:19 shows us the confidence that Abraham has. Abraham is so confident that God will keep his promise, Hebrews 11:19 says that "he considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead."

So just think about that for a second. We also say we have confidence that God can raise people from the dead. We believe that God will raise us from the dead one day, and we have the evidence of that in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. And we're told that that's the firstfruits that guarantees our resurrection.

But up to this point in history, in Genesis 22, no one's ever been raised from the dead. That hasn't happened yet. There's no evidence for that. But Abraham so believes the promise of God that Isaac is going to bring about the descendants for Abraham that God has promised, and since that can't happen if Isaac is dead, then therefore the only possible solution is that God is going to raise Isaac from the dead. This is the confidence Abraham has, and you see the confidence throughout the story, and Abraham, even as he's heading up the

mountain with Isaac, he tells his young men that came with him that "we will return." "We" plural. Isaac and Abraham will return to them.

Notice the end of this section that we read in verse 16, notice that God says, "Because you have done this thing, and have not spared your son, your only one, indeed, I will greatly bless you." And then he goes on to reiterate the promises of Genesis 15 once again. But it's not like the promise of God from Genesis 15 was a void promise that depended on Abraham's action. That's Paul's point about this text. That's not the case. But it is Abraham's faith in action that demonstrates, here, his ultimate vindication or justification of his faith. What we already heard to be true about Abraham, that he believed God, that is vindicated in Abraham's action. That is justified in Abraham's action, and that's James' point.

Looking back now, then you can flip back to James 2:22, and you can see the argument clearly; there must be an inseparability of faith and works, an inseparability of the two. He says that as a result of the works, "Abraham's faith was"

what? "It was perfected." Our faith grows and becomes perfected as we obey God, especially in the things that are hardest for us to do, the things that are most difficult for us to do, things that are most difficult to give up. In our obedience of those things, our faith is perfected. It's the clear testimony that you do truly believe God, that you believe his promises, and that what he has said is truly more important than what you might feel. What God has said is more important than what you might feel, or maybe what comes easiest to you.

Saying that faith is being perfected carries with it the sense of something being brought to its full realization. The divinely intended design and form of what faith is, is seen in its working itself out. In Abraham's case, the faith that believed the promise of God for an heir from Genesis 15 comes to completion, proves itself to be perfect in his willingness to give up the long-awaited fulfillment of the promise because of his unshakable faith in the one who made the promise.

This idea of faith being perfected in us is similar to the concept of love being perfected in us from 1 John 4:12, where



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John says, "No one has beheld God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us."

It's not that the actual love of God can be made more perfect than it is. It's completed in us, where we see the end for which he has loved us, and it is that we might manifest that love in our love for others. That's John's point in 1 John 4:12. It's how we see that we have actually come to know and understand how we have been loved, is when we see that same love towards others.

In the same way, faith finds its completion in our works. It's the way that we see that faith has had an actual effect on us. It's how we see that we have come to know and truly believe that which we claim to have faith in. This is what James is going on to say in verse 23: "And the Scripture was fulfilled, which says, 'And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness: and he was called the friend of God.'"

Notice again, this isn't contrary to anything that Paul says. This is the fulfillment of the declaration that Abraham believed God and it's credited to him as righteousness. In

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Romans 4, Paul is using the events of Genesis 15 to show that Abraham is justified by faith, and James is using the events of Genesis 22 forty years later to show the fulfillment of that faith, the verification of that same justified declaration. The two work together, they combine together.

Abraham holds back nothing from God. That's what true faith is. If you claim to have faith in God, to believe his promises, but there is something in your life that you're holding on to with a closed fist, there's something that you refuse to trust God with, you'd rather just kind of gripe and throw a fit about it, that's the demonstration that maybe your faith might be that vain-and-empty, words-only type of faith.

This is the type of faith we see in Abraham, the faith that holds nothing back from God, that it shows one to be, as we read here, a friend of God. Abraham is called "the friend of God." This is not, by the way, a title that's given to him in Genesis. This is something that came to be part of his reputation. We don't see him referred to that way until 2 Chronicles 20. We

also see it in Isaiah 41; it refers to Abraham as "the friend of God."

But here James connects the earning of that reputation as a friend of God to this event and his faithful obedience to God no matter what the cost. It's a similar thing to what Jesus says in John 15:14: "You are my friends if you do what I command you." This concept of friendship with God is also something that should drive us to live out our faith in good works of obedience. Is that our desire? Do we have the desire to be known as friends of God, to have an intimate relationship with God, or to be called his friend, as opposed to being one who is just trying to use the Word of God and the great doctrines of faith alone and grace alone, almost using those truths against God in order to get what we want out of him, and still live how we want to live.

If your interest in the Christian faith is purely what it does for you, if your interest is in what Christianity, the gospel, the church, what God can do for you, if that is your interest and not the relationship with the God who gives those

promises, then you are not likely to care much about the more difficult areas of obedience to God that would show you to be his friend.

And we know this concept of friendship from an earthly perspective, right? We recognize that. You would never call someone your true friend, "That's my true friend," who only wants to talk and interact with you in order to get things from you. He only has conversations with you when he needs to borrow your car or your money. They essentially use you to make their life better, and they're not really interested in having a relationship with you apart from that. You probably would not stand for that or call that person a true friend, right? You wouldn't do that.

But are you at the same time fine if that's what your relationship to God is like? Those who are just trying to get by on their belief in God while hanging on to worldly pleasures will later be shown in James chapter 4 to be those who are pursuing friendship with the world and therefore, as James says, "hostility toward God." Abraham showed that nothing in this

world had a hold on him. Obedience to God was primary; therefore, he is the friend of God. Can you say the same?

So James concludes his discussion on the example of Abraham with verse 24: "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." The "you" here, the "you" in this verse, you can't see it in English, but he is now returning to the plural use of "you," indicating that James has dropped out of his argument with the fictitious objector and is now looking again towards his audience, making sure that they understand what is being said. And we can't spend time on it, but this verse is probably the one that sounds the most like it might be contradicting Paul. But again, without laying all that out once again, Paul would agree with this point James is making. And he does in several places.

And since we've already talked about this in length, I'll just remind you that Paul makes statements along this line of thinking about the necessity of love and good deeds in the Christian life in multiple places. Write down Galatians 5:6, Galatians 6:4, 1 Corinthians 13:2, 2 Corinthians 9:8, 2

Corinthians 13:5. We see those things there. We hear it also in Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:15-23, where he is teaching on knowing a tree by its fruit. So James is just teaching along the same lines, but maybe saying it a little more directly.

And then to further make his point, James turns to a second well-known example from the Old Testament, the story of Rahab. The story of Rahab. That story is found in Joshua 2. You can turn there if you if you want. Maybe we won't read all of that, but the story of Rahab is found in Joshua 2. And before we look at that, it's important to note that while this is also a well-known example of faith from the Old Testament, Rahab is also found in that great "hall of faith" passage from Hebrews 11 that we read.

But even so, she could not be a more opposite character to choose from. Compared to Abraham, the father of the faith, she is a prostitute from outside of Israel. She holds a sinful profession. James refers to her as a "harlot." In fact, some Jewish writers to whom works-based salvation is actually

important, like Josephus, kind of try and sanitize her. They refer to her as "the innkeeper" and try and gloss over her sinful lifestyle. Kind of showing that James is not a part of that type of thinking, in just a few words that he uses in this verse to sum up her story, he refers to the fact that she's a harlot or a prostitute.

So James most likely uses Rahab to show someone on the complete opposite spectrum of Abraham. So you can see that the point he is making applies to someone as revered as Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, a spiritual father of us all. He refers to him and then all the way to the prostitute from an enemy nation and therefore everyone that might fall in between.

So look at the story in Joshua 2. Maybe I'll just point out a couple of things instead of reading the whole thing. In Joshua 2, if you look at it, you see that Rahab, yes, does lie to help out the spies. But James is not commending her for that, so we need not get into that conversation here. But what she's commended for is her action of receiving the messengers or

receiving the spies and sending them out another way for protecting them. And why did she do this?

Well, let's just look at verse 10. And so here she is talking to the messengers. "For we have heard how Yahweh dried up the water of the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who are beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. Indeed, we heard it, and our hearts melted, and a courageous spirit no longer rose up in any man because of you. For," now, listen, "for Yahweh, your God, he is God in heaven above and on earth beneath."

This is Rahab's creed. She believes, totally disconnected from the nation of Israel, that what she has seen, all that she knows, she believes that Yahweh their God is the God in heaven above and earth beneath. She makes a creedal statement that is actually similar to something that the Hebrews might say, indeed something similar to what we might confess and hear on a Sunday morning. She doesn't know the law of God. She doesn't know his revelation to his people. But she shows that what she does know



she really believes because in doing this action of sending the spies out, she commits treason against her country. Her life is in a real risk. It's really on the line. She is willing to put her life on the line for what she has said that she believes.

There is no statement in the text in Joshua that says that Rahab's belief was credited to her as righteousness, again just further indicating that James is talking about justification in these verses. He's not talking of the, the legal standing of justified, but rather the proof of her belief. Rahab's intellectual conversion to believing that Israel's God is God, if that's all she had, this intellectual conversion, "Ah, I think I believe that God is God," if that's all she believed, that has no power to save her life. Her life isn't going to be saved by an intellectual conversion. She had to have actions to back up this claim. She placed her trust in God, and this was evident in the fact that she placed her life in his hands.

So James uses these two powerful examples to show unequivocally that true faith is accompanied by works, and it can be no other way. And the works that are seen in this example

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are meant to shake us out of any type of easy-to-accomplish good works that we might be offering up to God in order to make ourselves feel better. We are meant to see, here, that those who have true faith, those who have true faith, refuse to hold anything back from God, even their own lives. There's nothing that God could ask them to give up that they would take issue with, nothing in their lives that they would hold with a closed fist and say, "No God, not that." We're meant to see that those who have true faith refuse to hold anything back from God, nothing God could ask them to give up and they wouldn't do it.

If Rahab's faith led her to risk her own life for her belief, and Abraham's faith meant that he was willing to see his own son die, believing that it was easier for someone to rise from the dead than for God to not be true to his Word, then we need to be constantly asking ourselves if this is where our faith would lead us as well. If we struggle with putting aside relatively much easier things in our lives for the sake of obedience and faithfulness to Christ, if we struggle with those things, should we really expect our faith to ever pass a test like these tests? Can that faith save you?

James ends this section similar to how he ended verse 17. Look again at verse 26: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." And before you get too confused, "spirit," here, the word "spirit," most likely doesn't refer to the part of us that is present with God when we die, but to the normal Hebraic meaning of the word, which is "breath." So the body without breath, breathing. So just like a body that isn't breathing, we call that a corpse, so also faith that isn't manifesting itself into works is dead.

And beloved, when you think about the great truths about God, the great truths about God that we confess together in our church, that we confess together as Christians, when you think of the unbelievable, miraculous gospel message that we proclaim, when you think of these things and then in light of them, in light of what you believe, in light of what you say you believe, think about what your daily battle to mortify sin in your life looks like. Think about the way you respond to correction and confrontation from brothers or sisters in Christ.

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Think about the things in your life that you prioritize, things that, if you're honest, that others would say are most important to you. Think about the life that you live day in, day out, the life you live every day. When you think about these things in light of what you confess about God in his gospel, does the way you live your life make sense? Are good works in faith bound up inseparably in your life? Because this is the faith of those who are truly justified.

But is it your faith, your good deeds, sacrifice, and works of obedience, do they so mark you that they come as as natural as breathing to your body? To illustrate that, let me close with this quote from Martin Luther, which indicates that even though he didn't quite understand what James was saying, he did believe the same thing. In his preface to his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther says this: "Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is

nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks with many words about faith and good works.”

Is that you, beloved? You've maybe spent your life in the church, maybe talking a lot about faith and good works. Maybe you can't even count the number of lessons or sermons you've heard on this passage because you're that plugged in, talking about faith and good works. But would an examination of your day-to-day life reveal that for all your talking, you don't really seem to know what faith is, what a true good work really is? Maybe spend time today, ask someone who knows you well and loves you enough to tell you the truth, if that's what they see in you. Ask them what areas of concern they might see in you, and then see how your faith responds to that. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you so much for this word from the book of James. We thank you for his faithful message. Thank you that you love us enough to tell us difficult and true things. And then we thank you for the salvation that you've given us, the regeneration that you've given us, the Holy Spirit that you've given us that allows us to respond in true faith to the

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difficult teaching of your Word. Lord, I pray that for any in here who maybe, as they're hearing this message from the book of James, and they look at their life, they look at what they proclaim to believe and the way they actually live, and they see evidence for true faith lacking, Lord, that they would turn from sin and pursue you with a true faith, a faith that works.

And for any of us in here who do know you, for those who are yours, true children of Abraham in the faith, any areas maybe that this message has opened our eyes to, ways that we're maybe starting to get too attached to this world, to attach to something that we ought not, things that show that maybe our priorities are moving in the wrong direction, that you would use your Word today and steer us back on the right path, and that we would change appropriately according to your Word, that we'd be doers of your Word and not hearers only today. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.