

James – Life after Faith  
James 2:14-26  
“Faith without Works on Trial”

1. THE COMPLAINT RAISED AGAINST FAITH WITHOUT WORKS
  - A. It has no profit
  - B. It has no power
2. THE CASE REVEALED AGAINST FAITH WITHOUT WORKS
  - A. The argument with which James starts
  - B. The authority on which James stands
3. THE CONCLUSION REACHED AGAINST FAITH WITHOUT WORKS
  - A. Works are the consequence of real faith
  - B. Works are the confirmation of real faith

1. As I was preparing this message, I thought of that famous line from Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*: “The first thing we do, lets kill all the lawyers.”

2. While we could probably do with a few less ambulance chasers and settlement seekers, there is certainly a place for those who ethically and professionally practice law.

3. I know that Brother James never signed his name with an esquire, and never claimed to be a lawyer, and yet there is a sense in which he sounds very much like a prosecuting attorney in the text before us.

4. He states the heart of his claim in verse 17, “...*faith, if it hath not works, is dead...*” Then he argues powerfully and persuasively for the case he is trying to make.

5. Before us lies one of the more controversial texts in the New Testament. Therefore, before we sit down in the courtroom gallery, and listen carefully to Bro. James as he presents this case, I think we need to be clear about what is actually on trial in this text.

6. You see; there are some who interpret this passage as if James is arguing for salvation by works, and is contradicting the Apostle Paul’s claim that we are saved by faith alone.

7. In answer to that, John MacArthur says, “James is not contrasting two methods of salvation (faith versus works). His contrast is between two kinds of faith: one that saves and one that doesn’t.”<sup>i</sup>

8. In this text James is not challenging true saving faith. James is indicting a faith without works. James is condemning the profession of faith that does not result in the practice of faith.

9. With that in mind, let’s listen in as we walk through this text, and hear James convincingly prosecute the idea of faith without works.

10. Quiet in the courtroom, please, and let's hear first of all:

## I. THE COMPLAINT RAISED AGAINST FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

1. Beginning in verse 14, James recounts the charges that are leveled against a faith without works.

2. He says, *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?"*

3. Notice carefully the phrase, *"though a man say he hath faith"*. The faith that is under indictment in this case is a faith that a man merely claims to have, even though there is no evidence of it in his life.

4. In verse 14, James lays out two clear indictments against this faith without works. Notice them with me. The first is this: the problem with faith that is not accompanied by works is that:

### A. It has no profit

1. James asks the rhetorical question in verse 14, *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?"*

2. The word "profit" there literally means a benefit. It could be translated *"What good is a faith that does not have works with it?"*

3. That's a good question, and James illustrates this in verses 15 and 16. He sets up a scenario in which a hungry, poorly-clad brother or sister comes to one of their supposed siblings in the faith for help.

4. Now look at verse 16, *"And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"*

5. James essentially says, "It may sound right religious for you to speak a blessing to your poor brother or sister, but what good is that blessing if it is only spoken? Your words won't feed and clothe anyone."

6. In much the same way, it may sound good for a person to say, "I know Jesus. Jesus lives in my heart. I am believer."

7. Yet if that profession is never corroborated and carried out by a life filled with good works, what good is that profession of faith? What profit has it brought to that person's life and the lives of those around them?

8. If we have truly been saved, knowing Jesus should have a tangible, visible, profitable effect upon our lives.
9. Men who have truly trusted Christ should evidence the value of that faith by being better husbands and daddies. Real faith produces a visible benefit in the life of those who possess it.
10. As we listen from the gallery, we hear James say, "I charge that faith without works has no profit in the life of those who claim it."
11. The complaint raised against faith without works is not only that it has no profit, but listen further as James explains also that:

**B. It has no power**

1. Look at the question with which James closes verse 14. He asks, "...*can faith save him?*"
2. In the original language, there is a little article just before the word "faith". For that reason, some translations will read, "Can *that* faith save him?"
3. James contends that a faith that is only professed, but is not carried out into practice is a faith that does not have the power to save anyone.
4. That is why he sums up the complaint against faith without works this way in verse 17. He says, "*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*"
5. These are no minor charges. This is not just a religious misdemeanor. James alleges that it is possible for a person to claim a belief and faith in Christ, and to die and go to hell claiming that faith.
6. Lest you think these charges are extreme, remember the testimony of the Author and Purchaser of salvation.
7. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus said, "*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*"
8. Do you remember back in the summer of 2008, the story of the fugitive who called himself Clark Rockefeller? He kidnapped his own daughter and was arrested in August.
9. He was using the name Clark Rockefeller because he thought it sounded more impressive than his real name, Christian Gerhartsreiter.

10. In this trial against faith without works, James charges that though someone may take on a name of faith, it does not mean that their faith has the profit and power of true saving faith. That is the complaint raised against faith without works.

11. As we continue to listen in on this trial, we hear not only *the complaint raised against faith without works*, but listen further as James continues, and we hear secondly:

## II. THE CASE REVEALED AGAINST FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

1. After his opening statement, James quickly begins to lay out his case against the notion of faith without works.

2. As we read through this text, we find that James' case has basically two parts. James uses a logical argument, and then refers to the authority and precedent in the matter of saving faith.

3. In verses 18-25, we find the heart of the case against faith without works. Listen as the case is presented by Brother James. First of all, listen to:

### A. The argument with which James starts

1. In verses 18 and 19, James gives a two-pronged, indisputable argument against the kind of faith that produces no works.

2. The first prong of his argument is that faith without works is *invisible*; that is, it cannot be proven.

3. Look at verse 18. James supposes that someone tries to mediate between faith without works, and faith that works. He says, "*Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*"

4. In this verse, James contends that it is impossible to prove and demonstrate that you have faith apart from some visible and viable good work.

5. As one writer puts it, "Only Christian deeds show real faith. Can one display faith in any other way? How much would one square foot of faith weigh? What...color is faith?"<sup>iii</sup> The only real way to measure faith is by the works it produces.

6. James' argument is not only that faith without works is *invisible*, but he goes on in verse 19 to argue that mere faith or belief without action is also *insufficient*.

7. Look at verse 19. *“Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”*

8. James powerfully contends that even the devils in hell have a faith without works. They are monotheists. They recognize who Jesus is. They “believe” in Him, to some extent, just not enough to repent. James argues that faith without works is invisible and insufficient.

9. In a recent biography on the great preacher, Jonathan Edwards, the author says this about Edwards’ sermons. He said, “...his sermons were a combination of luminously clear logic and spiritual intensity that could sometimes cast a spell over his listeners.”<sup>iii</sup>

10. When you listen to the argument with which James starts, it has in it a “luminously clear logic”. Notice not only the argument with which James starts, but listen further to:

### **B. The authority on which James stands**

1. Listen to Brother James as he moves forward in revealing the case against faith without works. He asks sharply and almost satirically in verse 20, *“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”*

2. The word translated “vain” literally means “foolish”. James asks, “Do you want me to prove to you, you fool, that faith without works is dead?”

3. The argument is at its highest pitch when James suddenly enters into evidence the testimony of the authority of Scripture and Biblical history itself.

4. In verses 21 and 25, James calls upon the Biblical precedent found in the lives of both Abraham and Rahab.

5. He says in verse 21, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”*

6. Then in verse 25, He adds, *“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”*

7. We will consider the truth of these two separate examples in just a moment, but just recognize the weight of the case James is making here.

8. Abraham was a beloved patriarch, and Rahab was a Gentile prostitute, but both of them validated and vindicated their faith in God by their good works.

9. You have heard of an “open and shut case”. When James opens the authority of Scripture, it essentially shuts the case.

10. Nowhere will you find in the Bible a genuine saint who ever had a faith without works. Saving faith always carries with it good works.

11. The case is just about settled. We have listened as James gave us *the complaint raised against faith without works*, and we have heard *the case revealed against faith without works*, now let's consider carefully before the courtroom closes:

### **III. THE CONCLUSION REACHED AGAINST FAITH WITHOUT WORKS**

1. Just before Brother James sits down, his closing argument merely restates the point with which he began.

2. Listen to his closing statement in verse 26. *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”*

3. Literally, James concludes his case with this statement, “Just as a body without breath is dead, so also is a faith without works.”

4. Now that James is finished with his trial of faith without works, what is the verdict? What are we to conclude about this issue of a faith that is only professed but not practiced?

5. There are two things we must conclude. First of all, the conclusion reached is that:

#### **A. Works are the consequence of real faith**

1. Look back up at verse 21, and consider again the illustration of Abraham. James asks, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?”*

2. That phrase “justified by works” is bothersome to many who study this text. Look at what James goes on to say in verse 22. *“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”*

3. What James is teaching is that works justified and verified the fact of Abraham's already existent faith.

4. To prove this, look at verse 23. It says, *“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”*

5. When did Abraham believe God and have righteousness imputed to him? It was in Genesis 15. When did Abraham take Isaac to Mt. Moriah to be sacrificed? That is in Genesis 22.
6. There is a full 40 years between the time when God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness, and the work that James says verified that faith.
7. Likewise, in the case of Rahab the Harlot; she confessed her faith in the one true God *before* she hid the spies. Her faith came first, but it was validated and demonstrated by her works.
8. James is simply asserting here that true saving faith will always result in the consequence of validating, verifying good works!
9. An old preacher put it a little differently, he said, "Salvation is like the measles. If you got it, it will show up on you somewhere."
10. Notice further, the conclusion we reach about faith without works is not only that works are the consequence of real faith, but also that:

#### **B. Works are the confirmation of real faith**

1. Look again at how James finishes his case against faith without works. He says in verse 26, "*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"
2. Mark that word "spirit". It is translated from the word *pnuema*, which can be spirit, but it can also simply described breath, or air.
3. Think about that for a moment. Imagine we were driving down the road, and we saw a body lying motionless in the grass just off the highway.
4. As we ran over to that person's aid, what is one of the first questions we would seek to answer? We would ask, "Are they breathing?"
5. Breath is evidence of life. Likewise, James says that good works are the evidence and confirmation of true saving faith.
6. With that being said, regardless of what you or anyone else professes to believe. If you don't have the good works that must exist in a true Christian, you can no more be confirmed saved, than a dead man can be confirmed alive.
7. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "*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.*" Don't stop there though.

8. Verse 10 says, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**”*

9. If you been saved by grace, then it will be evident by the good works that characterize your life.

1. I have approached this passage as a courtroom scene. Perhaps you are wondering what role we play in this courtroom drama.

2. Well first of all, let's be clear. You are not the judge in this courtroom. Only Christ judges the hearts of men and women.

3. Likewise, you are not the jury in this courtroom. A person's salvation is not decided by a jury of their peers.

4. So where are you in this courtroom? I would suggest that you can only be in one of two places.

5. You are either in the gallery, saying “Amen” as James articulates what you know to be right about salvation.

6. You know you have believed upon Christ, and you know it because you have obeyed Him with your life and your works testify to your saving faith.

7. However, if you are not in the gallery, then where else could you be in this courtroom? You must be the defendant, whose faith without works is being indicted.

8. Oh friend, if you claim to have faith in Christ, but it does not prove itself by the works of your life, then you have no defense, and you are condemned as guilty before God.

---

<sup>i</sup> MacArthur, John F., [Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles](#), (Word Publishing, Dallas, 1993), p. 152

<sup>ii</sup> Gregory, Joel C., [James: Faith Works!](#), (Convention Press, Nashville, TN, 1986), p. 56

<sup>iii</sup> Marsden, George M., [A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards](#), (William B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), p. 66