

The Relationship of Faith to Works

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: James 2:17
Preached On: Sunday, November 15, 2020

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Alright, good evening everybody. It is my privilege to welcome you to another COVID edition of the all you can eat Baptist Bible buffet on Sunday nights. Let me use that as kind of a transition to remind all of us hopefully what the days lie ahead. It is our goal, it is our ambition, it is our desire that when 2021 comes around, that if at all possible we are going to return to as much as the schedule that we used to know that we no longer know. In other words, on Sunday morning we're going to return to three worship hours even though our 9:45 service is going to meet in the 316 Center rather than here so that we can disinfect properly and such. We're going to hopefully return to our age related ministries even on Sunday evenings that are not currently meeting. It is our desire but you and I know both know that there's about 60 days and a big flu season between now and then, so please wash your hands, please take care of yourselves and distance and do everything you can so that hopefully we can "reset."

Well, tonight we're going to find ourselves in the book of James. Hopefully you have a Bible with you. We're going to primarily be in chapter 2 but we are going to go to other places in the book of James and we're going to hopefully address one of the primary issues in the book of James that the good Reformer, Martin Luther, called this book of the Bible the epistle of straw. He was not a fan of what we know as the book of James, and I'm about to share with you why he was not a fan but I think also now 500 years later, we can solve some of the struggles that he had with this one particular book.

Let's pray and we'll get started.

Heavenly Father, as we gather tonight around your word, Lord, we confess in advance that you've inspired it, you've preserved it, and therefore we are subject to it. Lord, we have opinions, we have ideas, we have philosophies, we have all types of baggage in our life. God, may we not be guilty tonight of reading your word through that but, God, may you interpret that through your word. Help us to see it simply as it is written and that it means what it says and it says what it means. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

As I mentioned, those of you that are visiting both in person and online tonight, we're going to continue in this kind of COVID season of Bible studies on Sunday evenings

until hopefully January comes around, then it may have more of a "service feel," so to speak. But tonight in James 2:17-24, I want to read a passage of Scripture that gives many a Baptist heartache and indigestion and all kinds of other things, and hopefully we can unpack it and explain it and understand it better. It says,

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18 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. 19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23 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. 24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Now you understand Martin Luther who basically coined the phrase "through Christ alone, through faith alone, according to Scripture alone," would struggle with what we just read and so tonight I want to deal with a subject matter that is very difficult for most of us. How do we reconcile this concept that we have particularly in the book of James of the relationship between faith and works? Now the outline that I'm going to utilize tonight is very extensive. We have it on the screen for those of you who are here in person, it'll be on the lower thirds and be cutaways for those of you that are online. I want to go back and unpack a lot of what we know as the book of James before we get to this particular issue. In fact, tonight we're actually going to get to the issue of faith and works at the very end but we've got to build up to it because I believe that the book of James may be one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible, and if it's a misunderstood book, then it oftentimes can be misinterpreted.

So let's go back to chapter 1 of the book of James. I'm going to read the very first verse and allow it to be kind of a launching pad for us in tonight's study. It says, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

Now before we get to the details of tonight's study, let me address two kind of introductory concerns. The first one is the problem that every single one of us has when it comes to Bible study. Every one of us has a problem. In 2 Timothy 2:15 where it says, "a workman needeth not be ashamed, let him rightly divide the word of God." We struggle with dividing the word of God and I addressed this a little bit last week when we were talking about the Song of Solomon, that in every passage of Scripture there is a historical concept, there is a spiritual concept, and there's a doctrinal application. In other words, it happened among the people who were being spoken of at a specific time, in a specific location. Every passage of Scripture, it doesn't matter if you're in the Gospel of John or the book of Leviticus, every passage of Scripture has a devotional or spiritual application to our lives, we can learn something from it, however, not every passage of Scripture has

a doctrinal application for a born again believer in Jesus Christ. Let me remind you the doctrinal application is that it has a specific teaching, at a specific time, for a specific purpose, and the reason that I can prove that is that on our campus today we had two services this morning, we had Sunday school, we're having a Bible study tonight, and nobody brought any turtledoves. Nobody. You say, "Well, what would turtledoves have to do with it?" Well, if you look back in the book of Leviticus when they would come to the worship and they would celebrate the Lord, they would bring a sacrifice for the sins that had happened since the last time they gathered, and you and I understand doctrinally that Jesus Christ according to Hebrews 10, he offered himself as a sacrifice once and for all.

Now we look back at the book of Leviticus where it talks about bringing the turtledoves and the sacrifice and spiritually speaking we say, "Of course, we ought to bring a sacrifice of repentance, a sacrifice of a transformed heart when we come to worship." We ought to have that mentality about us but obviously not two physical turtledoves and all the rest that the sacrifices required. But this is a problem for us because we look back at passages that had a doctrinal application for Old Testament Israel and we try to reconcile it with New Testament Christianity and at times it can be difficult because the sacrifices may not be literal for us but they're metaphorical for how we're to approach the Lord.

The second thing and I'm going to pick on us Baptists because the majority of us here are but I like to pick on us because it's just low hanging fruit, but one of the problems that we have is that we're more Baptist than we are Bible, and what I mean by that is we take the traditions of a specific perspective and we overlay the Bible with those perspectives. And I want to say something and I've said it many times but I'm going to say it again: I'm proud, for lack of better terms, that I am identified as a Baptist but I'd rather be a biblicist than a Baptist any day. There are things that the Bible says that are not Baptist and there are things that Baptists believe that are just not Bible. And so therefore, and by the way, we could pick on anybody but we might as well pick on ourselves, right? And so that being said, when we come to this passage, to the best of our ability which realize that we struggle dividing the word of God, and that no matter what our particular background may be, let's not let it get in the way of what it says.

So it says, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." This passage has a very peculiar audience, the people of whom we know as James is writing to, the Lord is inspiring him to communicate with. He calls them the 12 tribes. Now that being said, allow me to kind of go there just for fun, somewhat rhetorical. If you know personally what tribe you're a part of, raise your hand? I didn't expect any hands because you're not and neither am I. I, as many of you, am a good, old-fashioned, pagan, pig-eating Gentile is who I am. But it says here that it is written to the 12 tribes.

Why is that important for us to understand before we go back into chapter 2? Two reasons. Number 1 is the identity of the 12 tribes. You go back in the Old Testament and we're familiar with these individuals, the 12 tribes that came from Jacob via Isaac, via Abraham, but what's important to note is that when Jesus Christ, his earthly ministry,

when he was healing the lame, when he was walking on water, when he was multiplying food, every single Jewish individual that would have come in his presence when he preached his first sermon in Luke 4 and he opened up the scroll of Isaiah and he read to them, every person that was in that audience if he had surveyed them, "What tribe are you from?" They all would have known. Every one of them would have said, "Well, I'm from Dan. Or I'm from Simeon. I'm from here. I'm from there." They all knew what their respective tribes were, obviously not only from the Lord sharing but from tradition.

Then something very interesting happens. In the year 70 AD Rome comes in, they dismiss the Jewish people from what we know as Jerusalem, from what we know as their home place, and when they do so, something interesting happened to the tribal identifications. It is a rare day, in fact, it's speculation by most part, if you meet somebody who is Jewish that they know what their tribal affiliation is. It's been 2,000 years. There has been a lot of wars, there's been a lot of running for one's life, a lot of survival mode, for lack of better terms, and so today and I've had the privilege over the years of having many people in my life that were Jewish not only by their birth but Jewish by their faith, and I've just asked them a very inquisitive question, "Do you know what tribe you're connected with?" The overwhelming majority say, "I have no idea." But then they usually say, "Well, but my great grandmother used to say..." But there was no validity to it. And so what's interesting is we have a book in the Bible addressed to 12 tribes that since 70 AD nobody knows who's a part of what.

The second thing that's interesting about the audience, it says to the 12 tribes who are scattered. Now you understand that when what we know as Pentecost began, that famous event where we talk about the church being initiated publicly, the Bible says there in Acts 2 there were Jews from all nations, listen to this, who had gathered in Jerusalem. They had all come together. There was a system not only of the festivals and the feasts but just their socio-economics, they were a part, Jerusalem was the epicenter of Judea, that part of what we know as Israel. That was kind of, for lack of better terms, the mother-ship for all things.

They're scattered. I mentioned 70 AD. In 70 AD not only did the Romans annihilate the Jewish people out of Jerusalem but we call it the diaspora. It's a fancy word that means they were scattered. They were sent abroad and for about 1,900 years they didn't have a home. They went from this place to that place and they lived all around the world, but since 1948 what we know as the Jewish people finally have a home-base again in what we know as Israel. Why is this critical to our study tonight? Because this book of the Bible is addressed to 12 tribes who are scattered. Even today, even though the Jewish people as a whole have a homeland, they have a "sovereign state," they still don't know their tribal affiliation. Why is this important for you and I? Because if we're going to look at the book of James from a doctrinal position, we have to realize that we're not a part of a tribe and we're not scattered. So the book of James is specifically written to a group of people that the majority of us cannot and do not identify with.

Now hear me clearly: when we go into the book of James, of course there is that spiritual application. We can't look at James and go, "Well, those five chapters, not for me. I'm a

Gentile." We can't do that. But there are passages in what we know as the book of James that will cause turmoil in our lives if we don't see them through the proper lens. There's 12 tribes that are scattered, there are specific persons who are utilized.

To begin with: Abraham. Why would this be important? Because Abraham is the patriarch of the Jewish people. Abraham is the key figure. He is the one that "started it all," and we just read here in chapter 2, and by the way, I did not list all of them on the outline or on the screen tonight, it mentions Isaac. Why is that important? Because Isaac had a brother by the name of Ishmael. Ishmael is the lineage of what you and I know today as the Arab people, and primarily those that believe in the Islamic faith. And so therefore for Abraham to be the patriarch, you've got to go through Isaac. Over and over Abraham is utilized, he is mentioned.

There's another character mentioned by the name of Rahab. Now some of you who have been to a lot of Bible studies, "Whoa now, pastor. She was a Gentile." Can we emphasize the word "was"? She was a Gentile. She was the woman who hid the two spies but she's also the woman who said, "Hey, when you come back, don't forget about us." And she actually became what we commonly would call a Judaizer, one who converted to Judaism. You say, "Well, how do we know she converted?" Have you read Matthew 1? She is actually in the lineage of Jesus Christ and if that wasn't enough, when you go to Hebrews 11 when it talks about the Hall of Fame of Faith, all the great patriarchs and matriarchs of the faith, Rahab is actually listed. And so we have this woman of incredible faith that's a part of the Jewish lineage of the Messiah and makes the Jewish Hall of Fame.

We have the character of Job who is referenced, that man of great patience, that man of great persecution, but historically speaking probably the first chronological book of the Old Testament that the Jewish people would have had access to.

There's another interesting person recognized and I put it in quotes, "the fig tree." The book of James talks about the fig tree here and the fig tree there. You say, "Why is that critical?" In the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets, the fig tree was always representative of what we know as Israel, the entity of Israel. That's why in Matthew 24 when Jesus says, "When the fig tree begins to blossom, you know that the end times, you can set your clock, it's getting close." That fig tree over and over again was Israel.

The elders. Now I realize that the Apostle Paul mentioned that when he would go from church to church and city to city, they would ordain elders, but in the Old Testament it was the elders at the gate of the city, it was the elders who were those individuals that rose to prominence in the community that made the decisions. These are the individuals such as Esther's uncle, Mordecai, and others who were the prominent figures of the culture of the Old Testament.

Elijah. Elijah is not only one of the very few, shall I say one of two, people of what we know in the Old Testament who do not suffer a physical death. Remember, he was caught up in the chariot of fire to be with the Lord. But Elijah is one of the last folks mentioned

in what we know as the book of Malachi 4 and even today when a Jewish family celebrates Passover, they always leave an empty chair for Elijah. Why? Because they believe, and Malachi 4 says, that Elijah will return before what we know as the Second Coming of the Lord. In fact, Jesus said about John the Baptist, "If you believe in me, then he is Elijah."

Now why am I going into all this? Because every single character that is mentioned in the book of James as an example of what to do is an Old Testament character. What about Matthew? And what about James? And what about Peter? And what about Bartholomew? And Paul? The great men of faith of your New Testament? There's not one mention of any single character or person that we know in the "New Testament" as an example of how to live out one's faith. Do you see kind of the stream of thought here? We have an audience that has a tribal affiliation that's being scattered, we have examples of individuals whose lives were lived before the time of Christ, not since.

There are some particular Scriptures that are referenced and I'm not going to go through all these tonight because this would consume our evening, but what we know as the law, the first five books of the Old Testament, is quoted twice in the book of James. What we know as the prophets or particularly whom we know as Amos is quoted about five times in the book of James. And what we know as the writings, that section of Scripture that involves not only 1 & 2 Samuel but Job and Psalms and Proverbs and such, is referenced numerous times.

Again, Paul's not mentioned, Barnabas isn't mentioned, John Mark's not mentioned, but Abraham and Rahab and Job. There's no reference to what we know as the Gospels. There's no reference to any of the letters of the Apostle Paul. Every single scriptural reference is to something in the Old Testament. And so every character, every passage that James talks about as an example, in other words, "Go back and look at this," is in the Old Testament. Hm. So where does James find its place in Scripture?

Now for those of you who may be new with us or at least new to my "teaching," allow me to share something that I think is very critical to a proper understanding of rightly dividing the word of God. We need to not get caught in the weeds. When you look at Scripture, one of the best things I can teach you is this: always make sure you look at it from 30,000 feet. Look at the big picture. We have statements in our culture such as, you know, don't miss the road for the windshield, or don't miss the forest for the trees. We know what that means, it means that you get so indepth at eye-level you miss the big picture. So let's look at the book of James as it fits in what you and I know as the New Testament and this is going to see what we know as the New Testament completely from a 30,000 foot perspective, and did I mention that the goal is to be biblical and not to be Baptist tonight, right?

Alright, here we go. What about its place in the Scripture? Let's talk about the Gospels for just a moment: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We know them well. We can probably quote verses from them. We adore them. We love them. We revere them. But here's the thing I want you to understand: there is not a single person in the Gospels that's

ever referred to as saved, regenerated, reconciled or redeemed. Not one. In fact, one of my favorite trivia questions is how many born again Christians are in the Gospels? None. Not one of them. You can't be born again until Jesus raises from the dead. He doesn't raise from the dead until the last chapter. So all those characters whether it's blind Bartimaeus who was healed, the woman at the well that believes upon Jesus, it's the rich young ruler, you can pick any of them, not one single person in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is born again, redeemed or saved until Jesus comes up from the grave. Not one. And the overwhelming predominant audience is, you guessed it, Jewish. And when Jesus tells them, "Have you not read in the Scriptures..." you know he's not referring to the book of Romans, right? What is he referring to? The law, the prophets and the writings.

So what we have from 30,000 feet, at least within the Gospels, is we have the Jewish, as far as lineage is concerned, Messiah speaking to the Jewish people that their system is not going to get them where they want to go, they've got to go through him. In fact, how many times do you see, particularly in the Gospel of Mark but all over the Gospels, how many times do you see Jesus basically say, "Hey, just come and follow me"? Why? Because if they didn't go through the cross, if they don't go through the resurrection, then all they are is offering their turtledoves and making their sacrifice on a regular occurrence. That's why John the Baptist when he was at the Jordan River said, "Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. Follow him."

So the Gospels, again doctrinally speaking, nobody's born again until Jesus comes up from the grave, and what we know as Pentecost, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, technically takes place a month and a half later which speaks of the book of Acts. The book of Acts if you look at it just historically, serves as a history or a transition, if you'll allow me to use that word, from what we know as the Gospels to the church because what we have in Matthew 7 is not the church. You don't have a church until you have a resurrected Savior, right? You've got a synagogue but you don't have a church. It's very different. And so the book of Acts serves as this transition. There's about 30 years of history of the early believers from Pentecost until eventually the death of what we know as the apostles. We have the Gospel being in an Upper Room with a couple of people, technically a little more than a couple, very scared and fearful. That's in Acts 1. By the time you get to Acts 17 it says they're turning the world upside down. By the time you get to the end of the book of Acts, what we know as the Gospel is going literally to the ends of the earth.

As you're reading your New Testament it starts with the four Gospels, it goes to the book of Acts, and then we get this section that you and I call the letters of Paul. For those of you who are a little bit old school, the Pauline epistles. What do we discover in the Paul letters? Well, we discover that he writes a message to the church which is at Corinth, does he not? The churches that are Galatia. The church at Ephesus. The church at Philippi. The church in Thessalonica. Are you getting a pattern here? He is writing a message to what we know as the body of Christ, that which is now feasible because Jesus has risen from the dead. He has now conquered death, we have the capacity to be born again, we have the ability to be saved because he's offered the sacrifice once and for all, and as you walk through that section of your New Testament, you'll discover that seven

times, seven times the Lord communicates through Paul these mysteries, these things that even though the Old Testament hinted at it, we don't really get it until we have the Holy Spirit.

How about the idea in Ephesians 5 that Jews and Gentiles will be one body known as the church? That's a mystery, is it not? You go in the Old Testament, do you know where we got...by the way, when I say "we," I'm talking about the Gentiles. Do you know where we got to hang out? The outer court. We weren't even allowed in the real place that you wanted to be. But now all of a sudden we're in the same room, reading the same Scripture, listening to the same message, we are one body.

Another mystery in the book of Colossians says this is a great mystery, that Christ is in you. In the Old Testament if you wanted to go to "the presence of God," what did you do? You went to Jerusalem. Now that Jesus is raised from the dead if you want to go to the presence of God, just wake up because wherever you are as a believer, the Spirit of God is. We are the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Here's a great mystery, 1 Corinthians 15, we shall not all sleep but we shall be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we shall be caught up to be with the Lord. That was alluded to in the Old Testament, it was mentioned, but we didn't realize it until we were a part of the body of Christ, until we were the bride of Christ, until we became what you and I know as the church.

As you're walking through what we know as the Pauline epistles, when you begin in Romans and you end in what we know as Philemon, when there is a reference to the Old Testament, typically he is speaking to Jewish people within the context of the church of how the faith of old comes seamlessly into the faith of new. In fact, let me give you a hint: one of the sections that causes all kinds of chaos among individuals of biblical teaching begins in Romans 9. Romans 9 through Romans 11 is just a struggle for a lot of folks. Let me save you a lot of heartache. He begins chapter 9 saying, "O for my brethren Israel. If it were possible I would give my very soul for you." And between chapters 9 and 11 of Romans, guess what every illustration is from? You guessed it, the Old Testament, Old Testament characters. He was speaking about Jewish people among the church that were struggling with this transition.

So what we know as the Pauline epistles or the letters of Paul communicate to us a very clear doctrinal message to the church of Jesus Christ. Now this isn't really a study of the book of James but let me go there because I can. Find anywhere in this section of the Bible from Romans to Philemon where anybody loses their salvation. You won't. Find anywhere in that section of Scripture that somebody has to somehow work to please God. Nowhere. In fact, what you discover in that section, it is by faith alone, through grace alone, according to Scripture alone. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved right there in the book of Romans.

Over and over again, in fact, the book of Galatians says, "O Galatians, you foolish individuals. I marvel that why are you removing yourself from the faith that was preached so simply." 2 Corinthians 11, the simplicity of the Gospel.

We get to the book of Hebrews, the book of Hebrews, much like the book of Acts at 30,000 feet serves as a transition to what we call the general epistles. Now this is where I want to spend a little bit of time tonight because this is where we find the book of James and I think this is the solution to our problem here. It's just not the fact that it's written to the 12 tribes that are scattered, that is critical, but I want us to see where what we know as the book of James is placed in your New Testament, I want to look at these general epistles and I want you to see a commonality between all of them.

I've listed them on the screen or on the outline for you. Let's begin with what we know as the book of Hebrews. Who is it addressed to? Hebrews. How does it begin? Verse 1, "God who in sundry times and diverse manners spoke unto us in times past by the prophets, has now spoken unto us by Jesus Christ." Find anywhere in the Pauline epistles where they consult the prophets for a message. You won't. When did that take place? Remember what we know as the Old Testament. Hebrews. Old Testament prophets.

The book of James. We've already addressed the 12 tribes which are scattered.

1 Peter. The strangers and the elect. It's one of those words that causes all kinds of turmoil, a lot of times in discussion this word "elect," are we elect, are we not elect, what's elect. One of the things that we have to notice when you're studying the Bible, it's called the law of first mention. The law of first mention means the first time that it's addressed it sets a pattern for how we utilize it the rest of the way and in Isaiah 45, Israel is referred to as the elect of God. In fact, a couple chapters later Israel is again referred to as the elect of God. A corporate calling, a body derived from what we know as Abraham.

1 John. Not only do we have this interesting prologue or beginning, "That which we have seen, that which we have heard, that which we have handled with our hands." Well, the church at Thessalonica couldn't say that, could they? How about the church at Ephesus? Those were Gentiles in the Roman land. They never laid eyes on Jesus. They never touched him. But who did? The Jewish people. In fact, Jesus' ministry was in what we know as Israel, particularly primarily in Judea.

Finally the little book of Jude. It's only 25 verses long but somebody very near and dear to me wrote an entire book on all 25 verses. I'll let you discover who that is. Every reference in the book of Jude is an Old Testament reference whether it be the angels that fell in times past, Moses, Korah, Cain, Enoch, etc.

We call them the general epistles or the general letters written to a general audience. I'll be honest with you, I think that's a bad title. I think we ought to call them the Jewish epistles. To Hebrews. To 12 tribes. To the elect versus the strangers. To those who have handled and touched and seen. And every single reference is to what we know as the Old Testament.

Now I know that's a fire hydrant of information so let me take a step back for just a moment. When you get to the book of Romans through Philemon right in the middle of your Bible, it's written to specific churches, it's written to the body of Christ, and if there are references to the Old Testament it is doing so as a springboard to now having Christ in us or communicating to Jewish people who are struggling that their present faith is a continuation of the Old Testament faith. When you get to the book of Hebrews, from Hebrews all the way to the end of your Bible, I didn't even include Revelation because it is the most Jewish of them all, over 250 either quotations or references to the Old Testament and not one quotation from 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Romans. Do you see the pattern here? This entire section of the Bible is addressed specifically to Jewish people, using Jewish people of faith and referencing the Jewish Scriptures about their faith.

So if we were to look at the Scriptures from a 30,000 foot perspective, allow me just to kind of lay something out before we get specifically to James 2. The audience of the Gospels was overwhelmingly Jewish, the audience of the Pauline letters is predominantly Gentile, and the audience of the general epistles is primarily Jewish. What we know as the "church" was initiated at Pentecost, and as we studied last week, will be called up before the end time events. And so what we see from 30,000 feet, I personally believe is a beautiful picture of how God has worked through time. He has not changed. He has not altered. But what we see is a building up to the cross and the empty tomb in the Gospels, a living out as the body of Christ in the Pauline epistles, and I would state tonight I believe there is evidence in what we just shared that by the time you get to Hebrews, doctrinally it is speaking about those believers what we might call post-rapture, those last days, those end times. By the way, when you get to the book of Revelation and we talk about the end days, there is a temple that is being utilized on a very regular basis. It talks about the commandments of God. It talks about in Revelation 7 the 12 tribes. Well, isn't that interesting? All of a sudden the tribes show up again. So we see a very interesting perspective laid out.

Now if that is the case, and obviously I would state that as the case, allow me to state the conclusion. If you found yourself in what we know as, say, Mark 5, I'm just picking one out of random here, and you found yourself as an individual who perished, who died, it happens, right? And I'm going to use the old evangelism explosion methodology. It's probably one of my favorite tools for sharing the Gospel. We call them the diagnostic questions. As you're going door to door, as you're talking with somebody, you ask them this question, "If you were to stand before God tonight at the entrance to heaven and he asked you, 'Why should I let you in?' What would you say?" Let's just pretend it's Mark 5 and you die. You can't say, "I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, his death, burial and resurrection," because he hasn't done it yet. What took place in Mark 5? There was a temple, there was a Holy of Holies and the sacrifices had to be offered.

Now for you and I today, if you were to stand before God right now, if I were to stand before God and say, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" The answer is real simple, "The blood of Jesus Christ was shed for me and I believed on it for my salvation. I've got

nothing else to offer." Is that not the testimony of Romans through Philemon? But then we just read in James 2, show me your faith without works, I'll show you my faith by my works. Doesn't that seem to conflict just a little bit? But notice where it is in the Scriptures. It's in this section that's being addressed to Jewish people. It's in this section that's alluding back to all the Old Testament. And when you get to those proverbial last days, guess where we find ourselves? The body of Christ, the Gentiles primarily, have "been removed" and according to Romans 11, one of those mysteries, I show you a great mystery, but Israel has experienced blindness in part until now but there's coming a time when the time of the Gentiles is fulfilled that all of Israel shall be saved. Romans 11:25-26 is so critical because the Lord says, "Even though the Jewish people are not the primary means of the message today, the Gentiles are, there's a day coming in the future where the Jews again will return as the primary conduit." Is that not what we see in Hebrews through the book of Revelation?

So therefore when we look at the book of James or we look at the book of the rest of the general epistles, we understand that it was written to the 12 tribes, we understand it was written to a people that were scattered which means it was futurist in the sense that it had to be post 70 AD because that's when they began to be scattered. Spiritually speaking, you cannot take a single verse out of the book of James and say, "Well, that doesn't apply to me. I'm a born again Christian in the church age. Don't need the book of James." Oh, you need the book of James because it warns us about the danger of our tongue, it warns us about the danger of riches, it warns us about the danger of allowing people to have precedence in our life based on what they can give us in life. There's a lot of wonderful warnings in there but at the same time doctrinally speaking it means it's written to a specific people, at a specific time, for a specific purpose. I would state tonight that the doctrinal approach to James, that it is written specifically to those who are living in the last days on how to live their life in preparation for Jesus Christ to split the skies and come and set up his kingdom.

Doctrinally speaking, which is why we have a problem that I think is now tonight easily solved. I put two verses of Scripture on the outline and on the screen. One is from Romans 3 and one is from James 2. Romans 3:28 says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." James 2, "You see then how by works a man is justified and not by faith only." Now I'm the only one or am I the only one in the room that sees a problem with those two verses? They contradict themselves, do they not? The book of Romans says, "Works has got nothing to do with it." James says, "Works has got everything to do with it." Romans says, "It's by faith alone." James says, "You can't say that."

Now if I was a skeptic, if it was one who just wanted to throw rocks proverbially at the stain-glassed windows of Christianity, I would say, "Aha! That Bible of yours has a mistake in it. That Bible of yours has a contradiction in it. That Bible, you can't have it... It's called the law of non-contradiction. You cannot have two opposing truths both be true at the same time." There's a lot of different examples but my favorite example is this: you cannot have a married bachelor. It's impossible. You're either one or the other. You

cannot be both. And so for you and I today, we are either justified by faith without any deeds of the law, or we are justified by works. We can't have both be true.

So let me go back to 2 Timothy 2, "a workman that needeth not be ashamed rightly dividing the word of God." So let's take Romans. Where does it fit in that scope at 30,000 feet? You guessed it, it's after Pentecost and it's before the last days, right there in the midst of what we know as the body of Christ, primarily speaking to those of a Gentile, non-synagogue, law background and the Lord saw fit as he said in his word, to reach out and to even save the heathen. That's us. You know, the Lord has some not so nice words for us. He calls us pagans and heathens. We are. But nonetheless, we are justified by faith, not by works.

There's a lot of different reasons for that and I won't elaborate on them, but you and I don't have access to a temple, we don't have access to the Holy of Holies, we don't have access to what we know as the ark of the covenant. You do realize that those things were pretty critical to the Old Testament faith. That's why they celebrated Passover, that's why they celebrated Pentecost, that's why they celebrated all of those celebrations because they had to "get right with God" by offering those sacrifices. You and I today, and I've said this before and I'll say it again, this is the easiest time in the history of the world to get right with God. We don't have to go to Jerusalem. Phew, can you imagine if we were under the Old Testament covenant in COVID? I'm not joking. When you can't get on a plane to go to Passover. You're not allowed in the country to even make your sacrifice. That would be a problem, would it not?

Here's the beauty of today. It doesn't matter where you're located, it doesn't matter where you are, what time of day it is, you don't even have to be in church, you can be saved, you just call on the name of the Lord. I've known people that have gotten saved in bathrooms. Now that's a far cry from the temple in Jerusalem. I've known people that have gotten saved in their cars. I've known people that have gotten saved in their field. I know people that have gotten saved at work. I know people that have gotten saved everywhere. Here's the problem: in the Old Testament you'd better be in Jerusalem and you'd better be at that temple. But today according to Romans 3, a man is justified by faith, not deeds of the law.

Oh, but there's a time coming. If you've read those general epistles, if you've read particularly the book of Revelation, what we know as the bride of Christ is going to be caught up together to be with the Lord. There is going to be a temple that is built again one day. There are two witnesses that show up and they testify, they measure it and the sacrifices and all that stuff. Oh, my goodness, it's almost as if we returned to what we had before.

So it makes perfect sense. Twelve tribes? Temples? Sacrifices? Old Testament Scripture? That's why when you get to those last days, James 2:24 says, "You claim that you're right with God just because you say so? Let me show you by my works." You say, "Well, what would those works be?" And I'll wrap up with this. I want you just to imagine that you're living in those last days. I want you to imagine that you're living in a time that Jesus

called the Great Tribulation. Baptists didn't come up with that, Jesus did, alright? So what would happen? You'd have to make a choice, do you take the mark of the beast or do you not? Do you or do you not? Now that's important because someone says, "Oh, I'm right with God. It's all by faith." And someone says, "I see some, I see a mark there. I'll show you my faith, I didn't take it. I'm living, I'm trusting God that he's going to take care of me. I'm not playing both sides of the fence." "I'm good with God because I've got faith." Why weren't you at the temple during the celebration? Do you see where that fits?

So the book of James, the great Reformer, Martin Luther, called it epistle of straw. It's not an epistle of straw, it's an epistle of the future is what it is. Now hear me clearly: please don't go to the book of James and go, "It doesn't apply to me anymore." Oh, it does because if there's one thing we're guilty of, we've got tongues that wave the fan of fire of hell according to James 2. We struggle with treating everybody equally no matter what their background is. We struggle with riches. We struggle with attaining things for the future. And as we talked about this morning, we have wars and we fight among each other.

So don't cry against it for our everyday application as a believer in Jesus Christ, but I can tell you that chapter 2, verses 17 through 24, has caused many a born again Christian to doubt, question or speculate, "What if I didn't do enough? What if I did the wrong thing? What if somehow, somehow I've missed something?" That's where we go back to Romans 3, we are justified by faith. You and I today are comprised of what the Bible calls the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, by faith alone, through Christ alone, according to Scripture alone. If we are true believers, will our faith be displayed through our actions? Of course. They should be. That's why the Bible talks about bearing fruit. The problem with bearing fruit is it rarely, if ever, comes on our timeframe. In fact, I would challenge you, go put a seed, well, this is not the right time, but go put a seed in your backyard and plant a fruit tree and demand that it have fruit by spring. It won't happen, will it? What does it take? Years to bear fruit. But when you finally see that fruit on the tree, what does it prove? That that seed was real and that seed was authentic. You and I are not saved by our fruit, the fact that we are saved means we do bear fruit. The problem is sometimes our fruit is not what it should be. It doesn't discount the seed that has been planted, it just shows us that we ought to water the root more.

And so tonight as we close, again as we've done during our COVID season, we're not going to have a time of standing and singing and inviting and such, but we do have some phone numbers that are available and whether you're watching online or whether you're here in person, if you need to talk something out, you need to pray something out, we're here for you. 334-231-2313. If you text us saying, "Hey, I need to talk to somebody. I need to pray with somebody." We'll be glad to facilitate that. We would love the privilege of talking with you about whatever struggle, issue, question, decision, whatever it may be.

But before I pray, I want you to rest in the assurance that one day I'm going to stand before God, I can just speak about Jeff, and when I stand before God and he says, "Okay, Meyers, why should I let you into my heaven?" I am not going to say, "Well, my faith

was justified by my works." I'm not going to say that. I'm going to say, "My works were but filthy rags and if it were not for the blood of Jesus Christ, I would have no reason to go across that threshold." I don't know if that's the exact wording I'll use but I think he'll read my heart when it happens.