

A Test of Faith, p.2

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Bible Text: James 2:14-16
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Well, grab your Bibles and go to James 2 this evening as we are continuing with this section on this thing of true saving faith and, um, what it looks like and, ah, again as we look at this, this is a section of Scripture that, oh tormented would be too strong of a word, but I struggled with as a young believer, as a young pastor, as I would question myself, "Am I doing enough works? Am I caring for enough people? Am I around town and in the neighborhood or in the world, am I caring and loving and ministering and doing the kind of good works? Am I truly saved?" And then the light went on and, I mean, it was a halogen light, or you might say an LED, big light today, and that was that he's talking about a heart of compassion and service for your brothers and sisters in Christ and in your local church. That's who this is written to. Don't separate the text from the application of its immediate context. He's writing to a local church and he's defining for them and in effect he's saying there are those who claim to be Christians and when they run into a brother or sister who is in dire need because of the persecution they're going through, and they won't even help them? They don't have a heart for them? He says that's not saving faith. He says can that faith save you?

Let's look at it together, James 2:14, um, and beginning there he says,

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [so this is a literal, specific, dire need, verse] 16 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? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well 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." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected [or brought to maturity, verse]; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of

God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 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? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

So I talked about the primary clarifier last week and that is the local church and your love for, your concern for, the fact that you're drawn to and want to minister to your brothers and sisters in your local church. Now once again, Christians ought to be caring, giving, loving people to everyone they come across that they can help certainly, but there's a limit to that. There's no way in the world, you can go out tomorrow and Monday and every single person that's got a need if you try to meet it, you won't be able to, but you have a primary focus and a primary concern from your heart since God's changed your heart for your local church. That's how this thing is clarified as to whether or not you have saving faith.

Whoa. Don't worry about, um, did you walk down the aisle right? Did you repeat the prayer right? Did you believe right? That's not to be your focus. Look in your heart and see is there evidence of a changed heart primarily concerning my love for other believers? That was radically true in my life. I went from no thought about church, never wanted to be around so-called Christians, to going to church regularly. I will give the caveat that in some places churches are so weak and have so many unsaved people in them, it's hard to sense this love because they don't have the Spirit, but nevertheless there is a drawing to those who do know Christ.

Now we come to a piercing illustration beginning in verse 18. A piercing illustration. He gives this, um, statement here in verse 18, "someone may well say." Now he, what he's, the point he's making is the guy who doesn't have works backing up his faith always usually is a big talker, usually he's talking in the place of serving the Lord in his church like he ought to. And on and on and on. I mentioned some of this this morning, but the person that says, "I can worship God out on the lake. I'm close to God out there. Well, I can worship God, I can be just as close to God when I'm out in the woods hunting. Or I can be just as close to God, matter of face, closer to God if I just get me and my family together in our house and maybe we'll get two or three other families and we'll have a home church. We don't really need the organized church." And on and on, talk, talk, talk, talk for in the place of joining a local body of baptized believers and loving them and serving the Lord and serving one another there. Someone may well say, they're always saying stuff.

I found this in, ah, J. Vernon McGee's commentary. I thought it was good. He said a minister once talked to a man who professed conversion and he asked, "Well, have you united with a local church?" "Well, no, I haven't," the man replied, "the dying thief never united with a local church and he went to heaven." The minister asked, "Well, have you ever sat at the Lord's Table in a local church?" "No, the dying thief never sat at the Lord's Table in a local church and he was accepted." The minister asked, "Well, have you been baptized into the fellowship of a local church?" "No," he said, "the dying thief was never

baptized into the fellowship of a local church and he went to heaven." "Well," the minister said, "Have you ever given to missions through your church?" "No, the dying thief did not give to missions and he was not judged for it." Then the disgusted minister said to the man, "Well, my friend, the difference between you two seems to be that he was a dying thief and you're a living thief." I thought that was really good and that's very true.

They're always talking. Someone may well say. They've got a way to philosophy about their life and their approach to serving God but it's not God's way faithfully through a church loving your brothers and sisters there. And you know, it's so real to me and it's so obvious to me that, um, I can't be away from my church that long. Now I get tired of the work but I don't get tired of my brothers and sisters. We all get tired in whatever work we're doing. Um, it's like the man who is a cabinet shop worker and he's, he and a few other guys have been employed down at the cabinet shop and one day he doesn't show up for work at the cabinet shop and his boss calls him, ah, that evening and said, "What happened? Are you sick? You didn't show up to work." He said, "Well, I built cabinets at my house all day." He said, "Wait a minute, no, you hired in to be a part of the team here," and that's the point James is making. You can't come up, someone may well say, you can't come up with your own view and philosophy of serving the Lord. God's got the way he wants you to serve him and it centers in the church. True faith always brings life and life always produces good works.

Now this verse 18 is a very misunderstood verse, matter of fact, we don't know for certain exactly what it's saying and one of the reasons is the quotation marks are not in the original Greek so the translators put them in where they think they go, but here's what I think it's saying, matter of fact, here's what I'm convinced it's saying, James is giving you a hypothetical objector. The hypothetical objector says, verse 18, "someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works.'" What he's saying is, "Well, you have works, that's good, but I have saving faith and maybe not the works but it doesn't matter because we both are okay." One has faith, no works. One has faith and works. But what does it matter because we're saved by faith?

Now the rest of the verse 18, it shows James's answer. James says back to him, "Well, show me your faith without the works," now how do you do that? See where he's getting him? "Well, show me your faith with no works." You can't show faith with no works. I don't know if you've got, I can hear your tongue but he's already referred to someone may well say, saying don't mean anything. So James says, "Show me your faith without the works," and then James says, "then I will show you my faith by my works." Of course, he's the pastor of a local church. He's given his life for the church. It's obvious in James's life.

So he's silencing this objector. You see, you can't come to Christ and remain the same any more than you can come in contact with a 220 volt wire and remain the same. God changes you when Christ comes into your life. You're different and one of the primary ways you're different is your affections are changed. The circle of people you're drawn to, the circle of people you love begins to change. Well, it doesn't have to, you may be

surrounded by Christians but for most of us in my situation it was a radical change of direction concerning my affections. I was drawn to those people at the church. An interesting thing.

So this is quite a piercing illustration because he continues on in verse 19 answering this, this objection that, "Well, I can have faith without any works and I'm okay, even though you have faith with works and you're okay." James says, "Wait a minute," verse 19, "You believe that God is one." He says, "That might be part of your faith. Well, you do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." The word "shudder" means "make the hair raise up on, on, on its ends." Shudder means a deep emotional response. He said, "The demons know God is real and when they are approached by God or in God's presence, they, they're terrified because they know who He is." The Bible tells us, for example, that demons, um, bear witness of the Sonship of Christ in Mark 3. They believe that there's a place of punishment made by God, Luke 8. They recognized Jesus as the ultimate judge sent from God, Mark 5. But they do not possess saving faith. They have a faith, they have a belief, but it's not saving faith.

So remind yourselves, church, and be discerning, older folks in the Lord, that emotional responses, weeping and even tears over God and God's love doesn't necessarily mean you're saved. I want to know do you love Christians and your local church? That's what James wanted to know and that's what I want to know. Ah, be real cautious of these great, flamboyant, passionate, self-denying, crocodile-tear, ah, ah, itinerant servants of the church, so to speak, who are real light on the local church. One of the questions I always ask is what body of local church elders are they honoring and submitting to? Be careful. I believe that's the way Satan throws curve balls to everybody, ah, to make you think, "Well, he's so, she's so devoted and so, oh, they're heart, so, oh, oh, oh." Do you not think Satan can counterfeit that if he can get your heart off of what really matters? Demons can counterfeit anything.

Verse 20, the hypothetical objector is countered further, "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" He's saying basically, "Your faith is a lot like the way the demons have faith. They believe in God but they're not saved."

Now let's go on to not only this piercing illustration where he tells them, "Your concept sounds like something demons would come up with," basically that's what he's saying, now let's look at a practical illustration. A piercing illustration, now a practical illustration and we start in verse 21 with Abraham. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" Genesis 22, God told Abraham to take Isaac, his son, and sacrifice him on the mountain of Moriah. He obeyed God, showed that he had faith. He showed a work. He took his son up there and did what God told him to do.

Now the point is faith is changing, faith makes a vital difference in your life and let me just mention the three components of faith in the inner man. First of all, faith affects the intellect. It means you believe the basic truths of the Gospel. It doesn't mean you

comprehend all of them, but in your mind, you see, Christianity comes through the mind, Christianity is not some sort of a trance you go into and the Spirit changes you. That's superstition in pagan religion that teaches that. Christianity has to be understood in the mind, that you understand you're a sinner, you understand the weight of your wanting and your great, ah, ah, depravity and that you're only rightfully deserving of God's wrath. You're beginning to grasp that in the mind and you're beginning to grasp in your mind that Christ in love beyond comprehension took your penalty, died for you on the cross, was buried and raised for your justification and even intercedes for you in heaven forever. So it doesn't mean you grasp all that but, but you have the basic concepts of understanding in your mind, then your emotion feels that guilt, your emotion feels the weight of your sinfulness, your emotions feel the lostness and your emotions feel and sense the need to cast your hope and trust in Jesus Christ. So the intellect understands the basic concepts, the emotions begin to feel the reality of the weight of sin and the need for Christ, and then in the will, you embrace Christ. You stand in him. You take him as your own and you begin living out under his Lordship. The intellect, the emotions and the will.

Now look at verse 21 again, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" Now that seems to be really contradictory to Paul's theology. Look back at Romans right quick and look at Romans 4, would you do that? And let's see what Paul said about Abraham's faith, Romans 4, beginning in verse 1. "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works," isn't that what James just said, "he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." So here it looks like Paul is saying that, ah, Abraham was saved by faith alone as he looked forward to God's promise of a Savior. James, this practical local church guy, is saying, seems to be saying, "No, faith has to have works for it to be saving." But there's really no contradiction in them, these two viewpoints at all. They're talking about two totally separate things, two totally entirely different things. Paul, in effect, is talking about Abraham's moment of justification when Abraham gained a right standing before God, when Abraham cast that initial moment of faith in God to save him through his provision of a Savior who we know as Jesus Christ. And that occurred in Genesis 15:6 where the Bible says, "And Abraham believed God and God accounted it," or reckoned it, "to him as righteousness." James, though he uses the word "justification," is actually talking about the proofs of justification, or you could even say sanctification. James as the practical local church guy here is talking about the outward proof of Abraham's faith. Offering Isaac was the outward evidence of the inward saving faith.

Now matter of fact, look at James 1 as a great cross reference here and look at verse 17. James 1:17, let's look at James talk about the sovereignty of God in salvation here and how it is a monotheistic statement, that is, God and God alone gets this accomplished. James 1:17, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above," well, salvation is the best thing and the perfect gift, it comes from above, "coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Verse 18, "In

the exercise of His," God's, "will He," God, "brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures." That is a strong Pauline-ish type statement about salvation is by God's grace and work alone. So James, are you contradicting yourself? [unintelligible] "No, you've gotta understand, I'm talking about two different things there. The first time I'm talking about the moment of faith that gives you a standing of justification, in this text I'm talking about the evidence of that faith that shows forth your justification because your words alone doesn't tell me anything. I want to see a love in your heart for God's people and God's church." And primarily in this context, when these dear souls were being persecuted, at the very least you'd take care of your brothers and sisters who are being hurt or hurting and who are being persecuted if you belong to God, if you're one of his truly saved ones.

So no contradiction here alone. By faith Abraham was justified before God, by works Abraham was justified before men. Abraham was not saved by faith plus works, Abraham was saved by a faith that works. Now another thing to remember is when Paul's writing particularly in Romans, when he talks about works, he's talking about Jewish ceremonial works, the ceremonies of circumcision and all the washings, and all the keeping of the, the rites and the rituals that was associated with the outward ceremony of Judaism. So he's talking about ceremonial works of the law, James is talking about Gospel proofs that are proof of your inward saving faith. Paul points out that works prevent true faith. James points out that Gospel works accompany true faith. Now let me say that again: Paul points out that there are works that prevent saving faith. If you're putting your confidence in ceremonial or ordinances or rituals of the church to save you, that will keep you from ever coming to true saving faith. If you trust, "Well, I was baptized." As long as you're putting your hope in baptism, you can't be putting your hope in Christ. It prevents saving faith. "Well, I took the Lord's Supper with the priest." As long as you're putting your faith in the priest and taking the supper and not Christ, you're not, you don't have saving faith. So Paul is talking about if you put your confidence in the works of the law, ceremonial law, you're not there yet, you're not to saving faith yet. James talks about there are Gospel works which show forth that you have saving faith.

Folks, let me say something to you. Ah, we don't have a whole lot of this anymore. We used to have a whole, whole, whole, whole, whole lot of it and that is just folks that would walk down the aisle, put their names on the roll, and we can't find them 3-4-5-6 weeks later. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people on our rolls. I'm telling you, I don't give them one tiny chance to truly belong to Christ and be saved. The, the, the really, folks, are you listening to your pastor? The assurance of your salvation is your long-term inability to forsake God's church and God's people. Your long-term. Did you hear what I said? Inability. You might get in sin and you might fall out and you might get lazy and you might run this way and you might run that way, but I'm telling you if you're God's sheep, he draws you back to the sheepfold. Long-term abandonment of faithfulness to God in his church or long-term church-hopping and running to the next congregation that fulfills your carnal desires, either one tells me you don't have saving faith. That's what the book says.

So quit this silly superstitious stuff of, "Well, did you pray this prayer? Did you mean it? Did you say it right?" That's not in the Bible. James says the evidence is do you love God's people and love his church? Now be careful about measuring this. It's, it's maybe different in all of us but the, at least the germ is there and you never get over it.

In verse 23 he says, ""You see that faith was working," he's talking about Abraham, "with his works and as a result of the works, faith was perfected." Now the word "perfected" there is the very same word, ah, that we see in James 1:4. Turn back to James 1:4 and let's see what it means here. In James 1:4 he says, "let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." So is James saying you're gonna be perfect and that you'd sin no more? No, it means to be brought to completion or brought to a maturity. Here's what he's saying: when you begin to live out as a regular faithful product of your life faithful good works for God through his church and to his, to your brothers and sisters in Christ, then you're reaching the kind of maturity God wants in your life and that's what happened to Abraham. Abraham was an illustration that he honored God and did what God called him to do to a point that where he was considered mature, brought to an end in his faith.

Now verse 23. Now this is interesting. Get this thought in your mind, now think just, I know it's Sunday night but think just for a minute. Up in verse 21, James refers to Abraham's faith being shown by his work of carrying his son Isaac up on Mount Moriah to sacrifice him because that, Isaac up on the mountain to sacrifice him because that's what God ordered him to do, but now in verse 23 he goes back to Genesis 15 and he says, verse 23, "and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" Now James goes back and James says, "Now I'm gonna go to Paul's viewpoint or, or the perspective Paul takes." Abraham was actually saved in Genesis 15:6 when he believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness but Abraham showed forth, illustrated he had real saving faith in Genesis 22 when he obeyed God and did the work of taking his son Isaac up on the mountain to sacrifice him. So even James goes back to that moment of belief and says that was his real righteousness, that was his real justification, verse 23, but it was shown among men when he took Isaac up on the mountain.

Can I ask you and I'm talking to the Sunday night crowd and you're the best of the best typically, maybe an impostor in here somewhere, but typically you're the best of the best, is your work in your church, is there a love in your heart for your brothers and sisters that show forth you are one who possesses saving faith?

Look at verse 24 of our text, "You see then," or rather, "see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." Now A. T. Robertson is one of the most eminent Greek scholars who ever lived, good Southern Baptist, and A. T. Robertson says to understand the Greek here you needed to translate it this way, "You see a man is shown to be justified by works and not by faith alone." In other words, you can't show faith. That's why James says to that hypothetical objector, "You may well say, talk, talk, talk, talk about your faith in Christ." That's talk is cheap. Talk, you can learn all the jargon in the world and sound so impressive, I want to see from your life do you love God's church

and love God's children. That's what James says. A man's shown to be justified by his works.

Now he goes to a very opposite illustration here and this is another practical illustration, Rahab the harlot who, who helped the Jewish spies out so they could take conquest of Jericho and so it says in verse 25, "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?" In other words, was she not shown among all the inhabitants of Jericho, none of them had sympathy for God's people and God's work through Israel except Rahab the harlot. Now what's the point? The Bible tells us that Rahab had heard about the God of Israel. She had heard about the miracles and the wonders and his power, and she became convicted and convinced, "This is the true God of heaven and I believe in Him and embrace Him." She was saved and she showed that justification and that salvation by siding with the congregation of God, Israel, in the same way we show our true saving faith by abiding with and supporting and loving the congregation of God, the local church.

Boy, I love this stuff. That's the way it's shown. Look, these guys, we don't have much of this anymore, it happens every now and then that a family just, poof, disappears. Well, where are they? Well, we can't get them to talk to us. We don't know where they are. We don't know what they're doing. Now there's some exceptions when folks are hurting and I understand that, but you know what that means? Far too often it means they don't belong to God. If God put a love in your heart for your brothers and sisters in Christ, by the way a love even deeper than it should be for your own spouse because if your spouse abandons Christ, you're to stay with God and with his church and not go rejecting Christ because your spouse rejects Christ. Are you, are you listening to me? Then how can you can just disappear and go floating off somewhere? If God's moving you somewhere, come to the church elders and respectfully and honorably ask for release from the covenant commitment you made to this body. We're gonna let you go. Trust me, we don't want you here if you don't want to be here. But this just disappearing.

Rahab loved and sided with and supported the congregation of Israel, proved her justification, proved her salvation by that work, and so do you. So do we. Folks, there's just no two ways around this. This is God's truth. This is God's word. It's, it's a very neglected, misunderstood or completely ignored truth.

Verse 26, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." You know, it's difficult sometimes to tell if a person is dead or alive. In the old days, they would put a, a little glass right up to their nose and mouth and see if there'd be any vapor on it. You can take the glass of discerning spiritual life and put it on a lot of churches and you'll be good to get a little droplet of vapor on it and there are far, far, far too many folks who profess faith in Jesus Christ if you put the glass of spiritual discernment on their life, you won't get any evidence of true life there.

James in context again says, "Where's the evidence shown by your love for your church and love for your brothers and sisters?" Brother Larry, did you see some that, brother, when all this time you've been hurting? People loving you because you're their brother in

Christ? You men, I know we talked about that just the other day, about the way brothers and sisters ministered to him in his time of need. That's, that's not special, that's just normal. That's what we do for each other.

You see, folks, God saved us – now listen – God saved us not first and foremost to keep you out of hell, that's wonderful and it's true but first and foremost God saved you to honor him and glorify him through your life and he's primarily honored and glorified through his church. So if he saved you to honor and glorify him and he's primarily honored and glorified through his church, then your heart, your work, your passion, your love, your devotion should be to his church. Now you have to do other things, we all know that, but that must be there if you are his. It's inconceivable to profess saving faith and produce no biblically defined good works as James defines it in James 2.