

Scripture Reading:

James 2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; **9** but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. **11** For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **12** So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. **13** For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? **17** Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. **18** But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! **20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? **22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? **23** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. **24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. **25** Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? **26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

The Faith of the Church

Once again it is a pleasure to be here with the Saints in Santa Cruz and I bring you warm Christian greetings from Sacramento. We are continuing through a short series of messages for young churches from the Book of James In two previous messages we have learned about the Joy & Crown of the Church and the Mercy of the Church. *[Mention outline & tapes]*

- James has already introduced the topics of both faith and works and this morning James is going to clearly show that those who are in Christ have a living faith!

This morning I want to show that what James teaches about faith & works is NOT in conflict with the Apostle Paul or the salvation we find in the Gospels, nor our great reformation creeds which rightly proclaim the truth of salvation by faith alone!

- What James teaches here this morning is vital to any young church as he calls the true Saints to obedience
- James is focused on practice and not just theory.

There is so much controversy in some reformed circles today that you can get in trouble just using the words 'faith' and 'works' in the same sentence! This should make us wonder why James does not hesitate to do so in his epistle.

To me these controversies are not much different from the battles that raged in evangelical circles thirty and forty years ago when the debate was whether you could have Jesus as your Savior and not as your Lord.

Back then many insisted that IF you said someone must bow the knee to Jesus as Lord if they were truly saved you were adding works to salvation by grace!

Now if you say that those who have faith will obey Jesus, doing the good works they were created to do, then you are denying the great reformation doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

In both cases I believe the confusion comes from not remembering, or believing, what the Bible means when it says someone is born-again or saved by faith.

When Jesus, Paul or James talk of saving faith it is clearly:

- **NOT some sort of faith you have produced**
- **NOT some sort of decision we have made**
- **NOT some sort of human will-power to overcome sin & temptation**
- **NOT some list of faithful works we do to merit or earn salvation**

James clearly teaches that we are saved by no other faith than the gracious saving faith which both Jesus and Paul presented: Our salvation is the result of our sovereign God graciously giving us the gift of faith by which we repent and are justified.

- **The gracious gift of salvation is the result of God's love & actions from start to finish!**

John 1:10 "[Jesus] was in the world, & the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 3:7 "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The Apostle Paul explains this more fully in the second chapter of Ephesians where we read:

Eph. 2:4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace

in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

➤ **God’s Actions from first to last!**

James has already mentioned faith several times and we must understand that he means the saving faith that Paul has proclaimed:

James 1:2-3: “My brethren count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

James 1:6,12: “But let him ask in faith... he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

James 1:18: “Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”

➤ **James is in perfect agreement with Paul and Gospels**

James 2:1: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”

James 2:5: “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?”

James 2:8-13: Finally, our review read this morning that again reminded us that true saving faith will always be an obedient faith that loves our neighbor and shows mercy.

➤ **James, Paul & the Gospels stand united in teaching that saving faith is an obedient faith that is alive!**

➤ **James, Paul & the Gospels also stand united declaring that NO ONE is saved by the “works of the law” or by any other type of human effort.**

In fact, Martin Luther, who referred to James as an epistle of straw, still agreed and taught that saving faith was a lively faith: Listen to what Luther said about saving faith in his introduction to the book of Romans:

“Oh, it is a living, active, energetic, mighty thing, this faith, so that it is impossible that it should not work what is good without intermission. It does not even ask whether good works are to be done, but before one asks it has done them, and is ever doing. But he who does not do such works is a man without faith...”

Let’s dig into our text for today:

James 2:14: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”

James asks a very simple question and then gives a very simple and direct answer in the verse 26: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” Before I get ahead of myself, we must first carefully consider what James is asking in verse 14: He presents someone with dead faith: “if someone says he has faith but does not have works” and then asks: “Can this [dead] faith save him?”

James is NOT saying that works in anyway save the sinner or earn his righteousness before God. James goes on to give two very clear and easily understood examples which confirm that this is what he is asking and teaching. Verses 15-17: “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

It would be difficult to give a simpler example or have the lesson be more clear: With this simple example, James says that empty faith is...

EMPTY!

James uses compassion to illustrate faith: I announce to the family that I have become a compassionate person: Is this true?

The test comes with children sleeping in our 2nd story when it is cold or hot.

- Do I give them a blanket or a fan?
- Or do I simply SAY be comfortable and rest well!

Such “compassion” is DEAD compassion and all that James is saying here is that faith that does not result in good works is dead faith.

Verses 18-19: “But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!”

- How does one explain or show that they have faith?

The Bible says that it will be through baptism and obedience.

Think about the illustration of compassion as we consider these Biblical examples:

- John the Baptist: Confronting the Pharisees and Sadducees,

"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.”

- Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock”

- Or in the Great Commission:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”

➤ **What we see after the Apostle Peter's great sermon at Pentecost:**

“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

➤ **In the instruction of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians:**

“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

➤ **Those who receive the gift of faith respond with the works they were created in Christ Jesus to do!**

➤ **Those who do not show works have an empty faith, and James compares them to the demons!**

“You believe there is one God. You do well” [the doctrine is right] BUT James adds: “Even the demons believe and tremble”

A “decision” for Christ or the “right theology” is NOT enough.

Many times those who cling to a decision card or statement of faith do not even bother to tremble!

The Evangelical conflict over having Jesus as Savior or as Lord was a false dichotomy: You must have Jesus as Savior AND Lord!

It is also important to point out that this does NOT conflict with the great reformation revival of the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith:

Let's take a moment to consider a few Heidelberg questions & answers:

***Question 64* . But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?**

***Answer* . By no means: for it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.**

Question 86 . Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

Answer . Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.

Question 88 . Of how many parts doth the true conversion of man consist?

Answer . Of two parts; of the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man.

Question 89 . What is the mortification of the old man?

Answer . It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them.

Question 90 . What is the quickening of the new man?

Answer . It is a sincere joy of heart in God, through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Question 91 . But what are good works?

Answer . Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory; and not such as are founded on our imaginations, or the institutions of men.

- The reformers had no problem putting faith and works in the same sentence!
- The bottom-line: We are justified by saving faith, not any type or proclamation of faith that is not the gift of faith from the Holy Spirit!
- James goes on to confirm his teaching with two familiar Old Testament examples:
[And this is where he really gets into trouble with those who fear to use Biblical language!]

Verses 20-24: “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

- The faith of Abraham was an obedient faith and is the example of the saving faith that we need and should demonstrate in our lives
- Verse 22 clearly shows that it is God who brings faith to its goal
- We see the works of faith NOT working to have faith
- It is vital that we understand the difference!

Hebrews 11 gives us many more examples of saving faith: And we should notice that they are all coupled with obedient actions!

8: *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance*

20: *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come*

21: *By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph*

23: *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents*

24: *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*

28: *By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood*

29: *By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land*

30: *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days*

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

- **And Rahab is the final example that James uses in his discussion of saving faith:**

Verse 25: “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”

- **Were any these Saints perfect? Certainly NOT**
- **This is why James introduced this discussion with the command to show mercy and the law of liberty**

Verse 26: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

James gives a clear answer to the question he raised in verse 14:

Faith without works is dead!

- **Some today, are not comfortable with his straightforward answer.**
- **We must not allow our modern dualisms, rationalisms or pietism to confuse what James says here: Absent breath, the body is dead & absent works, your faith is dead.**

[Use example of someone physically dying and being brought back to church the next week]

What kind of faith will flourish here at Trinity Covenant?

- **Desire and seek Biblical saving faith that is active and obedient**
- **That is why we worship and celebrate on each Lord’s Day**
- **That is why we have community & sign a membership covenant**
- **That is why we discuss and focus on our culture and practices**
- **That is why we claim God’s promises for our children**

As Peter told the Saints at Pentecost, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

As we claim this promise:

- **We are called to have a lively, active and obedient faith**

- **Will we obey perfectly or consistently... NO But we must hear & obey Paul's admonition to the Saints in Colossae where he fleshed out some applications for what James has taught.**

Colossians 3:12 "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Lord willing, Trinity Covenant here in Santa Cruz will be RICH in faith and produce much good fruit!

Communion Meditation:

Christ has prepared His feast for us this morning:

The example of Abraham and Rahab are used by James and in Hebrews teaching us that the good news of the "new covenant in my blood" will go to the four corners of the earth and that God's gracious gift of faith in Christ can be celebrated at the Table by everyone:

Male & female

Jew & Gentile

Rich & Poor

Free & slave

"Righteous" & "sinful"

Mature & novice

Old & young