

How Life Works

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Thank you guys for leading us. Let's open our Bibles to James chapter two, James chapter two and when you're finding your place there, I want to talk to you for a couple of minutes about what's going on here tonight on our property and I hope all of you are planning to be here for our annual church picnic. It is here on our property. It's no secret that I often say it's my favorite night of the year. I love that we're able to all get in one place together and eat together and play together, listen to music together, catch up and meet some new people. And it's just an opportunity for us to do some things that doesn't happen on Sunday mornings. Grab some dessert to bring with you tonight, bring a chair, bring blankets, whatever you want to use to sit on the ground. We will park in the pavement areas and the picnic will be just to my right here in the grassy field. You'll see the white tents when you leave and the food will be served there under the white tents. The Hog Mountain Boys will be set up on the porch of the second house, and so anywhere out here under the pine trees or in the grass you can set up your tents and blankets. There'll be bouncy houses for the children, leave your pets at home, and there'll be games for teenagers and we'll just have a good time. I can think of some great reasons to be here tonight. We've got cloud cover. Amen. We've got it 15 degrees cooler. Amen. Thank the Lord. Praise the Lord for that. There's barbecue chicken. Amen. Y'all are gonna get fired up now. We got mac and cheese, we got mac and cheese tonight. You don't have to pay for the meal. We budget for this each year in our ministry budget. We are going to have some boxes out for us to make donations to hurricane Dorian relief for the Bahamas and you'll see those if you want to give. We'll match that up with Baptist Global Response and it'll get to The Bahamas to help with relief that's going on there. And it's going to be a fun night and I hope that you will make your way back here. The first note of music will be at 5:00 PM by the Hog Mountain Boys and we'll start serving barbecue chicken soon after that and we should be cleaned up and gone and done somewhere around 7:30. Stay as long as you like, it'll just get dark. Come as early as you want and it'd be great for us to all be together tonight.

A few days ago we had one of these kind of pop up storms in our community. It hit part of our county, part of Clark County and we were out in it. We got home and realized that the power had been off and it kind of prompted us to be thinking, "Well, where are our flashlights?" So we went to the drawer where we keep the flashlights in the kitchen and we went through those. Just wanted to get them out and have them ready if something like that came up again. We got them all out there on the corner and Carla's going through them and not a single one of them work. Just nothing. I mean they were pretty, they click, you know they made the clicking noise and we switched out the batteries in a couple of them and still just nothing. They were dead, they were useless. And what good is a flashlight that won't shine light? James is speaking to us today in chapter two about our faith that in some ways can be just like those flashlights. We can have a faith that is kept where we think it belongs. We can have a faith that claims to be faith, but it'd be dead. You can have a faith that's dead.

Now, that ought to cause every one of us to want to sit up and take note and say, wait a minute, if faith is what saves us, if we are saved by grace through faith alone, and I can have a faith that's dead, I need to see what James is saying. James is saying to us in chapter two that there is a faith that works and there is a faith that doesn't. And he's saying to us that there is some faith that is alive and there is some faith that is dead. We're looking at the book of James and we're talking about How Life Works, and specifically we're talking about how eternal life works in everyday life. And according to James chapter two, eternal life works in everyday life when we have a faith that works. A faith that produces works, a faith that bears fruit. And so for a few minutes here, would you kind of roll this question around in your heart, whether it's your very first time here, maybe you've been here for years. You may be here as a guest today and that we celebrate that, we love that, we'd love to meet you, speak to you. But more than just me meeting you or you meeting someone else, God has brought you here today to examine your faith, to examine your heart and see if you have a faith that's alive. If you're here and it's a routine every Sunday, you know where you're going to be, it's here, the spirit of God is saying to you today, I want you to examine your faith. To see if your faith is alive and if it is, be encouraged and be assured in that, and be confident in that as celebrate with gratitude that his mercy is great. But it may be that you examined your faith today, and you realized for the very first time the spirit of God is telling you, "You know what? This faith that I have is dead. This faith that I have bears no fruit." Let's look together, James chapter two and we pick up where we left off last week. It's verse 14, James writes,

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good^a is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

John Calvin said that we are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone. And this morning, I want to work through this passage of scripture that all of us have heard. If you're familiar with James at all, this is that section that we can get tangled up in. There may be some conflict here in these verses with other passages of scripture. And so let's work through it and may the Spirit work in our heart and our mind today as we work through it. Just let him illuminate this passage and speak to our hearts and make sense of it where he wants to make sense of it. There's a key question as we start these verses I go back to, and it's this, in verse 14, where James says, "Can that faith save him?" When we read it, we read it fast and almost missed that

there's this word here, right before faith in the ESV, four letter word, "that." Can that faith save him? If you're reading in the Greek New Testament, you see there that there is a definite article before the Greek word for faith. And it is James saying, a particular faith, can that faith, this faith that we're talking about, can that faith save him? Save who? Save the one who says he has faith but does not have works. Can that faith save him? And James makes the argument following that, that a faith that does not have works cannot save us. This question about faith goes back to verse one of chapter two. In fact, as you work through chapter two I believe it is 16 times that the word faith is used. He says in verse one, "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." We talked last week about how that was the third time that James has referred to salvation, the gospel. We talked about God begging us, or he talked about the implanted word in us, and here he talks about holding the faith. They all are, in ways, give a little bit of a different perspective on salvation, but they all point to us being saved. To us all being rescued from our sin, the work of God's salvation in our life. And he talks about holding on to that faith in the context of not showing partiality. And he points out very bluntly, he says to show partiality, do that you commit sin. And you hold faith in Jesus Christ, and you're committing a sin if you show partiality. And then he comes back and it's almost like he's in this conversation with people and he's imagining what they would say back.

And someone might say, well, it's not that big a deal. Partiality is just one of those things, it's just the way live. I got a bunch of things that I know are right, I've heard you say are right, but I still sin and that's just the way I live. That's just the way it is, and it's like James comes on the heels of that and said, what good is it? What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? It's like he's saying, what good is it for a person to say he holds faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but continues to just continue and continue to commit the sin of partiality like it's no big deal. Even knowing that God says what's right and wrong. He said, you're not obeying. And so what good is it for you to have that kind of faith that has no works. Can that faith save you? James is saying that faith doesn't save you, but what faith does save us? What faith saves us? When you take scripture, the illustrations of James, the teaching of the New Testament, the teaching or the Old Testament, we roll it into one sentence. The faith that gives eternal life, you could say the faith that saves, the faith that gives eternal life is a faith that is declared in heaven and demonstrated on earth. It is a faith that is declared in heaven and demonstrated on earth. That's the faith that saves. In other words, there are two courts. There's the courts of heaven, where God's eye's see and make a declaration and there are the courts of heaven where we validate, or we prove, or we give evidence of our faith. Justified in heaven by declaration, justified on earth by a demonstration.

Now, let me call your attention to what these verses are not about. There are four of these. We could read through this and say, well, this is a battle between faith and works. It's not. Let me kind of order it in this way. This is what these verses are not about. These verses are not about increasing the amount of good works we're doing. The impact of these verses, as James writes, it was not his intent here to say, so now that you've read this letter, get out there and do more. It's not about increasing the amount of good works that you're doing, that we're doing, that an individual is doing. James is not challenging us, now having read these verses, if we want faith, we better get out there and ring a kettle for the Salvation Army. If we want faith, we need to get out there and feed the hungry. We need to get out there and clothed the naked. It's not verses about increasing the amount of good words we're doing. It's not about the work

that we would do in the future. It's James saying, look at your life now and see, is there fruit now? Is there fruit now? That will show you if your faith is alive. Secondly, these verses are not about spiritual maturity. They're not about spiritual growth. James is not saying, Hey, it's time for you, scattered believers, to grow up in your faith. It's time for you to take another step. It's time for you to go from being a child of faith to being one who's fully grown in your faith. There are lots of verses like that in scripture that speak to us about the sanctification process. Where it says, growing and being transformed to be more and more like Jesus. James is saying, faith that is missing the fruit. Faith that is missing good deeds, faith that is missing, good works is not young or immature, that faith is dead instead of alive. These verses are not, number three, about the kind of good works or deeds we should be doing.

We could easily look at this passage and just dive in and say, "I remember what he said about orphans and I remember what he said about visiting widows, and I'm going to start doing that and that way I can continue to just make deposits into my salvation account. Here, he's talking about those that are poorly clothed, they're lacking in food. I'm going to start doing that. I'm going to get involved in that because I want to make sure that I'm saved." James is raising those illustrations up as examples of obedience to God. The overflow of your heart, the fruit of your life, is that those things are happening because of what's been accomplished in your life, not because of what you're trying to accomplish. There are a lot of people who do what we might call good things every day. There are lots of people that don't believe in God at all that are trying to get fresh water to people who have poison water. There are a lot of people that are trying to get electricity to places just because they think, this is something good to do for someone, but it has nothing to do with being obedient to a Heavenly Father or following Jesus Christ as Lord. It's not about the kind of good works or deeds that we should be doing.

Number four, these verses are not about solving a conflict between Paul and James. This is one of the most helpful things for me in understanding the scripture this week. It's what I've talked about in the house to Carla and I said, this really jumps out at me, and it's this fact that it's easy to read through James and say, "Well, James and Paul probably were in a big argument." "They were in a lot of conflict, I bet." Wouldn't it be interesting if we all wound up in heaven one day and realize that James and Paul were next door neighbors? We might find that odd. We might say, wait a minute, they were in conflict on earth and how can they live next door to each other in heaven? They would not say to each other, "Wow, James, surprised to see you here." James would not say to Paul, "surprised to see you here. Paul." He's not solving a conflict. How do we know that? Number one is just the timing of the letter. James wrote before anything that Paul had written. James was not responding to the book of Romans. He was not responding to the book of Galatians. He was responding to an environment where people were living and it seemed to be instances where they've said, "I've, I believe that Jesus is Jesus. I believe that God is God." Yet they live their life with that intellectual belief but no heart action, no hand action, no foot action. There was no overflow from that faith that they claimed to believe. There was no obedience. James and, you think, what about Paul? Maybe Paul was responding to James here? Here's just a simple reason. I think that Paul was not responding to James because Paul seemed to never have an issue with calling people out that he disagreed with. Well, you read in the new Testament and you find him speaking out against Peter. You see him call to in conflict, in the book of Philippians, by name together and say, y'all work this out. He talked about Demos that had abandoned him for the cares of the world.

What is happening is that they're not arguing against each other but they're coming at salvation from two different perspectives. It's as if James is looking at Earth's court and Paul is looking at heaven's court. Paul's looking at what God declares, James' looking at what people demonstrate. A few days ago we'd taken a picture here on the property of how the construction was changing, and it seemed like every picture we would send to our kids that live in other places, and I guess we had always taken the picture standing right here between the Life Building and the Cafe area. Just back that way and showing the progress of the building. And last week one of the pictures that was sent to the kids was taken from the children's building looking back this way, and the awning was missing from the Cafe area and the wooden sidewalk was there and the fence was up and our oldest son responded, "Where is this?" That was the funniest question to me. I'm like, you've been here 19 years, what do you mean, where is this? And then later he responded and he goes, "It took me 10 minutes to orient myself to where this is on the property." Same property, same building, same work going on. But coming at it from a different perspective,

Here James is not saying, "Here's what God is declaring in heaven." He saying, "Here's what your life is demonstrating on earth." And if your life is demonstrating a faith that is just intellectual but it doesn't show up in obedience to God, then you've got a dead faith. Wrestle with that. The illustrations that he uses are Abraham and Rahab. And it's intriguing here to see that when you read Paul and you read James, that they both use the same Old Testament illustration for the angles which they're trying to prove. In Genesis chapter 15, Abraham is declared righteous by God because of his belief. And then in Genesis chapter 22, when Abraham takes Isaac to the mountain and lays him on the alter, his works justify what he has believed. He has now demonstrated what has already been declared by God, because of his belief. His belief didn't stop with just an intellectual belief, it showed up in his obedience to God, regardless of the circumstances, by taking Isaac up to the alter.

Paul comes at that in Romans chapter four and says, look at Abraham. Abraham was declared righteous by God. Romans chapter four. James comes along and he zeroes in on his actions of taking his son, Abraham taking his son, and putting him on the altar and he says, "Look. See right here on earth, his works are showing. He's demonstrating what God has done in his life."

Well, I can imagine Paul saying to James, "James, I agree with what you're saying. That's why I said in Romans chapter 16, right, at the end of the letter. In Romans chapter 16 I spoke about a faith that brings about the obedience of faith, the obedience of faith." Jesus said, "How do I know that you love me? You obey my commands." Paul calls it an obedience of faith. James calls it a faith that produces works. What are these verses about? If those are the four things that these verses are not about, what are they about? These verses are about a dead faith. He says, "Can that faith save him?" Verse 17, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead." James is arguing, he's comparing dead faith and living faith. He's talking about dead faith. The faith that is just words and no works.

Listen, if you see works as required for your salvation, you will see good deeds and works as a deposit into your salvation account. But if you understand that works are the fruit of salvation, they are the result of salvation, they're the evidence of salvation, you'll see good works and deeds as a withdrawal from your account. Because of what Jesus has put on our account,

because we have been declared righteous, because he has imputed righteousness to us, the overflow of that is how we live and obey God in everyday life. And it's going to show up and things like James illustrated here, clothing those who have no clothing and feeding those who have food. He says, you're not going to just look and say, "Be careful out there." You're going to at least be convicted. You're going to at least have this pain in your spiritual heart that there is something right there that God wants you to do in that need. And if you do walk away, you'll be miserable because of the conviction of sin. But if your faith is dead, you walk away the sense of, "Hey, that's not what I'm going to do. I don't have to do that." There's a dead faith he's speaking about here. There's also a deceptive faith.

Look at verse 19, he says, "You believe that God is one, you do well." When I read that verse, I think of conversations that have been in before where we've asked someone, "Hey, do you think that you will go to heaven one day when you die?" And they say, "Oh yeah, I believe in God." Okay. They say, "Yeah, I don't have any problem, I believe in God." James is saying, you believe that God is one. You have some good theology. You do well. But look at this phrase, "Even the demons believe and shudder."

James is saying to us that if we believe that God is God, but that belief in God does not lead to a transformed life, that belief does not lead to obedience to God, we have more in common with demons than we do with disciples. And so an important part for us to do in this message today is to say, "Who am I more like?" And I'm more like the demon's who claim, "Yes, I believe in God." Or am I more like a disciple that is walking, believing, obeying, "I blew it there." Convicted, confess, repent, change, live different, listened to God, hear his will, obey, obey, obey, obey, convicted. Confess. God change me. Break this in my life. Give me a hatred for sin. Obey, obey, obey. There's a big difference in that discipleship process of growing and bearing fruit and becoming more and more like Christ. The one who just says, "Yeah, I believe." The belief that the demons have, the word there for shudder, it means, to make your hair stand on the end. They see God as big, powerful, strong, worthy of fear, but it doesn't change them. That's a deceptive faith. That's an intellectual only faith. Look at your life. Is there fruit?

Number three, James speaks of a dead faith or deceptive faith, and number three he speaks of a dynamic faith. We talk about something being dynamic, we talk about it being alive. We say, "Man, that downtown area is just dead." There's no life, no activity, nothing moving around, nothing new going on. But when we say that downtown area is dynamic, we're saying there's activity, there's life, there's things happening. James is speaking here of a dynamic faith, an active faith. Verse 20, "Do you want to be shown you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless." And then he lays out this dynamic faith picture of Abraham and Rahab. Johnny Hunt says Romans four speaks of the declaration of our faith. James speaks of a validation of our faith. So it's possible here in this room today for somebody to realize, 'You know what, there's just not much difference between my belief in God and what the demons believe. There is no fruit. There's no obedience. If it were not for my words, no one would think my obedience is godly.' We're saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone.

Those of you that go back several years in our church family may remember a man by the name of Tom Dooley. Yes, Tom Dooley was a member of our church family for a number of years and he was a very quiet man. And I remember sitting with him one day in his house, in his latter

years, he told me about how he came to know Christ. And he said, "I literally had what they call, pastor, a foxhole conversion." You heard of those? A foxhole conversion is where somebody gets in a crisis and in that process they call out to God to save them. And they say, "Lord, if you'll get me outta here, I'll live for you the rest of my life." And we call that a foxhole conversion. They say, "Father, if you'll deliver me from this debt, I'll live for you the rest of my life." "If you'll deliver me from this sin, I'll live for you the rest of my life." Tom Dooley said to me, "I was in a foxhole in the war with bombs going off and bullets going over my head, and I had never believed in Jesus Christ." And he said in that foxhole, I called out to God to save me, and he did. And he's sitting there, in his den, telling me this story. Several months later, I sat in that same house with his wife and two daughters and some friends. They did not talk about Tom's foxhole conversion. What they talked about was the way Tom lived after he got back from the war. They talked about his life, choices he made, the way he treated people. What they were talking about was the way he obeyed God. And really, what you have there in that scene, are those two courts. In that foxhole, he called out to God, and in heaven he was declared righteous by his faith. And day by day, by day, by day, by day, those who watched him and looked at him and said, "Yeah, and his works justified him." You could see it in his life.

Today, I don't want to call on you to run out here and volunteer for some kind of social activity. The spirit of God may be calling you to do that, then it's time to obey. But here's what I want to call you to. I want to call you to run to the cross. I want to call you today, if you have sensed the spirit of God awakening your spirit today, and you realize, 'I have a dead faith', or, 'I have no faith at all', then run to the cross where Jesus died, paid for your sin, and you can be forgiven. And once and for all, this intellectual, just cultural Christianity, just checking the box, that kind of stuff goes away and the overflow of your life would be James saying, "That's it." That saving faith. Call out to Jesus today for him to save you.