

Your Faith: Dead or Alive (Part 4)
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James 2:14-26
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Well, I invite you this morning to turn back to the letter of James. This will be the last time in a couple of months we'll turn to this letter. We'll hopefully finish chapter 2 this morning, and then it's my intention over the next couple of Sundays to direct our attention with a couple of special messages to the person of Christ as we to celebrate Christmas.

And then, (I've talked with the elders.) it's on my heart as we go into January in the New Year to sort of set both for myself as well as for our church, a sort of New Year's resolution, in regards to the matter of prayer. And so, it's my plan at this point to take Sunday mornings in January, and for us to look together at what's called the Lord's Prayer. It's really the disciples' prayer. It's the pattern for our prayer. We'll look together at it, Lord willing, through the month of January in the morning, So it's going to be the beginning of February before we come back to this great letter.

But I've enjoyed the study as I know you have, and this morning we come to the conclusion of what is really one of the most powerful and controversial and profound sections of all the New Testament. We've been studying, of course, James 2:14-26, this great section on the issue of faith.

In this paragraph, we have found that James wants us to know that there are two kinds of faith, two kinds of faith in every church, and in this church there is a real living faith that saves the soul from sin and eternal death, and there is a deceiving dead faith that damns the soul, and James, in this paragraph gives us two detailed descriptions of those two kinds of faith.

I called the first, a glimpse into dead faith, verses 14 – 19. We call that an autopsy of dead faith. What does dead faith look like? What is this kind of faith that has an appearance of the real thing, but is really the faith that demons have? What does that look like?

We discovered that wherever there's dead faith, there is always an empty profession of faith. That is a profession, a constant saying, I belong to Christ without a pattern of obedience.

There is always a consistent pattern of excuses as to why that there is no obedience, and then in verse 19 there's always a biblical orthodoxy that believed the right things. They have the right content. But there's no fear. There's no genuine fear of God, even as the demons have. That's an autopsy of dead faith.

But then we came to the second half of this little paragraph, and in verses 20 - 26 James provides us with a portrait of living faith.

Verse 20 marks a transition in James' approach. So far, in the flow of this paragraph, he has centered his argument in logic beginning in verse 20, he says, "... are you willing to recognize, [that is, do you want proof?] ... [O] foolish [man] ... that faith without works is useless?" That is that it doesn't produce salvation.

And now, James sets out to prove his point from the Scripture, and he cites two Old Testament characters as examples of living faith. They are Abraham and Rahab. We began last time, just briefly, to look at the first of these two great portraits of living faith Abraham. In verses 21 - 24 James writes this about Abraham's example of faith,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 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. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Now this is the section of James' letter, and of this paragraph we've been examining. This is the section that seems especially to contradict those great letters of the Apostle Paul, especially Romans. You see in verse 24 here, a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. If you were to turn back to Romans 3:28, you would hear.

Paul says a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. So, there is obviously an apparent contradiction, and many have been troubled by this contradiction or apparent contradiction. How do you resolve it? Well, as I told you last time, we looked at James together, there are essentially three approaches to resolve this problem.

The first is to conclude that, in fact, Paul and James disagree, but there's a true disagreement at heart. They believed two diametrically opposed things. Well, obviously, as those who embrace the integrity of Scripture, the inspiration of Scripture, the fact that Scripture comes as the product of one divine mind, the mind of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible that the Holy Spirit contradicts Himself. So, that's not a valid option.

The second option, as far as how to solve this apparent contradiction, is that Paul and James are using an entirely different definition for the word "justify". Paul is using it in the sense of "to declare someone to be righteous before God", and James is using it in the sense of "the vindication of their faith".

A third option, and the one that I prefer, and that we're working on together, is that both Paul and James use the word "justify" in the same sense, but they still are not contradicting one another. It's important to understand that Paul and James are fighting different battles.

Paul is fighting against the works-based system of first century Judaism, and so, therefore he has to emphasize that we are not declared righteous before God on the basis of our works. Rather, we are declared righteous before God on the basis of the work of Christ through faith alone.

James, on the other hand, is battling a first century kind of antinomianism; those who believe that you can live however you want; that true faith doesn't necessarily produce any pattern of obedience in the life; and therefore, he says what he says.

You see when you talk about works, there are two great dangers. The first danger is to believe that works secure your salvation. That's what Paul addresses in Romans, and he says absolutely not.

But there's a second danger, and that danger is to believe that works don't necessarily follow genuine salvation. That is what Paul confronts in Titus and what James is addressing here. The key to understanding this section of James is found in verse 21. In this verse, because of the nature of his rhetorical question, James is really making a statement.

He says essentially Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac, his son, on the altar. His rhetorical question calls for a yes answer, so essentially, he's saying Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac, his son, on the altar. Of course, he's referring to the

famous incident recorded in Genesis 22. But to bring some clarity to this, let me ask you, when do we first hear of Abraham's justification.

It's in Genesis, not Genesis 22, but earlier in chapter 15. It's in 15:6 that we're told that Abraham is justified. According to Paul, that is the moment of his justification. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, or at least that's when it's stated I should say that's when his justification is stated. So, as early as Genesis 15:6, Abraham was justified. And James records the same thing, you'll notice, in verse 23 of this chapter, he says, Scripture was fulfilled, the Scripture which says in Genesis 15 that Abraham believed at that point, and at that point in Genesis 15 it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

So, it's important to understand that from Genesis 15, when we read that God declared Abraham to be righteous to Genesis 22, a period of about thirty to forty years passes. So, God had already declared Abraham to be righteous to be justified in the forensic sense in the courtroom sense that Paul means in Romans 4 at least thirty years before we find Abraham sacrificing Isaac on Mount Moriah.

In fact, I think a strong case can be made for Abraham being justified in the Pauline sense in Genesis 12, when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees. Called him to leave his family and to go to the land of Canaan that would be forty to fifty years before the incident in Genesis 22.

Turn back a couple of pages to Hebrews 11. Hebrews 11, the writer of Hebrews, makes an interesting point in verse 8. He says, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing where he was going."

This, of course, is referring all the way back to God's call of Abraham out of his idolatrous family in Genesis 12. Notice, here Abraham responds to God's call how? by faith. So, all the way back in Genesis 12 Abraham had true faith in God, and of course, true faith issues forth in God's declaration of righteousness.

According to Romans 4:5, Abraham, at that moment believed in Him who justifies the ungodly. Abraham understood that God justifies him as an ungodly idolater living in Ur. He believes, and he's declared righteous before God.

Now go down to verse 17 of Hebrews 11. We skip forward in Abraham's life forty to fifty years. By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he, who had received the promises, was offering up his only begotten son.

It was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac, your descendants will be called." What you have to understand is that the offering of Isaac was a test of the faith that Abraham had already had for forty to fifty years. So, something else happened in Genesis 22, not Abraham's initial justification that happened all the way back in Ur of the Chaldees. So, what exactly does happen in Genesis 22. Well, let's turn back there together. Let's look at this amazing story in its context Genesis 22:1.

Now, it came about that after these things, that God tested Abraham, and [he] said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here, I am," He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, ... [you see God here, stressing the preciousness of Isaac, God really is highlighting this test.] [Take your son, but not just your son, He's your only son, and he's not just your only son. It's the one you love, and I want you to take him] and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering....

Now, if you'd never read these words before, this would take your breath away God, telling Abraham to offer a person as a human sacrifice on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." [This is a fascinating little study on its own, by the way.] Of course, it's Mount Mariah where it ends up. According to 2 Chronicles 3:1, this was the same place in which David offered that sacrifice after the numbering of the people the threshing floor of Ornan. It's also the place that would eventually be the place where the temple was built.

In fact, even today if you go to the temple mount there in Jerusalem, and you walk into the dome of the rock, you will find jutting up out of the floor of that Muslim mosque a rock, and that is the place where it has been believed for centuries that Abraham offered Isaac, We don't know if that particular rock was the place or not, but it was very close there. That was the place. That was Mount Moriah.

He says, I want you to offer him up, verse 3,

So Abraham rose early in the morning ... [he] saddled his donkey, and he took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and [he] arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. [And he] said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; [and watch this] and we will worship, and [we will] return to you.

You see, Abraham had three days in which to think about all of this. He knew that God had promised that through his son Isaac, a great nation would be born, and now he knew that God had ordered him to kill the son and so the only way that he could reconcile in his mind (as the writer of Hebrews says is), he considered that God was able to raise his son from the dead if God let him go through with it and actually sacrifice his son. Then God's intention was to raise him from the dead because God had made a promise, and notice, Abraham's faith stood rock solid in God, God promised He'll do it, verse 6,

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand, the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac. [At this point, we don't know how old he is. He's probably 20 - 25. He's at least old enough to walk. [He's old enough to carry a load of wood to have this discussion with his son. He's probably 20 to 25 years old at this point,] [and] Isaac spoke to ... his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" [He's doing the math, and he figures. You know something's missing here, something pretty important to this process,] Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

Then they came to the place at which God had told him, and Abraham built the altar there and [he] arranged the wood, and [he] bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, [and] on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here, I am." He said, "Do not stretch

out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me.”

Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked and behold, behind *him* [was] a ram caught in the thicket by his horns, and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. Abraham called the name of that place [Yahweh Gyra.] The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day in the Mount of the LORD, it will be provided.”

But notice that after he completes the sacrifice of this ram that God has provided, the Angel of the LORD, You remember in our studies we’ve discovered that this character, the Angel of the LORD, is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ, so Jesus Christ appears to Abraham, and he reassures Abraham. He reconfirms the promises that have already been made to Abraham in verses 15 - 18.

Why? Well notice the end of verse 18 “... because you have obeyed my voice.”

Now understand, Abraham’s obedience didn’t earn his justification. Abraham’s obedience confirmed his justification because his obedience showed that he really did believe God. God had made a promise.

Isaac is the one, and through Isaac I’m going to raise up a nation out of your loins, and Abraham remained rock solid in confidence in faith in God, and so he concluded that if God really did let him go through with his sacrifice, really did let him kill Isaac that God would raise him from the dead. So, he showed by his obedience that he really did genuinely believe in God and in God’s Word. By the way there’s a powerful application in the sacrifice of Isaac to us. You know what God taught Abraham that he wants to teach each of us. That is that He wants our undivided allegiance.

Think for a moment of the one thing in your life, that’s most precious to you. What is it? Maybe it’s a person; maybe it’s your spouse; maybe it’s a child; maybe it’s a friend; maybe it’s something else, a job, an achievement, personal wealth. What is that one thing in life that is most important to you that you could live without everything else, but that? Is God more important to you than that thing or that person? You remember Jesus made it clear that He had to be. In Luke 14:25 - 26. These crowds were coming along with Him, and He turned and said to them,

“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

He didn't mean you need to hate all of those people. He was calling for an undivided allegiance. He was saying, If your allegiance to them and your allegiance to Me ever come into contradiction, then you must love Me more than you love them. You must follow Me, even if it cost you those relationships.

Nothing should ever pull away our complete allegiance from Christ, and Abraham showed that God alone mattered most to him when he was willing to put to death his son. Now turn back to James 2. Let's see what James does with this remarkable account, verse 21,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? [By the way, I loved that last phrase, “when he offered up his son....”] We just learned in Genesis 22 that Christ didn't let him kill his son, and yet it's obvious here that the willingness to act is taken as the act itself. But what point is James trying to make in verse 21?

We know, as we've already seen, that Abraham was justified before this incident, and James knows that. In fact, in verse 23, James quotes Genesis 15, so James knows, that in the forensic sense, Abraham had already been declared righteous before God. So, James must essentially mean that Abraham was shown to have already been justified by his works by his obedience to God, and just in case you think that isn't clear, he's going to make it clear. In the next two verses, verses 22 and 23, James draws three conclusions from Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

The first one is found in verse 22. He says faith was working with his works. Faith was working with his works. The word “was working”. The Greek word that's translated “was working” means “to cooperate with, to work with, to work alongside”, and the verb tense in the original language is saying that his faith was continually working with his works.

Now what point is he making? Well, first of all, it's important to understand the point he isn't making. He is not saying, I'm going to give you two mathematical formulas, and they're worlds apart. Track with me, closely. He was not saying that faith plus works equals justification. He's not saying that faith plus works, equals justification. What he is saying is that faith, true faith equals justification plus works. You see works become the fruit of a true faith.

You don't add works to your faith to earn justification. Justification instead grows out of a true faith. It is given because of a true faith, and true works grow out of that true faith as well.

Notice here in verse 22 that James clearly distinguishes between faith and works. He talks about faith, and he talks about works. This means that faith is not works and that works are not faith.

They are distinct in that sense, and yet, at the same time he stresses that while faith and works are two distinct things, they can never be separated from each other. They always come as a package. Faith was constantly working together with his works.

There's a second conclusion that James draws, verse 22, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. The Greek verb that's translated "perfected" means "to bring to perfection, to bring to maturity", or we could translate it "to reach an intended goal". You see Abraham's faith reached its intended goal when he obeyed God in the sacrifice of his son. The nearest grammatical parallel to this expression is 1 John 4:12.

In 1 John 4:12, John writes, ... if we love one another, [and] God abides in us and His love is perfected, [same Greek word] in us, God's love is perfected in us. Now, obviously, that doesn't mean that God's love was faulty or weak or inadequate. What does it mean that it was perfected? It means that God's love reaches its intended goal when we express that love to others. The same thing is true with faith. Faith reaches its intended goal when it expresses itself in obedience.

When I was growing up, next door to our house there in southern Alabama, the next lot over was the Greens, the Green family. Now the Greens had three boys, and we were the same similar ages, and so we often played together and became the best of friends.

Now the Greens had in their backyard these two huge pear trees, and I remember every year when it came time for the trees to bear fruit, that I would go over to the Greens backyard, and I would help them, and we would prop up all the limbs with these long poles with little beads at the top, because if we didn't do that, the limbs would break, and the trees would be destroyed. There were enough pears from those two trees to feed the entire neighborhood.

We had fresh pears; we had canned pears; we had pear pies; we had pear preserves. Anything you can do to a pear my family did to pears. When you have ten kids, you're happy for all the free food you can get, and so we had it in every form you can imagine. We had it with breakfast; we had it with lunch; we had it with dinner; and there were so many pears that the Green boys

and I would actually take some of the excess pears and set them up for target practice for our pellet guns.

On the other hand, we had a pear tree in our backyard. Now our pear tree was just as huge and just as beautiful as their pear tree. It was magnificent to look at, and on its best year our pear tree gave us about two dozen pears, and they were rock hard, and sour as you can imagine.

That tree, for years, was a great challenge to my dad's sanctification. Why is that? Because we understand that the purpose of a tree like that is to bear fruit. The purpose of every plant is to bear fruit after its kind. A tree's fruit is not inconsequential, whether the fruit is pears, or apples, or nuts or olives. Part of the genetic code in the seed is the kind of fruit that tree will bear, and the fruit that it bears is crucial; it's integral to God's purpose and design for that tree. If it fails to bear fruit, then it's worthless like our tree was. It hasn't reached its intended goal, its designed goal.

Well, in the same way, good works are part of the genetic code of the new life that God puts within every Christian. God prepared us for this. Ephesians 2:10 says we were created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. It was part of the genetic code that God put in the heart of a new Christian of every new Christian was to bear a certain kind of fruit.

And when we don't bear that fruit, that fruit of obedience, it may be a very clear indication that there is no new life at all. In fact, Jesus gave a very serious warning back in Matthew 7 about the absence of fruit, the right kind of fruit and the life.

In Matthew 7:18. Now he's talking in the context here about false teachers, but he goes on in succeeding verses to apply it to people at large, not just false teachers, and he says this, verse 18,

A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruit.

What fruit is he talking about well? He goes on in verse 23 to identify it. The opposite of fruitfulness is lawlessness or disobedience.

He says the same thing in the little parable of the two foundations that follows the foolish man and the wise man. One does, and one doesn't do; one obeys, and one doesn't obey, so the fruit is

the fruit of obedience to the Word of God. There's a great problem when a tree that claims to be in Christ doesn't bear the fruit, it's part of the genetic code that comes with being a new person in Christ.

So, James here is drawing three conclusions for us, back to James 2. He's drawing three conclusions from Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

We saw one in verse 22 that faith was working with his works; two also in verse 22 that as a result of his works, faith was brought to its intended result. It was perfected; it bore fruit.

And thirdly, the third conclusion he draws is in verse 23 and the Scripture that is, that Scripture, which records Abraham's justification by faith, was fulfilled. Now what does he mean? Well, the Greek word translated, "fulfilled" means "to fill" or "to fill up"? It was used of filling up fishing nets; of filling up a house with people. When it's used regarding the Old Testament, it means to bring something to its ultimate significance.

James is saying that Abraham's faith that was recorded in Genesis 15 was brought to its ultimate significance by Abraham's obedience recorded in Genesis 22.

Listen to the great commentator, Cranfield. He puts it very clearly for James no less than Paul. The words of Genesis 15:6 quoted in verse 23 are decisive.

It was by his faith that Abraham was justified. His works, that is, his readiness to offer up Isaac in Genesis 22 did not earn his justification about which we've already heard in Genesis 15. They were simply, that is, his works were simply the fruit and the outward evidence of his faith. Had there been no works, Abraham would not have been justified, but that would have been because the absence of works would have meant that he had no real faith.

That's exactly right. James adds, in verse 23, that Abraham was also called the friend of God in 2 Chronicles 20:7, and in Isaiah 41:8 he's called a friend of God, What does that mean? Well, Jesus defines what that means in John 15:15, when he says to His apostles, I'm not going to call you slaves anymore. You're now going to be friends, and he says, because all things that I have heard from my father, I have made known to you, somebody's your friend when you bring them in, and you tell them what you're going to do. God did that with Abraham didn't He.

You remember back in Genesis 18, he says, How can I keep from Abraham what I'm about to do to Sodom and Gomorrah? I've got to tell him. Also, in John 8:56, Jesus says that Abraham heard about his day; he rejoiced in his day; he saw it and was glad. So, God let Abraham in on his counsels, but Abraham didn't earn this friendship with God.

Like the apostles, it was simply a display of divine grace that made him a friend. Now that brings us all the way to verse 24. This is the most difficult verse in this passage for many people. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Now remember that James has just quoted Genesis 15:6, which clearly says that it is by faith alone that Abraham was declared righteous before God thirty to forty years before Genesis 22. So, he cannot mean that Abraham's works were the grounds for his justification.

And he cannot mean that it is faith, plus works that provides justification because he's just quoted Genesis 15:6. Remember that verse 24 doesn't stand in isolation from the rest of the text. It's part of his illustration of living faith in this paragraph. In this entire paragraph he's talking about two kinds of faith. In verses 21 – 23, he's saying that the kind of faith that brings the declaration of righteousness is Abraham's kind of faith in verse 24 he's talking about the other kind of faith, and in fact, the phrase "faith alone" here is shorthand for the bogus kind of faith that he's been addressing, the kind of faith that doesn't have works at all. You see what James is saying is this, that justification being declared righteous by God, accompanies the kind of faith that works and not the kind of faith that is alone.

Or as Martin Luther, the great reformer put it, we are justified by faith alone; but the faith that justifies is never alone. If you have a kind of faith in Christ that is alone, that is, you have a faith that is unaccompanied by a pattern of obedience in your life. Then, on the authority of God's Word, I can tell you that your faith is dead. It will not justify you before God, and, in fact, it will damn you in the presence of God.

Now, to drive home his point, James provides us with a second portrait of living faith, and, frankly, it's a shocking one, in verse 25, it's Rahab. Rahab, the harlot, 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?

Now, Abraham seems like a logical choice. I mean, after all, he was the father of the Jewish race. He's the most respected person in Judaism, so if you use him for an example, then everyone's going to say that's got to be true. But why would he choose Rahab?

Well, Douglas Moo in his commentary, reminds us. "Alongside the famous and celebrated ancestor of the Jewish people, a man a friend of God, he places an obscure, Gentile woman of low moral character. Thus, he implies that anyone is capable of acting on his or her faith, whether a patriarch or a prostitute."

Remember the woman we're talking about. She was an Amorite. You remember that 700 years before God destroyed the city of Jericho back in Joshua 2; 700 years before all of that incident occurred, God had told Abraham he was going to destroy the Amorites because of how wicked they were. This woman was a Canaanite specifically, in Amorite, she was a Gentile. She was a woman, and she was a prostitute.

John Calvin writes, "God designedly put together two persons so different in their character in order to show that no one whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society has ever been counted righteous without good works."

Now, let's look at her story in its context. Turn back to Joshua 2. Joshua 2, you're familiar with the story of course, in verse 1, we're told that Joshua sends two men to spy out the land specifically to spy out Jericho. The end of verse 1 says they came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and they lodged there. Now, Rahab kept an inn, apparently on the city wall, That was common in those days for there to be an inn, but she obviously offered more services than just a place to stay and food to eat. She was a prostitute, but an inn would be a good place for two strangers to hide, because, of course, inns were filled with people who work from outside the area, and so they go there and reside there.

Verse 2, somehow the King of Jericho finds out, and he hears that these men from the sons of Israel have come, so, verse 3,

[he] ... sent *word* to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." ... the woman had taken the two men and had hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about that

when *it was time* to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I don't know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof."

Now, Scripture nowhere praises her lying. Everywhere you see this woman praised, it's for her faith in hiding the messengers and protecting them, and she does that very well. Over in 2:15, it says,

"Then she let them down by a rope through the window for her house was on the city wall so that she was living on the wall." She said to them, "Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you ... hide yourself there for three days until the pursuers return. She knew all of the way things worked in the city. Then afterward you may go on your way." So she hides them.

Now ask yourself the question. Why would this Gentile Amorite prostitute do this? Well Hebrews 11 tells us that by faith Rahab the Harlot did not perish. Along with [this is an interesting phrase] along with those who were disobedient.

The implication in Hebrews is that God had somehow called the inhabitants of Jericho to Himself, but they had all refused. Perhaps through His deeds, and they had heard about His deeds in freeing the people from Egypt and defeating the kings. They were all disobedient. Everyone, except Rahab refused to believe. She believed. In fact, look at Joshua 2:8.

Now, before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and she said to ... [them], I know that [Yahweh] ... has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea.... [Remember, that was forty years before we heard about that.]

[And we heard] ... what you did to the two kings of the Amorites. Remember, this would have been her relatives, what you did to the ... Amorites ... beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Aug, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you.

Now watch the end of verse 11. for the LORD Your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth Beneath.

That's her confession. She has come to embrace that reality, but how did she demonstrate that? She had come to embrace it savingly, and that she hadn't embraced it, just like the demons believed that to be true? By what she did.

As James puts it, she received the messengers and sent them out by another way. That's how she demonstrated the genuineness of her faith. It became obvious that her faith was the kind that justified when she risked everything dear to her to save these messengers of God.

And Rahab, formerly a Canaanite prostitute, became the mother of Boaz, the godly man, whom Ruth married. Rahab, the prostitute became the great-great-grandmother of Israel's greatest king David.

And in Matthew 1:15 she shows up in the line of Jesus Christ. Now there's a lesson in grace. So, whether you're Abraham or Rahab, true faith produces, listen to this, true faith always produces risky obedience. True faith is always risky, and it always shows itself in that kind of obedience.

Obedience to Christ may cost you your job. It may cost you your friends. It may cost you your family. It may even cost you your own life.

Now back in James 2, notice how James brings his argument to a close in verse 26. He's given us these two great examples of Abraham and Rahab of living faith, and he says this as he brings it all to a close, verse 26, "For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." He says, just as the human body without its spirit, without the immaterial part, is dead. In the same way, the kind of faith that has no works is dead.

Listen to the ringing words of Martin Luther. He wrote them in his preface to the great commentary on Romans that he wrote, He says, "Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly."

It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever.

He gropes and looks around for faith in good works but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks with many words about faith and good works.

You see faith, without obedience, is not genuine saving faith at all. Instead, it is a dead, worthless impostor. It will send you straight to hell. Only the kind of faith accompanied by works is genuine faith.

You know we understand this with other virtues, take love for a moment. What if I told you? (And I would tell you this) that I love my wife dearly, and what if I told you that often and loudly but then, as you watched our interaction, as you watched our relationship, you saw that I was never with her; that we essentially lived two separate lives; that I didn't consider her desires or her concerns when I made decisions; that I didn't listen to her counsel; that I never talked about her to others, and I never talked with her except when it was absolutely necessary. You never saw any signs of affection between us. I never kissed her or never put my arm around her, never looked at her with that loving sort of look.

You'd say, listen Tom, whatever kind of love, you think you have; it isn't genuine love. Now suppose I said to you well, how do you know? You can't see my heart?

You'd say, well, no I can't see your heart, but I know how real love acts, and there is absolutely no demonstration that you have real love at all because real love always acts a certain way, and you're not acting that way, and you'd be right.

The same thing is true of genuine faith. If you say you have faith in Christ, but you live your own life; you go your own way; you don't consider His desires when you make decisions; You never talk about Him to family and friends and coworkers; and you rarely talk to Him, except when it's absolutely necessary; there are no signs of genuine affection in your life for Him; there's no pattern of obedience. Then, James says, "You may have faith." He's not denying that you may have faith, but it's not the kind that saves. It is dead damning faith, the same kind the demons have.

So, what about your faith? Is it characterized by constantly claiming that you're a Christian and constantly having no works? Is there an empty profession of faith? Do you constantly find yourself making excuses for that reality? And do you have a biblical orthodoxy? That is, you

embrace the right content. You believe the right things about Jesus and about God and about the Bible, but there's no real fear of God.

Or is your faith shown to be genuine because it's accompanied by a decreasing pattern of sin and an increasing pattern of righteousness. Oh, I'm not talking about perfection, none of us are and won't be in this life. I'm talking about what's the direction of your life? Is it toward Christ? Is it toward holiness? Is it toward a life of love for Him; living for Him? Are you just pursuing your own way, your faith? Is it dead, or is it alive?

Let's pray together?

Father, thank you for the straightforward way that James confronts us. Father, I pray that You would work in our hearts; that You would help us to take seriously this warning really, Lord. I pray for those here who profess to be Christians.

Undoubtedly, Father, there are those here who profess to be in Christ who have genuine saving faith. I pray that You would encourage and strengthen them; that You would only strengthen their confidence because of this passage.

But Father, they're also, undoubtedly, those here who have the kind of faith that's dead. The kind of faith demons have that won't get them into heaven.

Lord, I pray that today would be the day that You would open their blind eyes, that You would allow them to see themselves the way You see them, completely overwhelmed with sin and lawlessness and on their way to eternal hell.

And Father, I pray that today would be the day they would truly bow the knee before You and before Your Son, confessing their sins and willingly turning away from them and embracing Christ as Lord and Savior.

Lord, I pray that You would accomplish this for Your glory, for the glory of Your Son, and by the power of Your Word and Your Spirit.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.