

Daily Bible Study

“Can Faith Save Him?”

James 2:14-20

October 2–6, 2023

MONDAY –As we return to our study of James this week we take as our text, **James 2:14-20**: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 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. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” This week’s Bible study centers on a very familiar and foundational concept in Scripture, and that is faith. It is so familiar that when it is mentioned, many people intellectually check out. James knows this and he also knows that there is not much point in saying something if no one is listening. So he begins this section with asking a couple questions to get everyone’s attention, the second of which is where we get our title, **“Can faith save him?”** There are certain statements held among Christians such as “Jesus is Lord” and “Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone” that to deny them is to brand oneself as a non-Christian. And now the half-brother of Jesus himself, has the audacity to question whether faith saves? He has their attention and hopefully yours as well. This passage of Scripture tells us what saving faith looks like, how you “prove you have it” if you will, and also reminds us that dead faith is a dangerous thing and it can be possessed by many. If you remember back to last time James spoke about the Christians security in the Day of Judgment. That when we appear before the judgment-seat and the books are opened, there will also be opened the Lamb’s book of life and those whose names are recorded there cannot be touched but are indeed safe (**Revelation 20:12–15**). This salvation is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (**John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8**). How very important, then, it is to know what a true and saving faith is because so very much rests on it.

(Meditate & Apply) Do I have saving faith according to God’s definition in Scripture? Do I know how to identify it and does my life prove that I indeed possess it?

(Pray): Father, teach me this week from Your Word. Help me come to see more clearly not only how important it is to know I have saving faith but also to see how having it should and will affect my daily life and actions.

TUESDAY – James 2:14-17: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James poses two direct questions right out of the gate which the reader can answer only with a negative reply. The bottom line is that faith without works is useless to a person because it cannot bring them salvation. Does this mean that faith does not save a person? Paul writes, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (**Romans 4:5**). Are Paul and James saying opposite things? Not at all. Rather, James looks at the one side of the coin called faith and Paul at the other. James explains the active side of faith and Paul the passive side. They are viewing faith from different perspectives. Paul has in mind the Jew who seeks to obtain salvation by keeping the law of God. To him Paul says, “Not the works of the law but faith in Christ brings salvation.” By contrast, James directs his remarks to the person who says that he has faith but fails to put it into practice. James believed salvation by faith, but he believed that saving faith inevitably shows up in good works. Good works cannot produce salvation, but salvation most certainly produces good *works*. John Calvin said it this way, “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.” James is dealing with a very common problem, namely, thinking we have true faith without really having it. He is dealing with the matter of being deceived about salvation. *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?* He then gives an illustration of being confronted by a brother or sister in Christ who is *naked and destitute of daily food*. Such a situation demands a response. One response is to nothing but talk, “*Depart in peace, be warmed and filled*”. Mere words are worthless if they do not lead to action, and, therefore, faith is dead and useless if it is nothing more than a matter of words.

(Meditate & Apply) Am I a talker only? Do I see the needs and problems of others but leave it there? Do I do something about the needs I see? Specifically, do I have any actions behind all of the truth and principles I profess to believe?

*(Pray): Father God, thanks for saving me merely by faith in Your Son Jesus a faith that is a gift from you. Also, thank you for empowering me to work out my salvation through good works You have ordained for me. Help me to keep working hard (**Philippians 2:12**).*

WEDNESDAY – James 2:18: “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.” There is always someone in the crowd who will raise an objection to any truth stated and here in our text is no exception. James knew that some would respond to his teaching by suggesting that

it was just a matter of emphasis. They would say that a Christian over here specializes in faith, and one over there specializes in works but both are true Christians. James stops that error immediately. He maintains that it is impossible to show faith without works, but it is possible to show faith through works. The New Living Translation is helpful in its translation of this verse. It says, “*But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”*” Bible scholar and pastor Kent Hughes observes, “Faith and works are like the wings of a bird. There can be no real life, no flight, with a single wing, whether works or faith. But when the two are pumping together in concert, their owner soars through the heavens.” Genuine faith in Jesus is one that believes and behaves because ultimately it is being orchestrated by The Father of genuine Christian children, God Himself; **Philippians 2:12-13**, “*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*”

(Meditate & Apply) Am I the person who always reaches for an objection or excuse to justify sin, whether mine or someone else’s? Do I have works along with my faith or is my proof to being a Christian, merely me stating that I believe?

(Pray): Father God, Thank You for being the one ultimately behind all the belief and works that I do. Help me to glorify You through a faith that not only professes but also expresses.

THURSDAY – James 2:19: “*You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!*” May we always remember we are saved only by faith in the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus. But as we have been seeing, there is such a thing as true faith, and there is such a thing as false faith. One of the marks of false faith is that it contents itself with mere belief in the existence of God. Ask or survey modern day Americans and you would find that the overwhelming majority “BELIEVES” in God. Well, Is that enough? Of course not. James’ Jewish readers would be familiar with the great “Shema” which says, “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!*” This is what he is inferring here in this verse. Is it good to believe that there is one God? Absolutely and James goes further by saying they “*do well*” to believe. But is belief in the existence of God sufficient for the saving of the soul? James answers by pointing to the demons of hell. He says that they also believe in God. They know the truth about God, and the truth they know makes them *tremble*. This Greek word means to be so afraid one shudders with fear or as the Oxford English dictionary defines it to shake involuntarily typically as a result of anxiety. Are the demons saved because they “believe”? Of course not! And neither is any person’s belief in God, if it consists of nothing more than an intellectual nodding in agreement with various facts about God. Gordon Keddie writes of the demons, “They actually have a more informed ‘faith’ than human hypocrites! Men and women can make their easy professions of faith and live their worldly lives as if

there were not God at all. Their casual blasphemies about ‘the man upstairs’ can roll off their tongues with never the slightest tremble at the consequences of offending a sovereign and holy God! Why is it that demons tremble, while sinners can sail on in blissful unconcern? The answer is that the demons are not so blind as people. They know their latter end ... They really fear the wrath to come. But careless sinners say they believe in God positively, go on in daily life to live as if he did not exist and yet can dream that they are safe in the everlasting arms!” James has put it plain and straight to us. Have we heard him and are we convinced that faith must show up in our lives and if it doesn’t, it is because it is not there.

(Meditate & Apply) Do I know friends and relatives that say they believe in God but have no works to back it up? Do I even care for their souls? Am I sure that I’m not deceived?

(Pray): Father, help me not to be deceived as to the state of my soul before You. Thanks for Your patience with me as a Father. Help me to love, live, and shine the light for Your glory.

FRIDAY– James 2:20 “*But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?*” We finish our text today with James giving a rebuke. The language is far from complimentary as he is blunt and forceful. The American Standard Version states, “*But are you willing to recognize you foolish fellow*”. James is impatient with the man who is arguing with him. He rebukes him in much the same manner as Jesus corrected the two men on their way to Emmaus: “*How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*” (**Luke 24:25**). Stubbornness and foolishness marks many a man and woman today as well. His words also sound familiar to Christ’s rebuke in **Matthew 5:22** where Jesus says, “*You fool...*” James is actually saying to this purposed objector that like his dead faith, his dead words are useless. Your words lack truth; therefore they are baseless. If the man talks of faith, he certainly needs to be able to back it up and as Christians, we better be able to go to the Scriptures to and prove our arguments. James is about to show the evidence of his argument for faith that works as he will point out illustrations from lives recorded in Scripture. We will see that next time Lord willing. But as we close this week, we have clearly seen that if all we have is talk and knowledge about God and not a living and acted out through our lives testimony, we must be warned and beware of possessing a dead faith.

(Meditate & Apply) Have I treated this matter of faith and works in such a way that James would call me foolish? Can I go to Scripture to defend the arguments I have concerning faith?

(Pray): Father God, help me to live a genuine life of living faith that works. Help me to submit to Your word and drop the objections to truth that would arise in my sinful and selfish heart. Help me to both know and feel secure as I stand completely on Your Word.