

Daily Bible Study

“Where’s the Faith?”

James 2:21-26

October 9–13, 2023

MONDAY –As we return to our study of James this week we take as our text, **James 2:21-26**: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 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. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”* I entitled this week’s Bible study, *“Where’s the Faith?”* as the principle being taught by James reminds me of the premise of an old Wendy’s restaurant TV commercial. If you remember, there were a series of commercials in which at some point, an older lady would peer in the burger bun and cry out, *“Where’s the Beef?”* She was exasperated that there was no substantial beef patty on the hamburger. We need the elderly lady to scream today to the modern church, *“Where’s the Faith?”* This is the major problem in churches today. Literally thousands upon thousands have walked an aisle, stood before a congregation and professed to believe in the Lord Jesus. They have been baptized and put on the membership rolls. To all appearances they are Christians but many are not. They begrudge coming or do not even attend the services of the church, do not give anything to support its ministry and do not take up any of its responsibilities, and show no interest in ministering to the needy or anyone for that matter. But they are very much like unbelievers in many ways; selfish, priorities completely out of whack, willfully blind to their own sin and they holding the same values, go to the same places and speak the same way of those who don’t know Christ. What are we to say about such people? Many would blame the church they were in. Others would attempt to explain the problem saying they are just immature or “carnal Christian’s”. This teaching maintains that these people are truly saved because they prayed a prayer to accept Jesus as Savior but they are not living as they should because they have not yet made Jesus their Lord. He is in their lives, but he is not yet on the throne of their hearts. To this, Scripture warns, *“faith without works is dead”*. The problem with those who give no evidence of faith, James says, is nothing less than this: they do not possess true, saving faith. James turns in our text to give two examples of genuine saving faith from the Old Testament. The first concerns the patriarch Abraham. The second concerns the prostitute Rahab.

(Meditate & Apply) Is there genuine “beef” (faith) in my life? Do I truly love and serve God

and others? What would I point to today to prove I am genuinely a born again Christian?

(Pray): Father, teach me this week from Your Word. Let me truly know and show I’m Yours.

TUESDAY – **James 2:21-22**: *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?”* Every Christian knows that sinners are justified (declared innocent and righteous before God) by faith in the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus. We also know the Bible tells us that Abraham was justified by faith (**Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:20–22**). But here James declares, *“Was not Abraham our father justified by works...”* To prove his point, James refers to the time when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (**Genesis 22:1–14**). We know the story. God promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation, but for years he had no son to begin to fulfill this family. Finally, God gave Isaac to Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac was the one from whom that nation would come (**Genesis 21:12**). But then, out of the blue, God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. It was a test of Abraham’s faith, and Abraham passed the test. He was given two seemingly contradictory messages from God. One was that Isaac would be the beginning of the fulfillment of the promised nation. The other message was that Isaac had to die. Instead of believing one message and rejecting the other, Abraham believed both. He believed the promise that Isaac would be the one through whom the nation would come, and yet obeyed the command to sacrifice him. We know from Scripture that Abraham believed that if necessary, God would raise Isaac from the dead (**Hebrews 11:17–19**). Why did James reference this story? Did James actually believe that Abraham himself was saved from his sins because he was willing to sacrifice Isaac? Is that the reason why he says Abraham was justified by works? No way, James had read his Old Testament well and knew that Abraham was actually declared righteous (‘justified’) by God long before he was called to sacrifice Isaac (**Genesis 15:6**). Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac was, therefore, not the means by which he secured salvation because he already possessed it. It was rather Abraham showing by his obedience that he truly had faith. James’s point is plain. Just as Abraham showed that he had faith by his works, so we are to be doing the same as well.

(Meditate & Apply) Have I been declared righteous before God? Is there visible works in my life that I can point to that show I do have works that validate my claim of faith in Jesus?

(Pray): Father God, thank you for saving me and declaring me righteous because of Jesus. Help me produce works that prove and validate my claim to be Your child.

WEDNESDAY – **James 2:23-24:** “*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. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*” James here tells us that “*the scripture was fulfilled...*” Then he takes us back to **Genesis 15** where God made a covenant with Abraham. He goes from the event that describes Abraham’s obedience on Mount Moriah which we saw yesterday to the statement of faith, “*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*” (**Genesis 15:6**). James begins with Abraham’s mountaintop experience of faith and concludes that this event fulfills the scriptural statement that *Abraham believed God*. Abraham believed God therefore he obeyed God. Faith and works are not identical but they cannot be separated either. They are like the roots and the plant, always joined together and yet different. They both have their own function yet they are one. Abraham’s faith “*was accounted to him for righteousness.*” We associate the expression *accounted* with banking. The Greek word literally means “count, credit” and many Bible translations use the word *credited* here rather than *accounted*. We get the point; the bank informs us that a certain amount of money has been *credited* to our account. We can earn money by working for it and put it in the bank or we receive a monetary gift from someone else. Did Abraham work for his righteousness and thus God credited it to him? No way. Paul in **Romans 4:2** says, “*For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*” Christians don’t earn our own righteousness, because even our works done in love for God, are not perfect and incomplete. *Abraham believed God*. God does not credit righteousness to us because of our intellectual knowledge of Him. Rather, He justifies us when we fully trusts Him, which is demonstrated by our love for God, our obedience to listen to the Word of God, and our obedient actions to it. Abraham did that when in faith and obedience he prepared to sacrifice Isaac. Then in a beautiful statement, we read that God called Abraham His friend (**2 Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8**) as He does all true Christians. We then read the conclusion *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only*. God justifies the sinner who can never justify himself by his own deeds. Nor can merely say “I have faith”, for faith without works is dead. James is saying that faith and works go together, that they ought not to be separated, and that faith divorced from works does not justify a person. God justifies sinners who are spiritually alive and show trust and obedience.

(Meditate & Apply) Can I say without doubt that God calls me His friend?

(Pray): Father, thank You for Your grace. May I live like one who is Your friend.

THURSDAY – **James 2:25:** “*Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*” For his second example, James cites the story of Rahab, who was a prostitute in the city of Jericho. James goes from the patriarch to the prostitute. He more than likely went to Rahab because he was anticipating

an objection to his argument so far. He knew some of his readers would say that Abraham was a special man and that it’s not fair to ask us to be like him. So James reaches, as it were, to the opposite end of the spectrum, and he does so to make the very same point: true faith evidences itself in good works no matter who the person is. If you remember this story, Joshua and the people of Israel were about to begin their triumph and entry to the Promised land of Canaan. The city of Jericho was the first and most intimidating target they had to face. **Joshua 2:1-16** tells us that he sent spies into the city and they went to the house of Rahab because they thought that it would not arouse suspicion for strangers to go to the house of a prostitute. But, the king of Jericho got word that spies had come to the city and were at the house of Rahab and he immediately sent men to search for the spies, but Rahab hid them and helped them to escape. We ask the same question of Rahab as Abraham. Is James saying that Rahab secured salvation for herself by doing the good work of helping the spies? We get the same answer, NO. Rahab already possessed faith before the spies ever came to her. **Joshua 2:9-14** helps us see Rahab’s faith and trust in God. What she did with the spies was, then, a result of the faith that already existed in her heart. But the point is that both Abraham and Rahab *did* something other than just claim to have faith in God.

(Meditate & Apply) Am I sitting idly or am I doing good works proving I have genuine faith?

(Pray): Lord, help me to evidence true faith by acting out in good works like Rahab did.

FRIDAY– **James 2:26** “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*” James tells us that if we have faith but no works we are literally like a dead man who has a body but no *spirit* in him. Curtis Vaughan says it this way, “Faith which does not produce works is therefore comparable to a corpse.” And Martin Luther says of faith, “Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises; it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a faithless man.” Faith that is alive expresses itself in works that are performed in obedience to the Word of God. For James faith and works form an inseparable unit that can be compared to man’s body and soul which belong together and make up a living person.

(Meditate & Apply) Am I as Luther said, a “faithless man” or do I have good works that bring the soul or spirit to my body of faith?

(Pray): Father God, help me to live in such a way that I show by my good works that I am truly Your friend and have experienced Your great salvation through Jesus work for me on the cross and that I possess genuine saving faith and Your Holy Spirit.