

Name: _____

New Hope Baptist Church Bible Study

LESSONS FROM JAMES

Week 12: Faith that Works – A Changed Life

JAMES 2:20-26

Faith Results in Good Work – James 2:20-26

JAMES 2:20

You senseless person. (NRSV) The foolish person is literally a “hollow man” If the faith around which we build our lives turns out to be empty, we are truly hollow people.

Do you want to be shown that faith apart from works is barren? (NRSV) James prepares to show from the Scriptures that real faith always has works. *The phrase here is literally, “But are you willing to know?”—indicating that he realizes the problem may reside in his readers’ will rather than in their having good reasons to act upon their faith.*

There are times when we need more teaching or understanding in order to respond to God’s direction. But most often we know what needs to be done, yet are unwilling to act. When it comes to putting into practice what we know, is it our habit to obey God?

JAMES 2:21

Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? (NKJV) Abraham was one of the Old Testament figures most revered by the Jews
_____ *Abraham’s remarkable obedience in being willing to sacrifice his son at God’s command was evidence of the works for which Abraham was called righteous.*

What was Abraham doing when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?
He was trusting God. Do I really trust God?”

JAMES 2:22

Faith was active along with works. (NRSV) Abraham had great faith in God (Genesis 15:6), but James points out that Abraham’s faith was much more than just belief in the one God—*the fruit of Abraham’s great faith was in his deeds.*

Faith was brought to completion by the works. (NRSV). His faith produced his works, and his works completed his faith, meaning they “perfected” or “matured” it.

JAMES 2:23

“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.” (NKJV)

Abraham believed God, so God gave Abraham the status of a right relationship with him—Abraham’s faith and God’s response *fulfilled* Scripture...when Abraham “completed” his faith by what he did (2:22).

He was called the friend of God. (NRSV) Because of Abraham’s great faith and obedience, he held the privileged status of God’s friend (see also 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8). The word *friend* (*philos*) is the same one Jesus used in John 15:14. Acting out our trust in God will lead to friendship with him, as it did in Abraham’s case.

JAMES 2:24

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (NRSV)

for James, *justified* refers to God’s final verdict over our entire Christian life, whereby we are declared righteous for having lived a life that was faithful to the end. For Paul, *justified* is the initial granting of righteousness upon a person’s acceptance of Christ.

- For James, “works” (what he does) are the natural products of true faith; for Paul, “works” (observing the law) are what people were trying to *do* in order to be saved.
- For James, faith alone is the shallow belief in an idea; no commitment or life change is involved.
- For Paul, faith is saving faith—the belief that brings about an intimate union with Christ and results in salvation *and* obedience.
- Paul made clear that a person enters into God’s kingdom only by faith;
- James made clear that God requires good deeds from those who *are* “in” the kingdom.

A person receives salvation by faith alone, not by doing works of obedience; but a saved person does works of obedience because of that faith.

For people who rely on their intellectual assent of a belief, with only a verbal commitment, James’s words are critical—their belief alone can do nothing to save them.

Two brief questions that help us monitor our spiritual health are:

1. **Who am I trusting?** If we are trusting anyone (including ourselves) other than Christ as the source and provider of our justification, we are lost.
2. **Why am I working?** If we are acting for any reason other than in obedience and thanksgiving to Christ for what he has done for us, we are lost. Out of our trust in him will flow action.

JAMES 2:25

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? (NIV)

Why would James bring up Rahab? After speaking of the great faith of Abraham, the father of Israel....James cited the example of Rahab, a pagan woman with a bad reputation (see Joshua 2:1-24; 6:22-25).

These two people, as opposite as they were, cemented James's argument—both people were declared righteous on the basis of their works that resulted from their faith.

The contrast is not between faith and works, but between genuine faith and false faith.

- If Abraham had not had faith, he would not have followed God.
- If Rahab had not had faith, she would never have decided to side with Israel—“For the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (Rahab's words in Joshua 2:11 NIV).
- Yet if Abraham had not been willing to obey God, his faith would have meant nothing.
- If Rahab had not risked her life to help the spies, her faith would have accomplished nothing. But she is listed in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews: “By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient” (Hebrews 11:31 NIV).

Many have pointed out that Abraham and Rahab could represent opposite extremes of society.

- James may have used them for that reason, but they were also his relatives—Abraham in a general way as father of the Jewish nation, and Rahab in a specific way as one of the ancestors of David, Jesus Christ, and James (see Matthew 1:5).
- Both these heroes demonstrate the fact that real faith can survive in people with “feet of clay.” The Bible describes neither Abraham nor Rahab as perfect.
- In fact, the spotlight shines on their sins as much as on their trust. Both demonstrated in their own way a tendency to lie (see Genesis 20:1-2; Joshua 2:3-7). Neither could have pointed to a life of perfect obedience as the reason for God's acceptance.
- Rather, each pointed to a life that illustrated their need for God and their trust in God.

JAMES 2:26

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Faith and deeds are as important to each other as body and spirit. Deeds are not added to faith; instead, the right kind of faith is faith that “works,” that results in good deeds.

No one is moved to action without faith; no one's faith is real unless it moves him or her to action. *The action is obedience to God.*

- The believer must do what God calls him to do—serve his brothers and sisters in Christ, refuse to discriminate among them, and help them out with good deeds.

James is about to continue with a series of life situations that we all encounter. It is in these everyday events that we demonstrate our faith to be alive or dead. *From time to time, we need to take our own spiritual pulse by matching our life with God's Word.*