

**I Believe... So Now What?**  
**(Week 5)**  
**James 2:14-26**  
**I “believe” I believe?**

**Introduction**

Martin Luther, a Catholic monk turned reformer, once referred to the book of *James* as, “An epistle of straw”. Luther had seen firsthand the flawed doctrine of early Catholicism that taught salvation came by “works”, and he opposed that teaching with every fibre of his being. Luther stressed that salvation was totally a work of grace, by faith alone. His message of saving faith was based upon The Spirit’s revelation to him from The Holy Scriptures. Luther’s “life verse” that had caused him to break with the Church of Rome forever became Luther’s battle cry:

**“.....the righteous shall live by faith.”**

**Habakkuk 2:4**

And so, the “Protestant Reformation” was born. Salvation is a gift of amazing grace, that can only be obtained by faith, and not by one’s good deeds. No one can live “good enough” to save themselves. This is an absolute truth, for the scriptures plainly tell us:

**“For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves: it is the gift of God: ...”**

**Ephesians 2:8**

Sadly, Luther had mistakenly thought that James had subscribed to the same “works based” theology, as did those within his former Catholic faith, thus he called the book of *James* “an epistle of straw”. Luther felt that James’ message would not be able to withstand the fires of God’s judgment, for it advocated “works based religion”. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The book of *James* is in perfect harmony with all other New Testament writers. James never advocated salvation by works, quite the contrary. James firmly believed in salvation by grace through faith, but James was vehemently opposed to a faith that does nothing! To James, a faith that does not work is not genuine faith. He believed as did Paul, that those who have been truly born again will in fact “do something” as a result. Did you happen to notice that the verse above from *Ephesians* ends with a colon and not a period? This simply means that Paul was not finished with his statement. So before we take this verse out of context let’s at least allow Paul finish to his thought shall we?

**“...not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus FOR GOOD WORKS, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do.”**

**Ephesians 2:9-10**

So you see, both Paul and James are in absolute agreement here. Both men believed that we are only saved by grace, through faith alone, and not by what we do. But also, both men agreed that if we have been saved it is “to do good works”, which means that every true believer will live in obedience to Christ and serve Him as a citizen of His kingdom. Simply put, if you have been truly saved by faith in Christ, then you will do something as a result! A person cannot claim to have genuine saving faith and then live as the world does. Real faith will bring about real change. James did not want his congregation “deceiving themselves” with a make-believe religion. He wanted them to make sure that they were genuinely reborn by The Spirit of God. He wanted them to have living faith and not dead religion. In this passage (**vs. 2:14-26**), James shows us the difference between: 1) Dead Faith; 2) Demonic Faith; and 3) Demonstrated Faith. Please allow me to explain.

**Dead Faith (vs. 14-18)**

**“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can such faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, stay warm, and be well fed,’ but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith, if it doesn’t have works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works’. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works.”**

**James 2:14-18**

James’ writings are in my humble opinion, the most practical and easiest to understand in all of scripture. Here, he makes a great argument for the sheer uselessness of a faith that doesn’t do anything. He likens it to someone being hungry, and then, being sent away with a blessing rather than a meal.

What a great analogy of a faith that is dead! Have you ever seen those commercials where they show the children in some distant land who are dying of starvation? Those commercials always offer us the opportunity to send money to help, but what do we do most of the time when we see those images on our TV screens? We change the channel, or (to make ourselves feel more spiritual) we offer up a quick prayer that God will feed and clothe those poor people. Can I say something that will perhaps seem a bit confrontational and possibly controversial? (Don't say that I didn't warn you.) When we see a need and simply offer up a quick prayer to "get it off our consciences" as it were, without doing anything to meet that need, we have just wasted our breath! When we see a need, we should try to meet it, not "pray about it"!

What exactly what do we expect God's response will be when we pray such foolish prayers? Just imagine this "prayer conversation" with God:

"Dear Lord, My neighbor is hungry, please help him out... Amen."

To which The LORD would reply:

"I **am** helping him out, I showed you his need so that you would **feed** him!"

There are some things in this world that we absolutely DO NOT have to pray about. The answers to those prayers have already been given in the Scriptures. We are to see to it that the needs of others are met... period. If we have genuine faith, if Jesus lives inside us, then we WILL do something about it. Faith without works is DEAD. So don't just pray for the starving children around the globe, find one that you can feed! Can't afford it, you say? Did you know, that if you make over \$10,000 annually then you are richer than 90% of the worlds' population? Now I realize that very few of us have the resources to feed a multitude, but how about just one? Do you think that you can find just one person with whom you could share?

I heard a story about a little boy who saw a multitude of starfish wash up on the beach near his home. The young man rushed out to rescue as many as he could. One by one he picked up a starfish and threw it back into the water. As he was doing this a man walked up to him and asked what he was doing. The boy replied, "Saving these poor starfish". The man said, "Son, look around you, there are literally hundreds of thousands of starfish dying on this beach! You are not making one bit of difference." The boy, undaunted, continued tossing starfish back in to the water. Each time he picked one up and threw it into the surf he said, "*It makes a difference to this one*". That boy was exactly right. I don't believe that God will hold me responsible for the multitudes of people in this world who are doing without what they need, but He absolutely will hold me accountable for the ones that I could have helped and did not. What kind of faith do you have this morning? The kind that sits back and does nothing, or the kind that makes a difference, one person at a time? Faith without works is dead!

James goes on to make an undeniable point. The only way that a person can truly prove that they have faith is to demonstrate it! A person can "say" that they believe in Christ as loud as they want, but it is the person who serves that **proves** they have Christ. Churches are filled with people who pray, sing songs of faith, and have committed hundreds of scripture verses to memory, but if they do not serve, they prove that they do not possess Christ! Although works certainly can't save your soul, they are in fact living proof that your soul **has been** saved. Listen to what James says about what he calls "Pure Religion":

**"Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world."** **James 1:27**

The point that he is making is that there are two definite "works" that will show up in a born again believer. They will first turn away from sin, and second, they will serve others! Many people think that they are being obedient to Christ simply by forsaking the sins in which they used to indulge. But this is only half of the "good works" that are required in us. We are not only to forsake sin, but we are called to live in such a way that we demonstrate Christ's love to a fallen world around us. So stop "praying" for somebody to "do something"... and go and do Something! Demonstrate your faith, by actual service, and not just "lip service". Anyone can "say" that they believe, we need to live what we believe.

### **Demonic Faith (vs. 19-20)**

**"You believe that God is One. Good! Even the demons believe — and they shudder. Senseless person! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?"**

**James 2:19-20**

While some translations read "You believe there is one God", the above rendering is correct. "**You believe that God is One**" is in reference to The "*Shema*" (remember that James is Jewish). The word "*shema*" means "*to listen or hear*" and this comes from a very well known scripture recitation that occurred in Israel multiple times each day. It can be found in **Deuteronomy 6:**

**“Listen (Shema), Israel: The LORD our God, The LORD is One. Love The LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. Write them on the doorpost of your house and on your city gates.”**  
**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

The Jewish priests took these verses so very literally that they actually had them printed and wore them in small boxes called “*phylacteries*” strapped to their foreheads! The saying “The LORD our God is One” is to bring testimony to all other nations that God is the only One of His kind, and there are no other gods besides Him (**Isaiah 45:5**). We, as Christians, also believe that “The LORD is One” and that He manifests Himself in three persons: The Father, The Spirit, and The Son. But just believing that this is true, according to Scripture, is not enough to save. Many Jews absolutely believed the *Shema*, but they rejected the Messiah when He came, and therefore, were still very much lost in their sins. But James even takes this a step farther!

The demons absolutely know that there is One God, and they also know that Jesus is this very same God manifested in flesh. Just listen to what the demons shouted when they saw Jesus as He approached the tombs near Gadara:

**“When He arrived at the other side, to the region of the Gadarenes, two demon possessed men met him as they came out of the tombs. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. Suddenly they shouted, ‘What do you have to do with us, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’”**

**Matthew 8:28-29**

So you see, not only did those demons believe in God, they knew exactly who Jesus was and were absolutely terrified of Him! Were they saved because of their faith? Absolutely not! For them, there was certainly no doubt as to the identity of Christ, but they did not willingly submit to His Lordship as a result of their belief. They were terrified of Jesus, but they still didn’t follow Him. We read that, and we might say, “How foolish!” But you see, there are many people today who are just like those demons.

When I was young I used to hear the term “God-fearing” a lot. It refers to people who know that there is a God and have an awe of His coming judgment. Sadly, many of those same “God-fearing” people went about their daily lives living as if there were no God. They weren’t really atheists, but they might as well have been. They were “practical atheist”, living with a fear of what God might do to them but never really doing anything about it. Much like those demons who cried out to Jesus. They didn’t want the punishment that was surely coming, but not enough to surrender in obedience. Now that is demonic faith my friends.

Demonic faith says, “I believe in Christ, and I certainly don’t want to spend an eternity in hell..., but I’m not ready to give up my sin and follow... not just yet anyways. Maybe later.” Don’t play games with the grace of God. If you believe that Jesus is exactly Who He says He is, then do something about it. Surrender your life to Him by faith and serve Him only. A faith that believes, but refuses to surrender to His Lordship, is a demonic faith, and it cannot and will not save. Faith without works... is dead.

### **Demonstrated Faith (vs. 21-26)**

**“Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works in offering his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was made complete, and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by works and not faith alone. In the same way, wasn’t Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”**  
**James 2:21-26**

Faith that is truly genuine will always be a faith demonstrated. James gives us two examples of demonstrated faith. He could not have picked two more different individuals to make his point. On the one hand there is Abraham, the father of the God’s chosen people, a righteous man of incredible faith and devotion. And, on the other hand is Rahab, a Gentile sinner, who was living as a prostitute in the city of Jericho. But, these two people had one thing in common, both believed that God would do exactly as He has promised. James actually quotes from my all time favorite scripture verse:

**"Abraham believed The LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness."**

**Genesis 15:6**

I LOVE that verse! It explains perfectly how a person can be saved. We must simply believe what God has promised. Simple as that. James is not saying here that Abraham was "saved" because of what he did. He is saying that he **proved** that he was saved by what he did! That night in **Genesis 15** when God made all those promises to Abraham, the old patriarch simply took God at His word. God knew right then that Abraham's "belief" was sincere. As far as God was concerned, in that moment, Abraham was "justified" in the sight of God. But later, Abraham was tested by God so that he would be able to demonstrate the sincerity of his faith for all of us. So you see, when Abraham first believed God, he was justified in the sight of The LORD, but when he proved his belief by placing his beloved son upon that altar on Mt. Moriah, he was justified in the sight of all men. Abraham has shown us what real faith looks like. We see it demonstrated for all eternity upon Mount Moriah. Is it any wonder that Abraham is referred to in Scripture as "God's friend"?

In the exact same way, Rahab proved that she believed the stories that she had heard about God. She was a pagan woman living among pagan people, but news had reached her about the might of The God of the Israelites. Rahab didn't just believe and quake with fear like the demons we spoke about earlier. No, she risked her very life to protect the spies that Joshua sent into Jericho. If Rahab had been discovered by the rulers of her city, she would have been summarily executed as a traitor, but she trusted in God enough to risk not only her life, but the lives of her family as well. She knew that her faith just might cost her everything, but she acted upon it nonetheless. God honored this gentile prostitute for her faith and not only did she leave her life of sin, but she later married an Israelite and became the grandmother of King David and is also listed in the ancestral lineage of Jesus Himself! That's a pretty amazing reward for her act of devotion to The LORD now isn't it? It just goes to show us all that God can and will use anyone who will honor Him by living a life of demonstrated faith. So live in faith, not just by words, but by your deeds.

Every time I read the story of Abraham, I am deeply moved by the fact that God was so devoted to the old patriarch. They were friends. At one point, when God is preparing to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorra, He says:

**"...Should I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"**

**Genesis 18:17**

I find this verse to be absolutely incredible! God doesn't want to carry out His sovereign plan, without first discussing it with Abraham. Now that is how close the two of them actually were. God was willing to share His plans with Abraham. Why? Because Abraham was God's friend. Wouldn't you just love to have that kind of closeness with God? Jesus actually promises us that we can:

**"You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father. You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask The Father in My Name, He will give you."**

**John 15:14-16**

Do you want to be a "friend of God"? Then you must not only believe in Jesus, but obey what He commands. In other words, you must have a faith that actually "works". You must live a life of Faith Demonstrated! Then, you will prove yourself to be a friend of God. To be born again means to have the very Spirit of God living inside you. If you have been filled with Christ, then you will live as Christ lived. And just what does *The Bible* say about the way that Jesus lived?

**"You know the events that took place throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with The Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were under the tyranny of the devil, because God was with Him."**

**Acts 10:37-38**

Jesus, "went about doing good". If we are to be anything like Him, if we are truly filled with His Holy Spirit, then we will go and do likewise. For faith, without works... is dead.

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!!!