

Faith without deeds

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[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service. If you could turn in your Bibles please with me to James chapter 2.

James chapter 2. That's where we are looking at faith, genuine faith as it's entitled here in Meribah. The section from the NIV.

James chapter 2 will read the whole of the chapter. This is God's word. But my brothers as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ don't show favouritism.

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say here's a good seat for you.

But say to the poor man, you stand there, sit on the floor of my feet. Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen my dear brothers.

[1 : 07] Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom? He promised those who love him. But you have insulted the poor.

Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law of fine and scripture, love your neighbour as yourself, you are doing right.

But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles up just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

For he, he said, do not commit adultery. Also said, do not murder. If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?

[2 : 15] Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs.

What good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. For someone will say, you have faith, I have deeds.

Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God? Good. Even the demons believe that. And shudder.

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not their ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

[3 : 15] And he was called God's friend. And he was called God's friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 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.

As the body without spirit was dead. So faith without deeds is dead. Amen. Amen. And may God bless reading all his word to us and give us understanding as we come back to it.

If you could turn back on your Bible speaks to James chapter 2. James chapter 2.

And we'll pray again as we come. Lord God, we thank you once more for the freedom that we have, the privilege that we have, the opportunity that we have to come into your presence and to open

your word.

And we pray that this evening it would not be just another mechanical exercise. We pray that it wouldn't be just part of our routine. But we ask, Father, that you would speak through that word.

[4 : 40] The word inspired by the Spirit. We pray that as we read that we would meet with you. That we would see Jesus in our need of him. And Lord, that we would, through the words of Scripture, be brought to that place where we have true saving faith in Christ.

So hear our prayers and bless us in your presence. And we ask these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Please remember. Amen. James chapter 2. Thank you for having us. King Adam says we yet to donate to the others and to the others and let their risatz into our peace. You gotta pass. Okay. Jump from Ilegan now. Lord Jesus and sight everything that we have. I say. You know it. So now there's also what I've seen on people that have. Challenges from I sozusagen. viele minutes in my heart. I ■■■■■■ ■■■■ Bio I have. And let me see the buzz, love. So bright, it can be. we don't see the older ones as they go from here through to the back there but let's keep on praying for them. So the YF meets just after this. I have to be away by 7 o'clock tonight so you can take great encouragement for that because I have to go and speak in Stornow at Kenney's suite in a youth meeting just after this.

[6 : 01] But a few thoughts on James chapter 2 as we come to the second half of the chapter and I want to begin tonight by asking you a question and the question is this, have you ever been misunderstood?

Have you ever been misunderstood? And my guess is that there isn't a soul in this room that hasn't at some point been misunderstood.

Whether we've been in conversation with somebody and we've said something that as far as we're concerned was inconsequential but the person who's heard it has taken hold of it and it's been twisted and they've got the wrong end of the stick and what was perfectly innocent in our minds is taken completely the wrong way.

You know and after two weeks of stony silence you realise what they heard was something different to what you thought you said and you've been fully misunderstood. Or these days it's much easier to be misunderstood through texts and emails and all this electronic communication because we don't look each other in the eye, we don't know what the tone of the conversation is and so we fire out something and we sometimes find that what we thought we said is not what the person thought we meant and so all of a sudden there's a huge rammy and we're out with a mop trying to fix it.

Well James chapter 2 especially the second half of the chapter it's caused many a rammy over the years and verse 24 is probably the verse that that comes up most often when we hear of such rammy James says in verse 24 you see a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone and it's that kind of a statement it's verses like that that caused many people Martin Luther even to frown in the direction of James and to call the letter of James a straw gospel and I expect now not in the realm of time but in the realm of eternity Martin Luther and James have settled their differences but we're not yet in the realm of eternity we're still in time and so we're trying to make sense of this all still and tonight I want to think with James about what true faith looks like and sounds like and is like in essence so that's the theme for tonight it's the question of what is faith what is true saving faith what do we expect to hear in terms of faith what can we expect to see if there is true faith what is the essence of faith as James preaches it here there's a song that my mind went back to a song in the 90s which was entitled

[9 : 22] True Faith it's by a band called New Order and just as I was preparing my mind went back to that to that song entitled True Faith I thought I must just check back on the lyrics of that just to see what is it always about and it's interesting the song begins like this I'll just get a note it's ok I'm not going to get a note the song begins like this but the lyrics are as follows I feel so extraordinary extraordinary something's got a hold on me I get this feeling and so the song goes on from there I feel so extraordinary something's got a hold on me I've got this feeling and that sets the tone for the whole song that's entitled True Faith and that's a good place to begin tonight many people confuse faith with feelings many people equate faith with having a strong feeling and I think we live today in an age where our feelings are almost the ultimate thing in the past there wasn't so much an emphasis on the way that we feel but today it's all about our feelings and the first point

I want to highlight here is faith is more than a feeling point number one faith is more than a feeling and in writing this James is addressing those who claim to have faith some of those that he's

addressing that he's speaking to and they make strong claims of faith and yet we can surmise from the tone of this that the claims didn't have a whole lot to back them up so James likes in verse 14 he says what good is it my brothers if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds can such faith save them so James is addressing those who really feel that their faith is true faith people who may be very settled and very passionate about what they claim to believe

James is speaking to those who say things like I have my faith I've thought it through I've worked it through it suits me I'm very happy with my faith makes me feel good there were people like that around in AD 49 there have been people like that around every year since there are people like that around probably much more so today you try and share Christ with them you try and share the gospel with them and they say back off I don't want to hear it that's that's your faith but that's not my faith I have my faith they say and I'm happy with my faith and James kind of throws a cat amongst the pigeons on that one and he says let's not talk about happiness and how happy you are with your claims to faith let's talk about whether your faith is ultimately going to do you any good and that's the key factor when we take our feelings and we elevate them to the ultimate thing we're in danger of being in total confusion we lose touch with reality and James is interested in talking about spiritual reality not our feelings now let's just think this through in terms of application that there are many people today who have strong faith in themselves and they're very nice people and they do lots of good things and they try hard to be nice and they try hard not to hurt anyone and they may have a great

CV in terms of all the things they do within the community and maybe even all the things they do within church and they think that because of all they do and all the things that they refrain from doing God will look at them and at the end of the day say on balance you're one of the good guys and so looking at your life you can go to heaven that's the faith that's what they believe that's what so many people in this country believe but the Bible tells me that such faith will do them no good on judgment day and there are other people who take another category of faith there are other people who have a strong faith in Allah or Buddha or any other manner of religious gurus there are some who have so much faith that they're willing to strap an explosive onto their chest and head into a crowded place and pull the pin because they believe that the second it goes off they're going to be propelled straight into paradise that's their faith that's how strongly they hold their faith but the Bible tells me such faith will do them no good on judgment day there are people who have strong faith that there is no

God and there is no heaven and there is no hell and there is no judgment and yet the strength of their faith and the intensity of their feeling that they are right does not change the fact biblically that one day with us they will stand at the judgment seat of God and with their very own eyes they will see that the God they denied is before them and the heaven that they dismiss they have washed and the hell that they ridiculed they are headed for see faith true faith is more than a feeling the second point is faith is more than words second point second song

[16:28] I don't know what my mind was doing this week my mind went to another 90s ballad when I thought about the second point faith is more than words there was a song in the 90s called more than words can say I'm not going to sing that one either but let me just give you the opening lyrics this is how it goes saying I love you faith is more than words that's the point remember here's the lyrics saying I love you it's not the words I want to hear from you it's not that I want you not to say but if you only knew how easy it would be to show me how you feel more than words is all you have to do to make it real then you wouldn't have to say that you love me because I already know and in that song you know you get the gist of it the one who loves hears the one whom he loves saying I love you with their words they obviously doesn't have great conviction that they mean it in their hearts because it seems to only be words and that's the point that James is making as the spirit leads he challenges those who say that they love and trust

God to say it with more than words I think it was Francis of Assisi that said preach the gospel use words if necessary I think that's nonsense I think to preach the gospel we have to use words but behind these words undergirding these words there has to be visible faith faith that we can see faith that drives us out with words and that's where James is going he says in verse 15 suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food if one of you says to him go I wish you well keep warm and well fed but does nothing about his physical needs what good is it and that's not a question that he expects to get an answer from that's a question that's rhetorical what he's saying is that kind of faith what good is it it's no good at all if we claim to have faith and say all the right words

to give an impression of faith but it doesn't make any difference to the way that we live our lives and spend our money and organise our time and cheat the people around us it's not true faith faith is more than words faith is more than feelings and secondly faith is more than words you've probably heard this story before but it's the story of the

French tightrope walker called Blondin did amazing feats of walking across tightropes and for his ultimate stunt he decided that he was going to walk across a tightrope that was I think it was 120 feet above the Niagara Falls the Niagara Falls are crashing down and here's this tightrope and this Frenchman and the crowds gather to see these amazing feet and he walks across and he gets to the other side he cheered he walks back they're amazed then he walks over with something in his hand again they're blown away by this and he walks back and you know the volume of the crowd goes up and he's doing stunt after stunt and he's going back and forth and they're amazed by all that he's doing and then he turns to the crowd and he says who thinks I could cross the wire here who thinks

I could walk the rope here the tightrope with a heel barrel and get to the other side and then come back the crowd go wild of course you can amazing wow and they're whooping and they're cheering of course you can do it they say and then he says okay that's what I wanted to hear who will get into the barrel silence crowd goes quiet no one steps forward see it's easy to speak out words of faith but true faith is more than words true faith involves getting into the barrel verse 17 in the same way says James faith by itself if not accompanied by actions is dead one of the commentators Jonathan Lam he makes reference to an article that was in the Times newspaper and it's an article that was written by a journalist called

Jamie White and the title of the article he wrote was I don't believe believers really believe and this is what he said he says the real test for genuine belief is not what people say but what they do to believe something is to be disposed to act on it the vast majority of western Christians this is in his opinion the vast majority of western Christians fail this test and he goes on to say whilst religious profession is irritating he's an atheist it's not alarming once you realise it's all just talk and that article shows the damage that false faith masquerading as true faith can do and James writes to challenge these false professions of faith

[22 : 30] James writes to call us to true living working faith in Christ it's a negative example but in the course of the week I heard a positive one I was watching a clip of a programme and that money expert Martin Lewis he was responding to somebody he phoned in to one of these talk shows to say that they got themselves into states of debt didn't know what to do but what could they do and so he was given advice and he said you can go to this one go to citizens advice they can help you to an extent you can go and see a good lawyer they can give you practical advice he says but you know you sound like you're in a really dark difficult place he says what I would recommend you do is go to a group called Christians Against Poverty he said they're Christians they're open about the fact they're Christians and they'll give you interest free loans to try and get you out of this they may even give you grants gifts to try and get you to the degree out of this they don't do this in order to make you a

Christian they do this because they are Christians and it was a really powerful testimony that spoke about real living faith if we believe in Christ and if we see someone who has no food who has no clothes who has cold and not well fed they've taken the opportunity to do something about it faith is more than a feeling faith is more than words the third point here is faith is more than rational belief more than head belief true faith saving faith is more than intellectual head knowledge it's more than just an and intellectual acceptance of the existence of God there are many atheists in the world and we hear them much more so than perhaps we ever did but there are many people equally who believe God exists there's many people who believe that he is who he says he is he is who he reveals himself to be in the

Bible there's many people who believe that Jesus really is the son of God that he's the Messiah and they believe that he came from heaven to earth and they believe that he went to a cross to die not in vain but with great purpose to save sinners and they know all that and they can go to their catechisms and they can recite it and they can quote passage after passage of scripture they know it they accept it they understand it it's touched them at head level and yet hasn't touched the heart it doesn't amount to faith in Jesus see believing that Jesus died for sinners does me no good until I as a sinner come to Jesus and ask him to save me see true faith touches the heart and it moves me to act verse 18 someone will say you have faith

I have deeds show me your faith without deeds I will show you my faith with what I do you believe that there is one God you believe in your head you believe that there is one God good says James but even the demons believe that and shudder it's sobering to think that the demons theology is clear unorthodox they believe that there is one God they believe in the devil they believe in heaven and hell they recognise Christ for who he said he was we can go to the gospels and see that and yet such belief will do them no good and such belief will do us no good if we do not resist the devil and flee from him and turn in repentance to the one true God and seek salvation from him in Christ faith is more than just rational belief touches the heart it's just to action have you have you faith have we faith when we see the cross and we see our sin and we recognise Jesus for who he says he is the spirit is at work the holy spirit is at work in our lives but have we come we come and say I am a sinner I am in need of salvation I see that Jesus died for me cleanse me save me that's faith faith is more than feelings faith is more than words faith is more than rational belief finally faith works faith works and James he takes two examples and he presents them to us the two examples that we see also in the great hall of faith in Hebrews 11 James wouldn't have taken them from

[28 : 57] Hebrews 11 because likely James was written before Hebrews 11 but in fact just go to Hebrews 11 for a moment please Hebrews chapter 11 and I haven't got time to read this chapter but you can read it yourselves when you go home so when you look through this chapter when you stand down and see all the characters all those you're involved all those you're presented as those who have faith the one thing that just struck me as I was reading through it is Hebrews 11 it's a chapter full of activity it's a chapter where there's so much going on lots of characters presented but there's much industry in the witness that's presented to us there's so many remarkable acts that are recorded and presented to us in Hebrews 11 it's faith that's celebrated in that chapter but it's works that are demonstrated thing think about

Noah what an illustration what a witness that man was imagine living next door to Noah in the middle of the desert and day after day hammer hammer bang bang crash he's banging he's crashing he's nailing stuffing and he's involved in this huge project this construction project that goes on and on and there's so much industry and there's so much work that's going on and everybody sees him and it's absolutely barren and yet Noah has been told that there is a flood coming and salvation will be through the means of this ark he believes it because he believes it because he has faith we find him with a hammer we find him in progress and that's just one illustration of so many characters in that chapter James just takes two in this chapter and he presents them to us as those who have faith and we see

Abraham and we see Rahab James chapter 2 and verse 20 the first one presented is Abraham keep a finger in Hebrews and we'll just look at Hebrews as well James says you foolish man do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless remember the title here this point is faith works do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar you see his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did 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 a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone and then you look at Hebrews chapter 11 verse 17 by faith Abraham when God tested him offered Isaac as a sacrifice he who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son even though

God had said to him it is to Isaac but your offspring will be reckoned Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead and figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from death we see faith in what he does and then Rahab has the final example here in verse 25 of James 2 James says in the same way was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did and she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction Hebrews 11 31 again Rahab by faith the prostitute Rahab because she welcomed the spies was not killed for those who were disobedient just two illustrations then James brings the whole argument to worst conclusion by saying as the body without the spirit is dead and we see that when spirit goes from the body when we see death the body without the spirit is dead so faith without deeds is dead a couple of quotes from commentators to kind of bring us to an end

Barclay says unless Abraham had been prepared to obey God to the uttermost his faith would have been an unreal thing and unless Rahab had been prepared to risk all to help the spies her faith

would have been a useless thing faith and deeds says the commentator are not opposites they are in fact inseparables no man will ever be moved to action without faith and no man's faith is real until it moves him to action so many people they like to take this James 2 and contrast it with one of the passages that Paul writes and they set James against Paul and it's kind of like biblical fight night and in the faith corner

[34 : 46] Ephesians 2 is Paul and then in the works corner James chapter 2 is James and theologians they'll then take text and they'll slug it out who's right who's wrong but the reality is that James and Paul they're saying the same things they were moved by the same spirit to write these things they just write from a different emphasis they're writing to a different group of people Jonathan Lamb says Paul was concerned to address a situation where people believed that they could be saved through the works of the law that's impossible says Paul James was concerned to address a situation where people were not demonstrating the works which flow from being saved by the gospel that's inconsistent says James or to think about it this way Paul stands before the door of salvation and he deals with how

Christian life begins and James stands on the other side of the same door and he's dealing with how Christian life grows and matures and ages Paul talks about what is needed at that entry point and James talks about what is required what is expected after you enter but both are talking about true faith and Calvin just sums it up in just a few words Calvin says this faith alone justifies but faith that justifies is never alone faith alone justifies but faith that justifies is never alone meaning that true faith works sometimes you see these captions finish with this you see these posters there used to be one in the vestry in Kyle in the Church of Scotland where I occasionally preached and there was a poster and it said if you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you and James says there should be because true faith will be seen in the way that we live in the works that we do for the glory of

God and for the blessing of those around us and may God bless his thoughts on his word to us and I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both now and forever more Amen