**Deeds Reveal Your Faith**

**Learning to Reflect Jesus Well**

**James 2:14-26**

**Text James 2:14-26b**

Can be a lot of confusion with this passage.

To be clear its not about work harder do better / pull yourself up by your own bootstraps?

No. What I believe James is trying to get through to his readers is that our actions or deeds reveal who or what we worship.

Our deeds reveal our faith.

But to be clear its not about doing more, working harder.

Not putting down other faiths or the people who embrace those religions. For many these paths are the only starting point to Jesus they will ever know. But they are starting points.

Every religion in the world is works based. This idea that you have to work for acceptance. You have to meet certain requirements to find peace with God or be accepted by a deity. Your value is found in the behaviours you perform.

This is where Jesus is different. This is where Judaism and the OT fall short; where the Koran falls short, where the 8 Paths of Buddhism falls short. It’s not about you doing the work; it’s the fact that Jesus has done it.

The final words Jesus spoke on the cross were “It is Finished.”

God’s love and acceptance are not based upon your performance. God is perfect and requires perfection, which we could never achieve on our own.

So in His amazing love He provided through Jesus the very perfection He required. God is absolutely Holy, without flaw or blemish or sin or mistake or error or fault. Absolutely perfect. He cannot compromise His very essence of Himself – His holiness. So in His amazing love God provided all we needed to be made right.

So when we say we are “in Christ”, it means we are in Him. He’s our righteousness. He’s our perfection. He’s our goodness. On our own we’re nothing. In Him we are made whole.

Why scripture says, “your real life is hidden with Christ in God” **(Col.3:3).**

Forgiveness from sin and eternal Oneness with God are readily available to all of us, but NOT by our good works!

That’s the foundation that needs to be laid before we dive into this text.

You might ask, what about Paul saying that we are justified by our faith? Does this text contradict Paul?

I see paul and james actually complimenting one another.

James says over and over again that ‘the Royal Law gives freedom’ and Paul taught that *“through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”*

Paul summarizes James’ words this way in **Galatians 5**. He says, “The only thing that counts is that faith expresses itself in love.”

Our deeds reveal who or what we trust.

As we grow in our knowledge and trust in Jesus, our faith grows.

Jesus talked a lot about faith and deeds.

Jesus walked by a fig tree and taught “Each tree is recognized by it’s own fruit” in Luke 6:44.

You can hear it. Faith without deeds is dead.

**Matt. 7:16** Jesus taught “By their fruit you will recognize the. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?”

That is in essence what James is getting at in this text.

**BIG IDEA:** When our trust is in a BIG God, our deeds will follow suit.

We are all attracted to people who live what they believe, aren’t we?

**We call this integrity.**

The desire is that we live integrated lives. Lives that reflect our faith in God.

In this case there was a situation in the Jerusalem church that didn’t reflect this.

There was a group who either showed partiality towards the rich; or looked down upon or marginalized the poor as less then.

Likely a scenario where the poor came to someone in the church or the church while they gathered together and offered them nothing except empty words which reflected their empty hearts.

All they got were Go, be well. Good bye. Have a good day. Stay warm. Eat well. Go in peace. Good luck.

**I can hear James’ heart.**

That’s it? That’s all you had to give them? Don’t you realize tat if you have trusted jesus all that God’s Holy Spirit has deposited inside you? You have my Spirit. You have fullness. I have made you complete. I have given you everything you need for godliness and you send them away with empty words?

In contrast to this we read in **Acts 3:6** when Peter meets a lame person at the door of the synagogue and doesn’t give an empty word. Instead speaks out of the fullness. Speaks out of his new identity as God’s child.

*“But Peter said, “I don’t have any silver or gold for you. But I’ll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!”*

Peter knew to live the Christian walk is to be alive, to be full of rich, abundant, pulsating life.

This is what James is reacting to. Where’s the evidence of this pulsating life?

In the church in Jerusalem there were all kinds.

1. Picture with me a faith continuum. People who were living full integrated lives, full of God’s Spirit.

2. As well there were likely those who were not living up to their new identity in Christ, not living up to their true God-given potential; thinking they are still a bunch of chickens when they were really eagles created to soar.

3. But there were also a group of people whose faith was merely an intellectual assent; it hadn’t yet activated anything in their heart.

Maybe just a strating point. Maybe no desire to grow in faith. We don’t know.

Here James is saying that true faith, the Hebrew bible translates this trust; once you have trusted Christ, once you have come to that place of full surrender; the theological word is soteriology. The doctrine of salvation through Jesus.

Saving faith.

When you come to that place of surrender, something new is activated in your soul. Your whole being. John 3 calls it being born from above. Corinthians calls it being made new – the old has gone the new has come.

**1 Peter** says we have been given a new name. Now a holy priesthood. A people set apart for God’s own possession. Set free from the empty way of life handed down to them from their forefathers.

**Paul** calls it being in Christ. The old has gone, the new has come. Jesus called it abundant life both now and eternal.

**James** says that when there has been this “saving faith” happen inside, it automatically results in a change of deeds.

It’s not working to get faith. It’s not working to be saved. It’s right faith that gives birth to new behaviours.

**I like how Nystrome** puts it.

“Faith alone without works is as dead as a body without breath. Deeds are not something extra to be added to faith; they are a necessary fundamental part of it. Without deeds faith is not really faith – it is only an imposter of true faith.”

We are all at different places in our faith journey. The key is that our trajectory is moving towards Jesus.

The danger is that our faith remains at the starting point; whether it’s some experience or intellectual assent. That kind of belief or “faith” is fruitless.

**Vs. 19** says, “You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you. Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.”

The crazy thought here is that even evil spirits have this sort of belief. They believe in one God, but it doesn’t result in good deeds. No actually the contrary.

James is saying that something happens in our hearts when we trust in Christ. Change happens on the inside and moves outward.

Self help, or mere intellectual belief is external. Changing behaviours meanwhile the heart is the same.

Real change starts from the Inside Out.

**Story: Louie Zaperini**

*I want to tell you a story and I want you to think about this man’s faith continuum and just when saving faith took place in his life and what happened as a result.*

*Unbroken* is a [biography](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biography) of [World War II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) hero [Louis Zamperini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Zamperini), a former Olympic track star who survived a plane crash in the Pacific, spent 47 days drifting on a raft, and then survived more than two and a half years as a [prisoner of war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner_of_war) in several brutal Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of brutality many POW’s experienced in Japanese Camps, 1% or POW’s in German Camps died; 37% died in Japanese POW Camps.

Growing up Louie really had no interest in God. God wasn’t on his radar.

He becomes a gunner in a B-24 in WWII and despite monumental successes; their plane finally goes down and crashes in the South Pacific.

In a couple of near death experiences on that raft over the 47 days Louie has these premonitions where he hears angels singing. It’s like he’s transported to another dimension.

But was that saving faith? Were those experiences enough? No they weren’t.

I know a lot of people who speak of miraculous experiences with angels and spirits but it so often leads nowhere. It has no sustaining power, or changing power.

A couple of times as Louie and his two friends were drifting at sea Louie prayed to God, “If you get me out of this; if I survive this ordeal I will devote my life to you.”

Revealed perhaps his spiritual trajectory towards Jesus, but many people have prayed similar prayers and it led them nowhere.

Was that saving faith? Had he come to that place of surrender? Did he experience New Life at this point?

No, he didn’t. But it was a start.

In the numerous POW Camps Louie was brought to a breaking point where he found himself praying to this unknown God. All he could do was pray.

But was that saving faith?

Louie was eventually rescued at the end of the war but his torment only intensifies. No longer are his tormenters the Japanese commanders in his POW camps but his own memories and flashbacks.

Louie in a later interview said, “I was constantly being tormented by the guy. And you talk about hate. I wanted to kill him.”

Nightmares began in prison camp and plagued Zamperini long after he returned home to California.

“The nightmares were every night,” he said. “He couldn’t get rid of them.”

Time wasn’t healing his wounds; it was making them worse.

One night Zamperini dreamed he was strangling “The Bird”. Instead, he woke up strangling his wife. Scared and desperate, he started getting drunk on a daily basis just so he could forget about the horrors that plagued him.

With her husband out drinking every night, Zamperini’s wife Cynthia filed for divorce. After surviving so much, Zamperini was about to lose everything.

That’s when a concerned neighbor invited Cynthia to the Billy Graham Crusade taking place in a Los Angeles tent dubbed the Canvas Cathedral. She accepted the invitation and then accepted Christ. Her husband wanted no part of Christianity, but his heart softened when Cynthia said she no longer wanted a divorce.

Finally Louie was convinced to attend, although quite reluctantly, thinking Billy Graham spoke on the subject of science.

After storming out of the tent the first night, Zamperini amazingly returned for one more evening. That time, the Bible verses Billy Graham quoted went straight to Zamperini’s heart.

He says “Of all my near-death experiences my life never passed before my eyes,” he said. “But when Billy Graham quoted Scripture my life did pass before my eyes.”

All these connections were happening. The Holy Spirit was speaking to him.

For the first time in years, Zamperini remembered the promise he made to God that if he got him out of the mess he would devote his life to him forever when he was floating in the south Pacific.

“His life passed before his eyes, and he saw his ugly life,”

Zamperini said. “Yes, I had a lot of great times. A lot of great experiences, and a lot of escapes from death, but I still didn’t like my life after the war. It was terrible.”

That night in L.A., Zamperini went forward and accepted Christ, and the biggest miracle of his life was set in motion.

Saving faith. The seed of God’s kingdom was finally planted in his heart.

And like yeast activates the dough, there was an immediate effect. Good “deeds” emerged. It wasn’t a set of have-to’s. It wasn’t a set of rules he now had to live by. New desires automatically emerged.

Louie says, “I knew I was through getting drunk, I knew I was through smoking, and I knew I was through with the pornopgraphic magazines I was looking at. At once he knew he had forgiven all of his guards including The Bird. Never dawned on him again that he hated that guy.

“That was the first night in all those years Louie never had a nightmare, and he didn’t have one from that point on.”

**But that’s not where the deeds ended.**

Zamperini’s transformation was so all encompassing, he returned to Japan to share the Gospel with hundreds of Japanese troops he once hated. This time, they were the ones behind bars, imprisoned for war crimes.

After he spoke he lined them all up and walked between them and shook their hands and extended grace and forgiveness to them.

Zamperini watched as many of them accepted Christ.

**You see, James insists that true faith always changes the heart and therefore results in acts of mercy and compassion.**

Louie eventually began working with delinquent teenagers, the roughest and toughest in the bunch. He shared Christ with them, but regardless of whether they put their faith in Jesus he loved them. Worked with them.

All those who knew him commented that he was truly a man who knew joy, and lived out is full potential.

Saving Faith always changes the heart and the outflow will be acts of mercy and compassion.

This is what grieved James’ heart in this situation.

People who said they knew Christ, but their lives didn’t match what they believed. Their deeds didn’t reflect their values.

We are attracted to people who live their faith. I wonder who might come to your mind – people who live their faith. You see the fruit?

James thinks of Abraham and Rahab.

Abraham’s trust was also active. It wasn’t some sterile intellectual assent but involved trusting actions that involved great risk. Reckless obedience.

Here was a man who lived more according to who he trusted than what he feared.

He wasn’t perfect, he stumbled at times, at times he lacked faith but his faith grew in partnership with his knowledge and experience of God as faithful.

Just like you and I grow, Abraham heard God and obeyed. Every step of obedience he grew in faith.

Cool that scripture calls Abraham God’s friend (Isa. 41:8; 2 Chron. 20:7).

Most of James’ listeners would have loved Abraham as their example. But then James goes for the jugular. He uses Rahab as their example.

She was a woman who wasn’t known for her good reputation, and godly deeds.

But unlike the people in the Jerusalem Church she showed hospitality to the spies. The apparent Jesus followers didn’t clothe the naked or feed the hungry; they ignored the poor because on the surface they didn’t look like they would have any benefit to the church.

But here they are reminded of this harlot who trusted God, and out of that step of faith came good deeds.

Interesting that in Jewish tradition Rahab married Joshua and became the ancestor of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and in Christian tradition she is the ancestor of Jesus.

Look at the fruit of her obedience? The simple step of faith germinated and grew into this kingdom tree bearing unthinkable fruit.

An ancestor of Jesus.

**Did you know your faith has a purpose?**

Its so that Christ is formed in you. That we become mature, complete, lacking nothing.

That we experience the fullness of Christ, bit by bit.

This not only brings God pleasure, it is where you experience true pleasure. Where you discover who you were designed to be.

This is your rightful heritage. You and I are meant to grow up in our faith. We are meant to discover our full potential in Him.

**Word shared in the 1st part of the CWG (Laura / Darcy).**

This is a word that has come up again and again in our prayer time this week.

A couple of people shared the impact a teacher had on their lives, where at grade 7 a teacher told them they saw great potential in them. And how those words, that belief set them on a whole new trajectory that eventually led them to Jesus.

**Potential.**

**Are you living out your God given potential?**

**Are we as a church living out our God given potential?**

We love Veggie tales. There’s this one story called the Snoodles Tale, all about Snoodle Doo who was created to fly but instead was held down to the ground by a back-pack full off all the lies he had received from others, and that he told himself, all his life. Like he was carrying around a backpack full of heavy bricks and as a result he wasn’t able to reach his full potential. It’s not until he allows God to empty his backpack does he discover that he was actually created to fly. To soar.

When our eyes are fixed on our creator, and by faith we accept what He says about us, we begin to live lives that reflect Him.

Its so much a matter of who we’re listening to. Who is the centre of our orbit?

When we allow what God says about us to govern our lives, we discover our potential.

But when we allow Self to determine who or what we do, we lose our way.

**AB Simpson** says that the great conflict, the heavy bricks that weigh us down are often the various forms of the self-life.

He speaks about Joshua going into the land of milk and honey and having to defeat 31 kings that occupy the land.

He says that from what he saw in his own life he needed to conquer similar kings in his own heart in order to experience his full potential.

He calls these self-sins tyrants and if allowed to remain in our backpack, they have the power of robbing us of our true potential and purpose.

I won’t name all 31 but will highlight just a few.

1. **Self Examination or Introspection:** A morbid and excessive self-examination that spirals us down. It causes us so much pain and robs us of so much joy. It leads to nothing but condemnation. We must remember that God alone does the searching. We can pray and ask Him to search us and know us.
2. **Self Depreciation** – it keeps so many from discovering their useful service and spiritual gifts. When asked to do something, serve in some way the default is always inability. There is no trust in a great God who can use their weakness; and be strong in their weak places.
3. **Easily Offended** – So many began their journey full and radiant, but something or someone said something or did something that wounded them, or offended them, and they haven’t been the same since. Once open now so guarded.
4. **Self Help** – It’s all about self and not about God’s strength and healing. It’s what I can do for myself. Doing it on our own never opens our heart to only what God can do. This kind of healing is only surface, the externals. Not about deep healing from the inside out that then brings lasting change on the outside
5. **Self Gratification** – not about others. Not about serving others. Laying down my life for others…ever. It’s all about my own pleasure. Indulge. “My precious…”.
6. **Self-Affections –** even people we love we love not so much for the blessing that we can be to them, but instead for the pleasure that they give to us.
7. **Self- Pity** – Where our grief’s and heartbreaks come from the wounded pride, preoccupation with self, or the loss of something we shouldn’t have called our own in the first place.
8. **Self Righteousness** – where we try to justify ourselves to God and to others by our own good works. I’m good. I’m better than.

I wonder how much lighter we would feel if we were free from self? If we truly lived our lives according to what Jesus said about us than what we told ourselves?

*CS Lewis commented in his book The Weight of Glory, 'How God thinks of us is not only more important [than what we think of God], but infinitely more important.'*

*How God thinks of us. Who we are in Him. Determines what we do. Our actions. Our behaviors. Our responses.*

I don’t think we are any different than Abraham, Rahab or Louie. It begins with that step of trust.

Saving Faith opens our hearts up to the ultimate source of life which sets off a Holy chain reaction in our lives.

Our hearts all the way to our hands, feet and mouths.

And out of that you get this faith expressing itself in love.

*How will you allow what God thinks of you to impact everything you say and everything you do, today, tomorrow and every tomorrow?*