**The Life of Faith**

James 2:14-26

**Good Morning Beloved**

* New Born Child
  + The entire Family gathered around
    - Surreal moment – Kodak
  + Grandfather – “Now if he will just go to the bathroom…”
    - Thank you for being here on this special day….
      * But for experienced parents… when the child goes to the bathroom…
  + It is a sign that all their systems are functioning
    - It is a sign of LIFE!!!
* In James 2:14-26, the apostle wants you to see the evidence of Life in Christ.
  + Our Point for Today… Life in Christ produces Fruitful Deeds.
    - The reason why Covenant Presbyterian Church exists is for one glorious reason….LIFE.
      * Often you hear us talk about…
        + Exalting Christ
        + Engaging in Community
        + Expanding for the Great Commission
    - And if we don’t pay attention, it would be easy for our focus to drift toward kitchens, carpets, and convenience.
  + This church why we are here… Life in Christ.
    - In our text today, James helps us understand the evidences of being alive in Christ.
      * Those who are the “firstfruits of his creatures” (1:18)
      * and have “received with meekness the implanted word” (1:21)
    - Are people who love the Gospel and walk in accordance to the Gospel.
      * But in the church there is partiality and favoritism and so James must address:
        + Can you claim to have life and not show the signs?
        + Can you claim to have faith in Christ and not manifest it in deeds?
    - So James gives us two examples of dead faith and two examples of living faith.

**Reading of God’s Word** – James 2:14-26 (p. 1012 in the Pew Bible)

*14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

*18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

**Preaching of God’s Word**

1. **Fruitless Deeds of Dead Faith (vs. 14-20)**
   1. **The Arm-Chair Philanthropist (vs. 14-18)**
      1. *14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith*[[1]](#footnote-1)  *save him?* [[2]](#footnote-2) *15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*[[3]](#footnote-3)*.* 
         1. He sees your situation, but is unmoved.
            1. This person loves to give advice.

He sees the needs of those around them… acknowledges them but goes on about his day.

* + - * 1. Illustration: John Wayne – “"Life is hard; its harder when you're stupid."
      1. Application: The question – “How are you doing?” has become a standard social greeting in our day.
         1. We are not truly asking for a disclosure?

We are merely being cordial.

* + - 1. So James sets up an imaginary court case against the arm-chair philanthropist in verse 18.
         1. 18 *But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.*

Here someone contending for a difference based on spiritual gifts.

One person’s gift is a spirit of unshakable trust (1 Cor. 12:9)

Another person’s gift is a God-given aptitude for works of mercy (Rom. 12:6)

* + - * 1. What’s the problem? The issue is not a spiritual gift that some possess, but the general gift of faith by which all alone become Christians (as verse 14 laid out).
      1. In chapter 3, James will ask “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom” (vs. 13).
         1. Conclusion: Motyer - “It is not mere expression of faith that saves a man, but only that sort of faith which proves its living power by the evidence of good works.”
  1. **The Demonic Theologian (vs. 19-20)**
     1. *19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?* 
        1. James, why in the world are you bringing up demons? I thought we were talking about discriminating between rich and the poor?
           1. Because it is not enough to know the truth . You must act on the truth.
        2. When Jesus roamed the hills with his disciples, it is amazing how many people do not see who he is and what he is doing.
           1. But there is always one group that recognizes the truth… the demons.

Matt. 8:29 – Jesus heals the Gadarene Demoniac - And behold, they cried out, “*What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*”

Luke 4:34 – “ “*Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God*.”

* + - * 1. Notice: The demons recognized Jesus as the HOLY ONE of God. Yet they are lost to Hell.
      1. Application: The man who says “I believe in God” is no better than the faith of demons.
         1. As A. Barnes makes plain: “If demons might hold such faith and remain in perdition, men might hold it and go to perdition…”

Notice the result of the demon’s knowledge… shuddering (from fear) and trembling with terror.

* + - * 1. In contrast to the demons, true faith brings peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

Illustration: "You can be as straight as a gun barrel theologically—and be as empty as one spiritually." (A.W. Tozer)

* + - * 1. So he concludes…
      1. 20 (NIV) - *You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?*
         1. “barren (RSV), useless (NASB, ESV, NIV, NEB, JB), and dead (KJV)” .

This word is the opposite of “first-fruits: in 1:27.

* + 1. POINT… Dead Faith = No visible Fruit
       1. Neither manward in deeds of kindness…
       2. Nor Godward in peace and assurance
  1. TRANSITION: In contrast to these two examples of dead faith, James gives us two examples of living faith… Abraham and Rahab

1. **Visible Fruit of Living Faith (vs. 21-26)**
   1. **Abraham (vs. 21-24)**
      1. *21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.* 
         1. Why would you bring up Abraham, James?
            1. Because Abraham exemplifies what James has just said in chapter 1

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (1:2-4)

* + - * 1. In the earthly course of events, Abram was tested by a 25-year-wait (Gen. 12:4; 17:1; 18:10,14) before Isaac was born.

Then, it an utter declaration of love for God alone. Abraham takes “his son, his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and went to the land of Moriah, and to offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which God told him.” (Genesis 22:2 ESV)”

* + - * 1. In an act of sheer obedience to the Lord, Abraham’s faith was revealed (Heb. 11:17-19) as the challenge of verse 18 is answered.
      1. The NIV differs from almost every other translation is the way they phrase verse 21 and verse 25.
         1. In the NIV, we read “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did.”
         2. In other translations like the ESV, we read “was not Abraham our father justified by works.”

KEY THOUGHT: The NIV rightly makes an interpretation… rather than a word for word translation.

* + - 1. Why the differences?
         1. Because the exact phrase shows up in Romans 3:28, where Paul writes “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

For James, “justify” is a synonym not for “save” (2:14) but for “show” and “prove” (2:18).

* + 1. James is not saying that Abraham, by offering Isaac, is for that reason declared righteous (as Paul uses the word), nor is he saying that Abraham makes himself righteous before God by his actions. [[4]](#footnote-4)
       1. James is using the word in the sense of “vindicate before people” (as in Luke 7:29).
       2. Paul is using the term in reference to the declaration of our righteousness, and James of the demonstration of our righteousness. [[5]](#footnote-5)
  1. **Rahab (vs. 25-26)**
     1. *25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*
        1. James draws on the story of the Prostitute of Jericho.
           1. Heb. 11:31 - By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

Love for others revealed her faith Rahab said, “*I know that the Lord has given you the land. … for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath*” (Joshua 2:9ff)… and that faith expressed itself in love for others.

* + - 1. So what do we learn from these examples???
    1. 1st and 2nd commandments – Love God and Love others
       1. Love God - Abraham vs. Demons
       2. Love your neighbor as yourself - Arm-Chair Philanthropist vs. Rahab
    2. The body without a spirit is a corpse… faith without works is a corpse, devoid of life.
       1. Breath is the evidence that a body is alive, even though it does not constitute that life.[[6]](#footnote-6)
       2. Do you end here? LOVE GOD and LOVE OTHERS
       3. Illustration: Ice Cream[[7]](#footnote-7)
          1. Not Hard… But Impossible
       4. Are examples enough?
          1. Illustration: Mother / Daughter – Hairbrush

1. **Conclusion**
   1. So does it matter if I don’t see fruit?
      1. “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5 ESV)
   2. The Well-Known Theologian Christopher Hampton - “A branch connected to the vine has no choice but to bear fruit.”
   3. So what if you’re here today and you have a dead faith… you’re indifferent to God and you tolerate your neighbors.
      1. How do you get a living faith?
         1. This sermon is not about doing more, trying harder. If you walk out of this room thinking “I’m going to have more faith this week”, you will miss the point of this passage.
            1. This passage is about life in Christ. You see examples are not enough to grant us life.
         2. If you are not connected to Christ, the examples will be like the daughter with the hairbrush.
            1. Imitation alone leads to condemnation.
   4. If you are connected to Christ, your justification leads to imitation.
      1. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:1-2 ESV)
   5. We must go back to the cross and see that only in Christ will we understand Abraham and Rahab’s faith.
   6. Tim Keller -
      1. Jesus is the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, “Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,” now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him and say, “Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us.”
      2. Jesus is the true and better Rahab who didn’t just risk leaving a prosperous city but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn’t just risk his life for his enemies, but gave his life for his enemies so that they could become his friends.
   7. Through his resurrection, the Son of God became a Life-giving spirit so that you might have life today (1 Cor. 15:45).
      1. Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as the Lord has loved you.

**Benediction – Romans 15:5-6**

*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Appendix**

* Is James contradicting Paul’s insistence that justification comes by faith alone (Rom. 3:28)?
  + Are the two apostles diverging in how a person can have a right relationship with the Lord?
  + NO!!! Salvation in the book of James has already been established as a result of God’s initiative. This seeming conflict can be resolved in two ways[[8]](#footnote-8):
    - First – the manner of “justify” (dikaiow)
      * James is using the word in the sense of “vindicate before people” (as in Luke 7:29).
      * Paul is using the term in reference to the declaration of our righteousness, and James of the demonstration of our righteousness.
    - Second – the time of “justification” as both James and Paul refer to the sinner’s righteousness before God.
      * In James, the term refers to a “vindication at the last judgment,” a force the word often has in Judaism (matt. 12:37). James is focusing on the way the status is vindicated before God in the judgment.
      * Paul is focusing on the initial reception of the status.
* Paul fights the legalist (the Reformation).
* James battled the licentious (the Wesleys).
* So what is TRUE FAITH?
  + There are two aspects to saving faith…
    - #1 – passive reception – abandoning any attempt to preserve yourself and entrusting yourself to another
      * Knowledge – faith rests upon content – facts of the gospel
      * Assent – acknowledge that Christ alone saves
      * Trust – relying on Christ alone for salvation
    - #2 – active expression – not what faith receives, but what faith expresses[[9]](#footnote-9)
      * Justifying faith, saving faith, is a faith that works by love.
      * “No other faith justifies but faith which works by love” (Gal. 5:6) – Calvin (Institutes III, 11, 29, 750)
  + If you are actively loving others but are indifferent to Christ, you are blind.
  + If you are actively receiving Christ but indifferent to others, you are empty.

“Both teach than an authentic faith works, Paul stressing the faith that issues in works, and James the works that issue from faith.” – John Stott in “The Cross of Christ”, p. 189

1. The article used here in the Greek refers to the previous mention of “faith,” where it was qualified as being without works. “What does it profit, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but does not have works? Can *that kind of a faith* save him?” If the force of the article is not brought out, it could give the impression that James is saying faith cannot save a person (cf. Barclay, AV).” – From “Intermediate New Testament Greek” by Richard Young, p. 57-58 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is a rhetorical question using mh to convey a negative answer (Matt. 7:9; Rom. 3:3). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Richard Young sees this use of ek as a prepositional phrase convening the sense of “means”. So faith is revealed “by” deeds. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Carson and Moo’s *Introduction to the New Testament* is a useful resource (p. 633). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Martin Luther adamantly contended that this statement about justification by works was a “defect [that] proves that the epistle is not of apostolic provenance.” “Preface to the Epistles of St. James and Jude.” Pages 439–44, 477–79 in vol. 6 of Philadelphia ed. of *Works of Martin Luther.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. McCartney, *James,* p. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ted Tripp used this illustration, but it is no less true in the Bradshaw household. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Carson and Moo’s *Introduction to the New Testament* is a useful resource (p. 633). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Westminster Confession of Faith 11.2 is extremely helpful. “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: (John 1:12, Rom. 3:28, Rom. 5:1) yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love (James 2:17,22,26, Gal. 5:6). ” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)