

Faith Sacrifices

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[0 : 00] So good to see you all here this morning. We're continuing our series in James, and we're just going to do the last little bit of James chapter 2 together.

But perhaps before we dig into this, I would like us to just take a minute to think about the week gone by, just individually, and think to ourselves about this question.

What difference has faith in Jesus Christ made to the week just gone by? In my life? What is it about trusting Jesus that has altered the way I would have lived the week just gone by?

Maybe it's your attitudes, your actions, your interactions with others. Perhaps it's something you did or something you didn't do. Maybe it was the way you reacted to people.

But let's just take a minute and think, what difference has faith in Jesus Christ made to the week just gone by? And then I'll pray, and then we'll get stuck in.

[1 : 10] Father God, as we come to this, your word, and we think of the week just gone by, Father, we long that as we reviewed a week, that there might be so much evidence that we have trusted Jesus and are living for him.

And so, Lord, as we come to this passage, such a challenging passage about the outworking of faith in life, about the cost of following Jesus, Father, would you help us?

Father, would you teach us, and would you spur us on, Father, that we wouldn't just have a dry, intellectual knowledge of Jesus, but we might have a deep, profound love, and therefore an active, vibrant service of him in our lives.

Father, bless us in his glorious name. Amen. So we're in James. James is a book that really does make us wiggle and squirm.

As we get into, behind what James is telling us, it becomes decidedly uncomfortable. Because James is very practical. And he shines a light on all of life.

[2 : 22] And as the light of God's word shines into our lives, it makes us squirm. He's writing to his former church, his former congregation that has spread among the nations.

That they were once all together, but now he writes to them, as they are in the midst of a hostile world. His congregation are predominantly Jewish Christians.

And therefore they're hated by everyone. They're hated by the pagans. And they're hated by those people that are still Jewish. They're in real trouble.

It is really hostile. This prejudicial hatred infringes on every area of life. At work.

On the commute home. In the marketplace. Everywhere they are, they are known as Christians. And hostility comes their way.

[3 : 22] To be a Christian, to own the name of Jesus, is to paint a target on your back. For others to shoot at. And James knows this.

He knows to be a obvious minority in a hostile world is a very unpleasant place to be. And he's really exhorting them, don't bow to public pressure.

Don't let your faith melt in the heat of hostility. James says, don't blend in. Don't back down.

Don't compromise your Christian faith. Because the temptation for them, as is the temptation for us, when hostility comes in, we just put on this cultural camouflage.

We just want to look the same as everyone else. Behave the same as everyone else. Do what everyone else does. Say what everyone else says. That it's very tempting, isn't it, to be like a hedgehog.

[4 : 29] That you'll walk around, safe on a Sunday, but Monday through to Saturday, you'll curl up into a prickly ball. Just kind of mothball your Christianity. And then make sure you take it off the shelf and dust it down, ready for the show next Sunday.

James says this is a real temptation, to be one thing on Sunday and something else during the week. All through the letter, as we were looking at in Team Tabitha on Wednesday, he says, don't be double-minded.

Don't be too sold. Don't have disassociative identity disorder, where you are two people in one person. You are a Christian on a Sunday, but just ever so normal during the week.

Don't conceal your Christianity. And that's a temptation for all of us. I played cricket yesterday. It was freezing. I took a catch that was absolutely hammered at me, and I thought my hands were going to shatter like glass because they were so cold.

But the incredible thing about cricket is most of it is spent just sitting around drinking tea. And they're always fascinated because they know I'm the pastor of a church. And we're sitting over tea, and somebody says, what is being part of a church all about?

[5 : 49] And this isn't just my team. This is the other team as well. I'll tell you, sweat, even though it was so cold, was dripping down my back. Because there's a real nervousness, isn't there?

There's a real pain, a real anguish when we have to stand up and stand out for Jesus. I told them that to be part of a church is to belong to Jesus.

I said to belong to Jesus means that you trust that he died for us and raised that we might be forgiven. Once I said that, suddenly people thought it was time to start playing cricket again.

We're all sorely tempted to keep our relationship with the Lord Jesus on the down low. James knows that's true, as we all know that's true.

So he writes this letter and says, don't just merge and morph and become like everyone else for the sake of ease and comfort. Make sure you are in the world, but not of the world, because we all know the temptation is to be in the world and of the world.

[6 : 55] I live a very secluded life. Most of the time I work for a church, I spend most of my time with people in the church. And I really feel for you guys who are actually out there trying to be different for Jesus, trying to work in such a way that honors him, trying to love your friends in a way that really adorns the gospel and makes it look attractive.

And as I was preparing this this week, the one thing that I thought I must do is pray for each of you more. Pray for each of you more as you just live life, that you might live it in a way that makes Jesus look glorious.

James starts his letter by talking about not collapsing under trial, but persevering and getting wisdom from God that we might be mature in faith and complete in Christ.

He then says at the end of chapter one, don't just be hearers of the word, but doers. Don't just consume a Sunday sermon and go out on Monday morning like you've forgotten what you look like when you look in a mirror.

And then chapter two is a real call to be genuine. The first half is about being genuinely loving, genuinely loving towards everyone and not changing how you approach people depending on whether they're wearing a gold bracelet or not.

[8 : 18] He says show universal love to all. And then in the second half, he says have genuine faith. Have genuine faith that works out in life.

Real faith, vibrant faith, faith that leads you into works. He says that famous thing that we looked at last week. Don't be a Christian of the platitude.

Go in peace, keep warm and well fed, and then get into your BMW, drive home, have a three course meal next to your log fire all by yourself. Don't just be the platitude Christian who just says nice things but actually has the capacity and the resource to do something about it.

Be a whole, let there be a wholehearted trust in Jesus that is evidenced by your good works. As we move to the end of chapter two, we'll see that it's not just do good works, but also that good works cost.

There's a real cost associated and we'll see that particularly as we come to Abraham and Rahab. So let me read chapter two and I'll start at verse 19 and then to the end of the chapter.

[9 : 34] Here we go. You believe that there is one God, good. Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

Was not our father 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. And he was called God's friend.

You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do 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 the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Well, there's one verse in there that really sets our theological antennas twitching, isn't there?

[10:48] This one verse, Martin Luther said, this one verse makes me want to throw little Jimmy into the fire. And this is the problem, isn't it? Verse 24. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone, which seems to be in direct contravention of the Apostle Paul who says, for we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

This is one of the most controversial verses in the entire New Testament. One of the second is Romans chapter 9, so it's a good job we're not doing that one tonight.

So what are we going to do? How are we going to square this circle? Well, I want you to cast your mind seven weeks forward to the Commonwealth Games.

And I want you to think particularly of women's gymnastics. And my favourite apparatus in all of women's gymnastics is the balance beam.

It is incredible that people can do things like this 1.24 metres off the ground on a bar that's 5 metres long and only 10 centimetres wide.

[12:07] I find it hard to walk along a pavement without tripping. I can't even do a handstand without breaking my neck. And these guys do it on what in essence is a glorified railing.

Have this in mind. Imagine that we are walking along a balance beam. For some of us that's easier than others.

We're walking along a balance beam. We have to be very careful that we don't lean too far one side and therefore fall over. So on this side we've got the Apostle Paul.

and he's telling the people of Rome don't be legalists. Don't think that there's rules you can obey which will make you acceptable to God. Don't lean too far this way.

And make out that grace is affordable. If you do enough stuff well God will accept you. Paul says we hold that a man is justified by faith alone.

[13:07] Faith is all important. But on this side we've got to be careful we don't lean this side and this is what James is writing about. He says don't fall for an easy believism.

Don't fall for a believism that is just oh I said a prayer one day in my life. I declared I had faith in God but can now live however I like. It doesn't matter.

Paul says what I do is important to make me acceptable by God and James says it doesn't matter what I do because I am acceptable to God and both are wrong.

And we have to walk this tension down the middle. Paul is all about affordable grace. James is all about cheap grace. Grace that's given to us and that's cheap so it doesn't matter.

Got to walk this balance beam well. That we are justified by faith alone but don't think that faith doesn't need to work.

[14:08] So James is particularly writing against what we might call insurance policy Jesus where we just believe in Jesus and put him in our back pocket and it doesn't matter and one day we'll cash in our insurance policy when we die.

James says don't fall for that. Don't think that what you do on a Sunday will save you if it's not completed by a consistent life during the week.

James is saying that your faith must be active fruitful saving faith. Not dead demonic futile faith. Do you see what he says in verse 19?

You believe that there is one God good. Even the demons believe that and shudder. His point is that even that the demons have this knowledge and it makes them shudder whereas you just have this knowledge and do nothing about it.

James is saying this faith has to be accompanied by works. He's saying faith alone saves but saving faith cannot remain alone absent of works in the believer's life.

[15:22] Faith alone saves but saving faith cannot remain alone absent of works in the life of the believer.

That's why he says verse 20 you foolish person. Literally the word is you hollow person. He's calling the person who says he has faith but no works a superficial charlatan and a fraud.

He's saying if you've got all theology all knowledge but no doxology praise and worship in your life you're hollow like your easter egg.

Nothing in the middle. No consistency. All talk but no walk. All icing but no cake. All information no transformation.

You're a cul-de-sac of knowledge not an avenue of good work. Such a challenge isn't it? Such a challenge for us today to not be hollow people.

[16:29] How much substance is there to our confession? When we think about what differences Jesus made to our week was it easy to come up with stuff? James says your faith has got to drive you to good works.

Your passion for the Lord Jesus is to overflow into every area of your life that we together might be altogether new creations. People that do things differently because we're not our own but we're owned by another the Lord Jesus Christ.

Don't let your faith exist in a hermetically sealed compartment in your life that has no overlap into the way that you actually live. Don't let your faith be like my mum's silver cutlery that you only bring out on special occasions and that's normally never to eat with just to polish in order that it might look nice.

James is so clear. Christian maturity isn't just what you know or how much you attend but it's what you do with what you know and the reason that you serve and love.

Be persistent in good works. Not just education but equipping for good works and the edification of the saints as it says in Ephesians 2.

[17:51] James says the faith that is dry, dead and doesn't result in good works is futile and sits at the level of the demons.

This is something we're just doing on a Sunday. There were no better than a demon. Billy Graham tells the story of flying from Chicago to Charlotte years ago.

Directly in front of him sat a large man who had been drinking a lot in the departure lounge before they boarded the plane. Once the plane reached cruising altitude and the seatbelt sign was turned off the man pressed the service button and plied himself with more refreshments.

He repeated this several times. The more he drank the louder he became and more abusive he got. The more he drank the more he flirted with the air hostesses despite wearing his wedding ring.

Finally one of the embarrassed passengers stood up and said to the drunk Sir do you realise that Billy Graham the great preacher is seated right behind you? The bleary man struggled to his feet stuck out his hand and said Billy Graham put it there.

[18:59] Glad to meet you. You have no idea how much your sermons have helped me. I listen to them every Sunday. To which Billy Graham said judging by your behaviour sir they've not helped you at all.

James is saying faith alone saves but saving faith cannot remain alone absent of works in the life of the believer.

To quote Martin Luther who didn't actually throw little Jimmy in the fire. He says oh it is a busy active mighty thing this faith and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly.

It does not ask whether there are good works to do but before the question arises it has already done them. And is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a hollow man of demonic faith.

Jesus himself will say there's lots of things out there that look like branches but they're not connected to me and therefore they're not fruitful and they're only good for the fire. Jesus will tell a story about three servants who get different sums of money.

[20:06] And the bottom one gets quite a lot of money but only one talent. And he puts it in the ground and does nothing with it. And what does Jesus say? You wicked lazy servant.

And he isn't welcomed into his master's rest like the other two. It is good works that we are not to tire of doing. James says faith alone saves but saving faith cannot remain alone absent of good works in the life of the believer.

And James gives us two case studies. He gives us the patriarch Abraham. He points us to the first and principal Jewish man.

The man Abraham. And he wants to show us that faith did something in Abraham's life. He talks about Abraham who was a former moon worshipper in Ur of the Chaldeans and God says leave all this take your family and go to the land that I promised you.

And God makes amazing promises to Abraham about descendants and land and that they would be his people and that he would be his God. And in Genesis 15 verse 6 we read what's quoted here.

[21 : 21] Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. That Abraham had faith that what God said God would do. But notice that this faith didn't remain dormant in his life.

He didn't just sit back in his hammock in the promised land and think I'll just wait for this dividend to be paid. I could do with some descendants. I'm getting quite old and this land is quite tough.

Notice what does he quote? He quotes sacrificing Isaac. Do you know how long there is between that declaration in Genesis 15 verse 6 and Genesis 22?

At least 30 years. At least 30 years it is said of Abraham that he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. That this faith started but it completed its work.

Because when God says I want you to take this son that you've waited so long for. This son that I've miraculously given you. I want you to take him up Mount Moriah and I want you to kill him as a sacrifice to me.

[22 : 32] And Abraham could have gone well we did this faith thing a while ago. I'm just kind of like life now. But he takes his son up and he trusts God and his faith does something.

And he's prepared to pay the highest price because his faith means that much to him. The highest price of obedience no matter what the cost. You see Abraham's faith and Abraham's actions were working together.

Faith produces good works. Good works complete faith. A virtuous circle. Faith produces good works. Good works complete faith.

See how it finishes? And he was called God's friend. He was called God's friend. That's from Isaiah 41. Where Isaiah is detailing the history of Israel.

And he says over all of Abraham's life he was a friend of God. Why was he a friend of God?

Because he not only trusted God but he did what God called him to do. Do you know what that means?

[23 : 35] That means over our lives can be written a friend of God's. Because we not only trust what God says but we do what God says we are to do. Faith alone saves you see but saving faith cannot remain alone.

Absent of good works in the life of the believer. But James is a brilliant pastor. Because he knows what we're all thinking well I'm not like Abraham. Abraham's kind of like the first and he's this real picture of faith.

And he's like I'm not like him so I can't trust and do what he has trusted and does. So look who he brings up in verse 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.

He is a brilliant pastor James because he knows all of us exist somewhere between that spectrum. Somewhere between Abraham the patriarch and Rahab the prostitute. And if Abraham showed his faith by what he did in being prepared to sacrifice Isaac then Rahab showed her faith by giving shelter and a means of escape to the spies.

Abraham is not a special elite that we cannot copy. He is someone that we're called to emulate by trusting God. It's a remarkable faith.

[25 : 07] Rahab's. Rahab's. She's in the city of Jericho. She understands that God is God in heaven and God on earth. She makes that declaration.

She harbors spies. If this goes badly for her she will be executed and Jericho is particularly barbaric. They even sacrifice children so they're not going to struggle to put a prostitute to death. And yet because she has faith in this God who has revealed himself to her in this way. She's prepared to put her life on the line.

In order that his work might be done. If you know her story she puts the spies under palm branches on the roof. She says oh they're not here they've gone this way.

Well she lets the spies down off a rope and says go this way. She put her life on the line. Her faith had a real cost. Because she knew what God said and she wanted to do what God wanted.

[26 : 12] I'm sure we're getting this by now but faith alone saves. But saving faith cannot remain alone absent of good works in the life of the believer.

Now all of us are somewhere on that spectrum. So all of us cannot dodge this command that our faith must work. It's not just James that's got this.

Hebrews 11 is littered with them. Talks about Noah was a man of faith who built an ark in the desert. That's great faith. That's like opening a vegetable shop in the middle of Glasgow. Moses who gave up life in Egypt didn't consider himself one of Pharaoh's sons.

Because he knew who God was and what he was going to do. Let us not just hear the warning that faith without works is dead.

Let us rejoice in the glorious promise that faith with deeds is alive. And it is life. It's not just a warning not to do this but it is a real emulation of what it means to trust God and do what he says.

[27 : 23] Because we serve a God who did more than Abraham. Who didn't just wasn't just prepared to sacrifice his son but sacrificed his son for us.

And we worship the Lord Jesus. Who wasn't just prepared to give us shelter at personal risk or give us a means of escape.

He actually died that we might have rest forever. And he actually died that we might have a means of escape forever from the wrath of God to come.

In response to all this good news this outrageous grace why would we not want to live lives of gratitude joyously involving ourselves actively in good works.

Why would we not live all of life as friends of God with our faith producing good works and our good works completing our faith. That when we think next week on what have I done differently because of Jesus we say everything absolutely everything because of the God who loves me.

[28 : 38] This is Michael Jordan when he leaves North Carolina University and he signs for the Chicago Chicago Bulls. He signs an endorsement deal for seven million dollars with Nike Athletics.

And when Jordan signed he also bought out Nike Air Jordans that exist to this day. The first Nike Air Jordans were red and black which in the mid 80s as today was a great fashion faux pas.

And no one thought they would sell. No one thought anyone would want a pair of Nike Air Jordans because they were so hideous. Another sports company tried to hijack the deal and the one stipulation that was different was we won't bring out trainers that are red and black in your name. However, Jordan signed with Nike and in March 1985 the first Nike Air Jordans came out. By May 1985 just three months later these shoes had brought in revenue of a hundred million dollars.

They'd sold every pair that they'd made and there was a massive crisis that they couldn't make more fast enough. And why? Because everybody wanted to be Michael Jordan.

[29 : 59] Everybody on the basketball courts all around the world wanted red and black shoes because they were Michael Jordan and when people saw those shoes they would think they were Michael Jordan. Such is the delusion of advertising.

Jesus says my endorsement deal involves doing good works. to be associated with me or my team means that you do good works.

That all over the world people that are associated with Jesus will adorn themselves in good works. Will dress in righteous deeds. Our good works show our association to Jesus Christ.

It is adorning ourselves with good works flowing from the gospel that people see who we are and striving to be like. Our good works are to faith in Jesus Christ what Nike and Jordans were to basketball in the 1980s.

There was the phrase that went alongside it I want to be like Mike. Wouldn't it be great if we go on from here and say I want to be like Jesus and I'll do whatever wherever whenever with whoever in order that I can make him look good.

[31 : 16] You see it's quite simple I think you're getting this by now. Faith alone saves but saving faith cannot remain alone absent of good works in the life of the believer.

I want to finish by reading Titus 3 verses 3 to 8 then I'll pray and then I'll hand back to Ian. At one time we too were foolish disobedient deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. we lived in malice and envy being hated and hating one another but when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared he saved us not because of righteous things we had done but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour so that having been justified by his grace we might

become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

This is a trustworthy saying and I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.

[32 : 27] These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. Let's pray. Father God save us from dry meaningless demonic dead faith.

Save us from just being lovers of the Lord Jesus for an hour and a half on Sunday. But Father send us out from here send us out as people who love him who want to serve him who want to make him known who want people to see our good deeds and give you thanks on the day that you visit.

Father keep us from a dry intellectualism. Father spur us to a real vibrance that works out in every area of our lives.

Father we do want to say that faith alone saves you. You've done it all for us. But Father save us from ever thinking that faith remains alone in our lives absent of good works.

Father send us out to love what you love to hate what you hate and to do all that you command us to do. Father may this week there be real evidence that we are not our own but we are owned by another even your son the Lord Jesus Christ.

[33 : 52] Amen.