

Introduction

1. For the past two weeks we've been in chapters 1 and 2 learning what it means to be quick to listen/obey
2. James began by calling on us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only
3. He then called on us to be impartial in how we obey God's Word
4. Today, he calls on us to demonstrate that we are doers of the Word by our works

A. James declares that faith without works is dead (READ 2:14-17)

1. He begins with a series of rhetorical questions (READ 2:14):
  - a. The first question is what use is it to someone if they say they have faith but they have no works?
    - 1) **"Faith"** refers to a claim of faith in Jesus (see 2:1)
    - 2) **"use"** refers to advantage or benefit—so he's asking what benefit, what advantage is it?
    - 3) **"works"** refers to what he discussed in the previous verses about being a doer of God's Word and not merely a hearer
  - b. This leads to James second rhetorical question: **"Can that faith save him?"**:
    - 1) The implied answer is, "no, it can't"
    - 2) Notice that James doesn't ask "can faith save him" but rather **"can that faith save him"**:
      - a) He's talking about a certain kind of faith, one that is in word only and not accompanied by doing
      - b) This person is a hearer of God's word but not a doer
  - 3) To make his point, he gives a real-life example (READ 2:15-16):
    - a) Obviously if we see someone in need, give them a blessing but refuse to help them, our words are useless
    - b) But James example goes deeper than that—He and his readers were Jewish and would have been well-informed about the Old Testament's teaching on caring for and providing for the poor and needy (Proverbs is filled with commands)
    - c) Jesus also taught about the value of giving and caring for the needy (Matthew 5:42; Luke 3:11; 12:33; 18:22; Acts 20:35)

- d) There were also poor, including widows and orphans, among James's readers that they were apparently neglecting (James 2:2-6)

- 4) It's difficult to interpret James's words here as anything other than this: claiming to have faith in Jesus but not doing what Jesus and God's Word says is useless—it cannot save
- 5) In fact, he summarized his point by saying that kind of faith is dead (READ 2:17)

2. Such a statement is obviously controversial:
  - a. This is one of the reasons why Martin Luther was so critical of the book of James and referred to it as an "epistle of straw"
  - b. Paul repeatedly stressed that we are saved by faith and not by works (READ Romans 2:8-9; Galatians 2:16)
  - c. We know the Bible cannot/does not contradict itself so how are we to interpret James's words in light of Paul's?
    - 1) Paul was arguing against those who claimed that God's grace and faith in Jesus wasn't enough to save, but that strict obedience to the Old Testament Law (works) was also required
    - 2) James isn't contradicting Paul or saying that faith in Jesus isn't enough to save, but rather merely claiming to have faith but without demonstration of that faith is useless because it isn't genuine faith

B. James declares that genuine faith is proven by works (READ 2:18-20)

1. In v. 18, James anticipates an objection by his readers but it's a bit challenging:
  - a. The **"someone"** is one or more of James's readers who he believes will object to his claim that faith without works is dead
  - b. All major English translations treat part or all of v. 18 as a direct quote, but since there are no quote marks in the Greek text it's not clear where the quote ends:
    - 1) The NASB and LSB treat nearly all of the verse as a quote, but this doesn't make sense because it would suggest the person is objecting to the exact opposite of what James is saying (RE-READ)
    - 2) Most other versions try to solve this by ending the quote after the first **"works"**:
      - a) Objector: **"You have faith and I have works"**
      - b) James's reply: **"Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works"**

- c) This isn't much better because it still accuses James of having faith (not works) and the speaker as having works (not faith) which is contrary to his argument
  - d) It also makes James reply awkward: why would James say "show me your faith without works" when the objector said "I have works"?
- c. A better approach is to understand the first part of v. 18 as an indirect quote:
- 1) A direct quote would be something like "You said, 'I hate kale'" but an indirect quote would be "You said THAT you hate kale."
  - 2) Understanding v. 18 as an indirect quote makes more sense: "**But one of you might say [THAT] you have faith and [THAT] I [James] have works...**"
  - 3) In other words, they are boasting about their faith even though it has no evidence or proof (works), and accusing James of not having faith but only works
2. James responds to this objection/boasting by demanding that they show him their faith without works while he demonstrates his faith BY his works (RE-READ 2:18b)
- a. He reveals the absurdity of such boasting and accusation by equating their so-called "**faith**" with that of demons (READ 2:19)
  - b. He then calls on them to consider that such faith is useless by comparing it to the faith of two Old Testament saints:
  - 1) The first example is Abraham (READ 21-24):
    - a) James says that Abraham was "**justified by works**"
    - b) This seems to run contrary to Paul's claim in Romans 4:2 that Abraham wasn't justified by works (READ Romans 4:1-4)
    - c) But, there's no contradiction:
      - Part of resolving this is understanding that sometimes the word justified in the Bible refers to declaring or making one righteous while at other times it refers to demonstrating or proving someone to be righteous.
      - In Romans 4, the works Paul was referring to are "**works of the flesh**", specifically circumcision, and he wrote that Abraham wasn't declared or pronounced righteous because of that; he was declared righteous because of His belief/faith
      - Here, the works James is referring to is Abraham offering up Isaac on the altar and how it demonstrated or proved that Abraham's faith was genuine, and therefore proved what the Scriptures said about him—that He believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness

- d) He explains this in the next two verses (READ 2:22-23):
  - Abraham's "**faith was working with his works**": in other words, his faith was accompanied by works
  - As a result, Abraham's faith was perfected—the ESV says, "and faith was completed by his works" (it was genuine, real)
  - His offering up Isaac "**fulfilled the Scriptures**"—was stated earlier in Genesis 15:6 when Abraham believed God's promises and he was declared righteous

- 2) The second example is Rahab (READ 2:25):
  - a. Hebrews 11:31 specifically declares that Rahab's protection of the spies was an act of faith
  - b. Here, James equates that act of faith with works and states that Rahab was "**justified by works**"
  - c. James isn't saying that Rahab's works made her righteous, but rather like Abraham they demonstrated or proved her to be righteous because her faith was genuine
  - d. She, like Abraham, was a doer of the word and not just a hearer

- 3. James ends his discussion by re-integrating that faith without works is dead (READ 2:18)

<h3>Conclusion/Takeaway</h3>
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- 1. Unfortunately, we are living at a time when faith in Jesus has been reduced to saying a sinner's prayer or simply attending church, without any expectation of true repentance and obedience to the Word of God or His commands
- 2. But that's not genuine faith because as we learned today genuine faith is accompanied by works—being a doer of the Word
- 3. Faith that is in word or label only is useless, dead; it's not genuine and that kind of faith cannot save
- 4. Jesus made this clear when He said in Matthew 7:21, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.**"