

Jim, Jim, Jim, Jim. Jim. What are we to do with Jim. Or the more important question. Jim, Whadda Ya Got For Us Today!

Today in our sermon series, “Jim Time”, James takes us on another expedition through the topics of faith and works. And as we are beginning to expect in his MOO, his mode of operation, he doesn’t hold back on the questions he poses and the examples he gives to answer those questions.

The main point of our passage today is this. Faith and works should be travel companions. They should go side by side, stepping together, like the legs of someone who is walking. But he makes an important distinction. Faith is first and lived out through works.

According to James, faith and works should be tied together so closely that you can barely tell which one is which. James is saying to his church and to us, don’t tell me about your faith; show it to me. Any true faith is a working faith.

James addresses this topic through three basic questions about our faith.

First, “Do You Have a Living Faith?” James asks two rhetorical questions to address this first question. " What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? "

These two rhetorical questions declare that faith **NOT** accompanied by good deeds is of no value period. The emphasis is not just on the true nature of faith but also on any false claims of faith.

James makes it clear. This kind of faith, which is really no faith at all, is useless.

Ophelos, a Greek word used in James’ first question means **advantage, profit, or benefit.**

Today we would say things like, Why bother, or what’s the point?

For a person entertaining the idea that a belief not backed up by action can save them, that person may be in for some disappointment.

James doesn't leave us guessing as to what he might mean. He offers a vivid example. "If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

This brother or sister is a person who is naked and destitute. It's not just that they have raggedy clothes; they have no clothes at all. They are literally naked!

This brother or sister is not a person with some food or food they don't like; they are destitute, they are starving. James is intentionally overstating the need here. He creates the image of a believer in drastic need. Not a mild case of need. This is a desperate one.

Let's try an illustration that we can understand better. We have a young boy, on an errand for his mother. He went to the store to buy a dozen eggs. As he was walking out of the store, he tripped and dropped the sack. Every single egg broke, and the sidewalk was a mess. The boy tried to hold back the tears. People started gathering to see if he was OK. They told the boy how sorry they were for what happened. Then a man steps forward and hands the boy a quarter. He turns to the rest and says, "I care 25 cents worth. How much do the rest of you care?"

Words just don't mean much when we have the ability to offer more. True faith transforms our conduct and moves us beyond mere thoughts and prayers.

When someone who claims to be a follower of Jesus lives an unchanged life, that is a person who may not fully believe the truths that Jesus taught.

James issues the prognosis for such a faith. It's a faith that is dead. REPEAT. A living faith involves a faith of action. A living faith requires actions that mirror the actions of Jesus. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but a verification of, our faith in Christ.

Well, that's the first question. Whew! But wait there's more. The next question from James...

Do You Have a Showing Faith?

In verse 18, James lays out the evidence for his case. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you faith.

It's almost like the announcement of the next boxing match. In this corner, weighing in with a 20lb bible, a 5-inch cross around his neck, and a tattoo that says John 3:16, is our contestant named "I have faith." In this corner, with no bible, no cross, no tattoo, wearing a t-shirt that says, "love is the answer" is our other contestant named "I have works."

James continues to draw in the leash with his next point. Faith and works are not necessarily related to each other and it is possible to have either one without the other. You can be a religious person who does not engage in good works. You can be a non-religious person who engages in good works.

James pulls in tight to take on this false hypothesis regarding a separation of faith and works. He is going to put it to the test.

Show me your faith apart from works, The correct answer to this test is simple: you can't show faith without works.

Faith is not demonstrated when it lacks action. Faith is an attitude of our inner person. It is only as visible as the actions of one who claims to possess it.

James reveals the correct answer to his test when he says. "I by my works will show you faith." James does not separate faith from works. Notices that he is not saying that we are saved by works. What he's saying is that our works are produced by our faith.

This reminds me of a story of a war where General and his army found themselves in quite a predicament. They approached a river and discovered that they actually needed to be on the other side of it. The General went to his engineers and told them to plan and build a bridge over the river so they could get to the other side. Then he spoke to his wagon master. He said it was urgent that the wagon train cross the river as soon as possible. The wagon master started gathering all the logs, rocks and fence rails he could find and built a bridge. Long before day light the General was told by the wagon master with all the wagons and artillery had crossed the river. The General was shocked. He asked the next most logical question. Where were the engineers and what were they doing? The wagon master's reply? They were in their tent drawing up plans for a bridge.

This isn't a knock on planning, planning is important. The point is this faith without works won't get wagons across a bridge, but faith with works might, just might help win the war.

James issues yet another challenge to the "I have faith" camp. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder." To "believe" in one God may be good so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. The demons may believe, but they do not have a living faith.

A recent Pew Research poll shows that about 70% of all Americans identify as a Christian. This is encouraging given that just a few years back the decline seemed to be in a free fall. Of those 70% how many do you think are living it. Are you living it? If you were arrested today for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Ready for one last question from James? Do You Have a Following Faith? James uses great people of faith to help answer this question.

His first example? Abraham. Vs 22 "Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" The word "justified" means "to be declared righteous."

Abraham was declared right by what he did. Does that mean we can be declared right by simply doing good things? No! In the next verse James says this. You see that faith was active along with his works, and by his works faith was brought to completion. Abraham's faith was working together with his works, and his works made his faith complete.

It was not faith by itself or works by themselves. It was the both of them working together.

Next, James turns to the story of Rahab. This story is told in the book of Joshua. Rahab was a prostitute living in Jericho. She agreed to hide Israelite spies and then send them out of the city safely.

Now Rahab was engaged in the oldest profession. Does that make you want to ask a question like, "How can a prostitute be a hero of faith?"

Rahab is indeed a hero of faith because she put her faith into practice. She took great risks to do what she did. If the people of Jericho found out, they would kill her. She also took the risk that the Israelites would not keep their word. Church family, people of faith are risk takers. By faith she believed God and took the risk.

Rahab not only received the reward of being rescued before the walls of Jericho came down, she was also one of a handful of women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. Rahab the prostitute is part of the lineage of Jesus.

Church family, if we are going to be people of faith, we need to put our faith into action the way Abraham and Rahab did. We need to commit to a faith that is useful, not useless.

What kind of faith do you have? Is it a living faith? Is it a showing faith? Is it a following faith? Is your faith a working faith?