

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF JAMES

STUDY NUMBER 5 – JAMES 2:14-26

FAITH IS DEAD WITHOUT DEEDS

Faith is dead without deeds. We're into chapter 2 picking up at verse 14.

Let me start with:

Matthew 7:20

“Wherefore by their fruits, you shall know them.”

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount.

James is very adamant that once you come to know Christ as Savior, there will be clear evidences of the fact by the works that flow or the fruit that flows from your life—that you truly have had an eternal transaction with the Lord.

The absence of such fruitage or evidence would likewise lead us to be concerned about the reality of the faith that has been confessed.

Now thus far James has told us that first of all we can plan in our Christian life that we will be tested. Tests are sovereignly designed by God for spiritual growth. So what's my response when I am tested by the Lord?

You say “Yes, bring it on! Whatever it is, Lord, do what You want to do.”

Then the second week we talked about temptation. Temptation, however, comes and is designed by the devil to derail us. What do you say in temptation? “No, I’m outta here!” You flee the temptation.

Then on the third week we talked about the priority of the Word of God.

If you are truly a born-again believer, in Jesus Christ, you’re going to handle the test by submitting to it. You’re going to resist the temptation by saying no. But, you’re going to have an insatiable appetite for the Word of God. You have a longing in your heart to know more and more of what the Lord has to say.

I like to put it this way: You wake up every morning hungry for the Word.

Then our last time together we were talking about love with partiality. And I used the illustration of a guy coming in with bib overalls to church and the guy coming in a fancy suit and clothes and how we are partial in the way we look at people and treat them and the kind of love that is genuine, that is from a born-again believer is not partial.

Now we come to this fifth demonstration of a born-again believer. That is, there are evidences in his life and it will in fact come out in conduct and relationship. It came out in your life this morning. You woke up and you have a relationship with the Lord and you know this is His day so you didn't even hardly have to think about it. You got dressed and you came. You are manifesting the fruit of someone who is hungry to have something from the Word of God that you can understand. It's not something you're trying to do. You didn't come to try to impress people that you're here. It's simply that you came to be fed and go away nourished from the Word of God. That's a manifestation of the fruitage of a relationship that you have with the Lord.

Pick up with me in verse 14. Are you ready? I'm excited!

v.14 What good does it do, my brethren, if a person is saying: "I am having faith" and he is not having works? [QUESTION] That faith is not able to save him, is it?

As James starts this part of it, on this business of conduct and your relationship to the Lord, he asks these two questions. The first one is:

"What good does it do, my brethren"—this is for believers, OK. He's writing to Christians—"if a person [this is the question] is saying: 'I am having faith' and he is not having works?"

Then the second question of course answers the first and stimulates your thinking:

“That faith is not able to save him, is it?”

What he means here, is that people will say something simply just because it's the thing to say. A lot of times people say: “I have faith. I believe in God because I don't want you messing with me in my personal life. I don't want to get emotional. I don't want to get fanatic. I don't want to lose control. Yeah, I believe. I believe. I believe.” And you see no evidence of that in their lives.

I think it's sad to see our politicians in a year of election, once again, try to impress us with their spiritual commitment by covering all the bases to get votes. That's a great illustration of what we're talking about. Here's somebody who will be in a photo opt at the Jerusalem wall.

And here's another one who wants a personal luncheon with Billy Graham. Here's another one who wants to have an audience with the Pope. All of those are using religion as a basis to prove their morality and their ability to rule politically.

There is no evidence whatsoever in the life of that which would demonstrate the reality of the faith.

When you see people who are just surface, they don't have any evidence in their lives by the things they do and the things they say, then we've got to call it to question. James does. That's all he's doing.

“What good does it do, my brethren, if a person says: ‘I am having faith’ and he is not having works?”

“That faith is not able to save him.”

Now some have said Paul is the great apostle of faith and James is the great apostle of works. No, no, no. Please don't even entertain that thought for a moment. Paul would say exactly the same thing. I want you to hear it from the book of Titus. He's writing to Titus on the Island of Crete.

Titus 1:16

Such persons claim they know God, but from seeing the way they act one knows they don't. They are rotten and disobedient, worthless so far as doing anything good is concerned.

So he's saying the same thing. You've got people who could use the words faith and trust and speak religious language but when you get close and you look at their lives, there's no evidence.

Titus 3:8 is another great verse. The latter part of that epistle.

Titus 3:8

These things I have told you are all true. Insist on them so that Christians will be careful to do good deeds all the time. For this is not only right, but [what does it do?] it brings results.

When you get a hold of the real deal you just can't sleep. You just can't shut it down. You're excited about people around you and an opportunity to please the Lord and share with others what the saving faith is all about.

It's just like an apple tree is supposed to bear apples. A clock is supposed to tell time. A car without wheels isn't going anywhere. And James says, "Man, you've got those things but you don't have one or the other." This is the way he's going to talk about it. It's recognizing that faith produces fruit and that fruit are the works that flow from your life.

Somebody put it this way:

Your Christianity goes from your HEAD to your HEART and then to your HAND.

It passes through to the point where intellectually you realize the evidence for the Gospel is indisputable and that it moves to your heart and you're touched by the incredible change that comes when you've experienced

what the choir just sang about, when you experience a Savior who loves you so much that He gave His life for you. And you say, “What can I do in return? How can I demonstrate the living Christ with the gifts and abilities that He’s provided?”

Listen to 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 13:5

Check up on yourselves. Are you really Christians? Do you pass the test? Do you feel Christ’s presence and power more and more within you? Or, are you just pretending to be Christians when actually God has rejected you.

Oh that was convicting. Because he’s saying at the end of all that “just test yourselves along this line, be sure.”

Jump with me to verse 15

v.15 If a brother or a sister [now look, these are believers, aren’t they? You’ve got a brother and a sister in the family of Christ—this is somebody here in the fellowship, let’s put it that way. This is not somebody outside where they’ve had a crisis and you’re going to meet that crisis. This is somebody right here that you know, let’s say, in the body of Christ, brother or a sister] **be poorly dressed, and in need of daily food,**

What should your response and what should my response be as a believer in Christ when we have this condition in the flock that we know about?

v.16 and one of you says to them “Be going in peace, dress warmly (keep warm), [in other words] and feed yourselves; and you do not give them the things needful for the body, what good does it do?”

If you’ll remember, one of the characteristics of the early church is they had everything in common. They were always sharing with people in need. It was not just meals, clothes, money, it’s whatever was needed among the resources in the body they took care of each other. And James is living in that time. And so he’s saying, “Your real faith is going to show up when you get intimately involved with your love without partiality in meeting the needs of others. That’s a living faith.”

John comes right along behind that and listen to:

1 John 3:17-19

But if someone, who is supposed to be a Christian, has money to live well and sees his brother in need, and won’t help him, how can God’s love be within him? Little children, let us stop just saying we love people, let us really love them and show it by our actions. Then we will know for sure, by our actions, that we are on God’s side and our

consciences will be clear, even when we stand before the God.

So, with this love and compassion without partiality that we talked about two weeks ago, with that love and compassion we're motivated as a result of our saving faith to want to meet the needs of others. We're reaching out to be a part and parcel of the remedy with our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is real faith in Christ.

I want to make one statement first before I go on to the next verse and this is F. B. Meyer.

“Faith appropriates the nature of God . . .”

So saving faith is going to look like God in action.

“ . . . just as the expanded lung does the mountain air, or the child does the parent's gift. Faith like a narrow channel, conveys God's ocean fullness into the lagoons of human needs.”

We're going there to meet needs because this is the way we are. We're following in the steps of our Savior.

v.17 So also faith, if it is not having works, it is dead by itself.

That's convicting isn't it? And it almost makes you think that somehow you've missed it. It's not just

enough to have faith in Christ, you've got to have faith in Christ but you've also have to work like crazy if you're going to make it to heaven. See, you've taken everything completely out of context.

First of all, we're writing to believers, aren't we? And for a believer to say "I'm living by faith and there's nothing else I have to do. I've got it all set up. I'm going to glory." That faith by itself is not real, according to James. It is dead by itself. Intellectual faith has not affected the way this person lives in the illustration.

Now, verse 18.

v.18 But a man will say: "You are having faith and I am having works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

Now he's really pulling it in. He's saying "First of all, you show me your faith without your works. I want to look at you. I want to look at your life. I want to look at how you conduct yourself since you're telling me you have faith and faith alone and that's all there is to it. And there's nothing else to be done." No. I don't want to see that.

And then he comes around with the second deal and says "I'm going to show you my faith by my works. You hang around with me for a while and you're going to find out what it's like to walk with Jesus. You hang

around with me a while, I'm going to show you some marvelous things that are taking place in the early church. This guy that wrote this thing is a half brother of Jesus Christ and he's a pillar in the early church. He says "Come on down. We'll show you some stuff. We'll let you have a real look at when God shows up and what happens when He shows up and what He accomplishes and what he does."

So he uses two different cycles there, that's all that is. In verse 14: "if a person is saying" and then he illustrates it, concludes it with verse 17. "So also faith, if it is not having works, it is dead by itself." Then in verse 18 we've got another cycle: "A man will say: 'You are having faith'" and then the two illustrations, for just as the body without breathe is dead, so also "faith without works" is dead.

Now you're saying, "Ok, tell me how faith that is alive works? How does it look?"

I'm glad you said that. Because the answer has already been given in the previous five weeks. First of all, living faith will never question what God has to do to make me more like Christ so I say sic'em when the test comes! Do whatever you want because I want to be the most productive servant that I can before I'm out of here. I'll take it in the teeth. I don't care what it is. The test is designed to make me more Christlike.

And secondly, when temptation comes I won't bat an eyelash. I won't hinder. I will get out of Dodge as fast as I can and I will resist the temptation.

Thirdly, I will wake up every morning with an insatiable hunger for the Word of God. I have to have the Word to live spiritually.

And fourth, I will see my brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. I don't care about their background or wherever they've come from. They are my brothers and sisters and I love them unconditionally without partiality, full of compassion, ready to meet whatever need they bring to the table.

Saving faith. I'll take the test. I'll be tempted but I'll resist. I'll take the Word of God, I'm hungry every day and my love is without partiality. And one of the things you're going to notice when you get close is that fruit flowing out of my life is showing evidences that I am a child of God. That's all James is saying.

The closer you get to a person the more you realize they are unselfish and they're sacrificial and they're totally given over to servanthood. They're only there to bless. They're only there to help. They're only there to give. They have no secret agenda. They have no presupposition of influence at all. It's just glory to God, fruit being born through our lives.

James is not discussing works and salvation in this passage. This is where Martin Luther got off of the deal by thinking of the conflict between faith and works. He didn't have much complimentary to say about James. In fact he called it an epistle of straw because he couldn't put together the fact that he'd come out of works and into faith in Christ.

Listen to Jesus in John 15. I think this will help.

John 15:16

You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father, in My Name, He may give you.

It is by fruitage in our lives that our faith can be seen.

People see it when we act.

You want to start with Abel, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Rahab. All these people manifested a faith because of the things they did and decided to do in given sets of circumstances. We'll get two illustrations here as we get ready to close.

v.19 You are believing that God is one; you are doing well. The demons also are believing and shuddering.

See the demons know that their time here is temporary. They lost their kingdom truly by what Christ did upon the cross. And they believe, oh yes they do, and they're scared about what's coming in the future. So for me just to say "I believe" and that means I have saving faith, James says "No, there's a whole lot more to it than that." There'll be great evidences of it. Saving faith has passed from the head to the heart to the hand. It's only in the head. It has not reached the heart or the hand here in verse 19.

v.20 But are you wishing to know, [he gets kind of strong once in a while] oh senseless man, that faith without deeds is useless?

Back to the same subject. Flowing from my life will be evidences. Then he gives you two illustrations here in closing.

v.21 Was not our father, Abraham, vindicated by works in that he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar?

Ok, let's take the story of Abraham for just a second. When did his faith get exercised? You see, it was exercised when God said "Get out of Er of the Caldees and go to a place that I will tell you to go."

He left trusting God. God said he's going to be a father of many nations. Instead of waiting for God to provide that promise baby at the 25 year mark, at year 15 he listens to his wife Sarah and they have a baby by the

name of Ishmael. And they go through at least a period of 13 years thinking they had done it on their own. But God said “Ok, I’m ready now.” At the 25 year mark, Isaac is born.

The first thing God says to be sure that Abraham understands that this is a God-thing he said “Take Isaac, and I don’t mean Ishmael, I mean Isaac. Take him and offer him as a sacrifice up here over on the mount.” That’s Genesis 22. God did test Abraham.

Is he going to respond to the test properly because he’s exercised faith? You better believe it man! He got the donkey saddled and the wood prepared. Took his son and headed toward the mountain and raised the knife to take his life when God said “Stop!” So it has nothing to do with anything but a manifestation of complete trust, faith in God that He will do what He said He would do. And the book of Hebrews has it beautifully:

“We will go and worship over yonder and we will return to you.”

“If I kill my son on that mountain, God is going to raise him from the dead because he’s the promised seed for the race through whom Christ will come.” He didn’t say all that, but we can now that we look back on it. But he did use “we” and “we.” Knowing that if he died on the mountain, God would raise him and send him back.

All that teaches you about Abraham as you surrender to God's authority and His slightest wish is your supreme command. Then you tell Him by your life and your response that you have living faith.

v.22 You are seeing that faith was working with his good deeds, [Yep, we can sure see that] and faith was perfected in good deeds.

Instant obedience is a manifestation of saving faith. Trusting God to work it out, He did it. Now we go from one to the other.

v.23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which said: "And Abraham believed God, and it was credited to his account for righteousness," and he was called a friend of God.

Three different passages, "friend of God."

v.24 You are seeing that a man by works is shown to be righteous and not by [just saying I believe] faith alone.

Now we go from a very sophisticated, high society gentleman like Abraham to the other bottom to a prostitute showing you saving faith in another illustration beautifully given.

v.25 Now in like manner was not Rahab the prostitute vindicated by works in that she entertained as guests the messengers and sent them out another way?

Rahab lived in Jericho. When those spies came in, she lied. She put them up under the flax on the roof. Told the guys to go find them. They'd already gone. But the minute they get gone she goes up there and says "You know, I really believe God because I've heard what God has done for you. You are God's people and He's going to destroy the city but would you protect us if I protect you?" In other words, she's already manifesting faith. And out of her faith, God delivers that whole family. She ends up marrying a guy by the name of Samon after they get out of Jericho and thirty generations later she is part of the progeny of Jesus Christ the Messiah. That's a God-thing! You can't question what God did in Rahab's life and how He transformed and changed her and that she was a vehicle for God in protecting these servants.

And our last verse is the key verse.

v.26 For just as the body without breath is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

He's giving you the final picture. Is there evidence?

When by faith you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, then it will begin to be manifested in your life.

I have a new and very high appreciation, and you will too when you hear this story. Mike Holmgren of the Seattle Seahawks is one incredible person. I want you to hear this story because you don't have any questions

when you walk out of here about the heart of Mark Holmgren's wife and of his too.

The Super Bowl is one of the most anticipated events in America each year. With the championship of the NFL on the line, entertaining commercials, and a spectacular halftime show, an estimated 190 million people watched the game in 2006. And one would assume the wife of one of the head coaches in the game would be one of those 190 million.

But Kathy Holmgren, the wife of Seattle Seahawks head coach Mike Holmgren, decided to skip Super Bowl XL, and Detroit, for something she considered more important—a faith-based humanitarian trip to Africa.

Kathy Holmgren and her daughter, Calla, left three days before the big game on a 17-day medical training mission with Northwest Medical Teams—a relief group based in Portland, Oregon—to the northwest region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. A nurse and obstetrician, respectively, the two joined six other physicians with experience as missionaries.

They went through roads, rivers, everywhere they could go to get to this target place and after they got there, while much of the world tuned in to the Super Bowl, the team was working with the staff of a hospital operated by the Evangelical Covenant Church, the denomination the Holmgrens belong to.

The hospital is the only medical facility for 300,000 people in the region, and the staff is often forced to use rudimentary equipment when treating 2,500 patients a month. More than 3.9 million Congolese have died since 1998, most from preventable disease, according to the British medical journal *The Lancet*.

Kathy Holmgren spent 10 months in the region during 1970, but gave up her dream of being a Covenant medical missionary to marry. Last October, Mike Holmgren's birthday present to his wife was the trip back to the country she loves.

The family did not consider the two women might miss the Super Bowl.

“I don't think we paid much attention to the date,” Kathy said. “As the possibility of our being in the game became a reality, we decided to continue with our plans. The actual game makes me so nervous, so I don't watch anyway, and we feel like this trip is more important.”

Don't you love it?

I don't have a question about Kathy Holmgren and her heart and her priorities when I read a story like that.

Are people reading stories about you like that?

Nothing takes the place of sharing Jesus with others.

CONCLUSION:

LESSON #1: It is possible to believe and not be a Christian.

LESSON #2: Living faith will reveal itself in Spirit produced fruit.

LESSON #3: The divine equation is Faith + Food = Fruit.

LESSON #4: Faith will reveal itself by being constructively involved in the lives of others.

LESSON #5: As long as you are concerned about doing enough, you probably have not exercised saving faith.

STUDY NUMBER FIVE - FAITH IS DEAD WITHOUT DEEDS — **JAMES 2:14-26**

KEY VERSE 2:26

v.14 What good does it do, my brethren, if a person is saying: “I am having faith” and he is not having works? That faith is not able to save him, is it?

v.15 If a brother or a sister be poorly dressed, and in need of daily food,

v.16 and one of you says to them “Be going in peace, dress warmly (keep warm), and feed yourselves; and you do not give them the things needful for the body, what good does it do?

v.17 So also faith, if it is not having works, it is dead by itself.

v.18 But a man will say: “You are having faith and I am having works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

v.19 You are believing that God is one; you are doing well. The demons also are believing and shuddering.

v.20 But are you wishing to know, oh senseless man, that faith without deeds is useless?

v.21 Was not our father, Abraham, vindicated by works in that he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar?

v.22 You are seeing that faith was working with his good deeds, and faith was perfected in good deeds.

v.23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which said: “And Abraham believed God, and it was credited to his account for righteousness,” and he was called a friend of God.

v.24 You are seeing that a man by works is shown to be righteous and not by faith alone.

v.25 Now in like manner was not Rahab the prostitute vindicated by works in that she entertained as guests the messengers and sent them out another way?

v.26 For just as the body without breath is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

NOTES

QUESTIONS:

1. Read James 2:14-26 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. How does James say our faith should work when someone comes to us with a need, according to verses 15 & 16?

3. What is the condition of a faith that does not do anything, according to verse 17?

4. Who else believes that there is one God, according to verse 19?

5. What Old Testament character does James use to illustrate his point about doing something with our faith?

6. What name was Abraham given, according to verse 23?

7. What other Old Testament illustration does James use in verse 25?

8. State in your own words what James means in verse 26.

9. Which verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: It is possible to believe and not be a Christian.

LESSON #2: Living faith will reveal itself in Spirit produced fruit.

LESSON #3: The divine equation is Faith + Food = Fruit.

LESSON #4: Faith will reveal itself by being constructively involved in the lives of others.

LESSON #5: As long as you are concerned about doing enough, you probably have not exercised saving faith.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:
