

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

How to Make Your Faith Real

James 2:14-26

1 Have you ever wondered how you could make your faith real? Have you ever thought that it needed to be more than what you already have? Maybe not. But consider James, chapter 2, verses 14 through 26 before you make up your mind. 2

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.¹ 3

But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor

¹ James 2:14-17.

Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ² ₄

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 justified by what he does and not by faith alone. ³ ₅

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. ⁴ ₆

The first thing to consider is . . .

² James 2:18-21.

³ James 2:22-24.

⁴ James 2:25-26.

I. The Misunderstanding About Faith

The misunderstanding about faith. ⁷

The first current misunderstanding about faith is **you can be saved by simply living a good life**. Right? ⁸ Not true! ⁹

Did you know you can live a good life and still go to hell?

Ask yourself this: who sets the standards to determine who is bad and who is good? Who draws the line in the sand and separates the good guys from the bad guys?

Usually it's you. Right? You will always put yourself on the good guy side. You will justify this decision by saying to yourself and others, "I live a pretty decent life. People like me. Bad guys are people who murder, rape, steal valuable things or defraud. They get arrested and thrown into jail. You read about them in the newspapers or see them on the evening TV news. I

have not done anything bad enough to get arrested. So, I'm on the good guy side of that line. Right?"

But the Bible says only God, the Creator and absolute Sovereign of the universe, has the authority to decide whether you are good or bad. He is the One Who determines whether you are good enough to go to heaven.

He has determined that goodness and badness are not determined by the Merit-Demerit System; the bookkeeping method where, supposedly, good deeds will outweigh the bad deeds.

Instead, He has set that standard. You know what it is? Absolute perfection! ¹⁰ James, chapter 2, verse 10, **For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.** ¹¹ Guess what? There's no forgiveness found in the Bible for those who trust in the good guy/bad guy system.

Faith in the Lord Jesus is essential for salvation, not your arbitrary standard! ¹² The Bible says, **For we**

maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.⁵ ¹³

Notice what the Apostle Paul said about the Law of Moses, the Merit-Demerit System, the Jews were using to justifying themselves the way many of us do today, We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

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You cannot get to heaven simply by trying to live good enough. ¹⁴

The second major misunderstanding is that you simply believe certain things about God. Intellectual faith solves the salvation problem. Right? ¹⁵

Wrong! This is wrong for several reasons. ¹⁶

⁵ Romans 3:28.

⁶ Galatians 2:15-16.

1. John the Baptist said you have to prove the reality of your repentance. ⁷ ₁₇
2. The Lord said that we have to live so the world can see our good works. ⁸ ₁₈
3. The Lord insisted that faith that existed in words only could never be a substitute for doing the will of God. ⁹ ₁₉
4. Romans, chapter 2, verse 6 says, God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” ₂₀

⁷ Matthew 3:8 - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. & Luke 3:8 - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

⁸ Matthew 5:16 - In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

⁹ Matthew 7:15-21 - “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.””

5. Romans, chapter 13, verse 12 says, **The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.** 21

6. Romans, chapter 14, verse 12, **So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.** 22

7. First Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 8, **The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.**

II. Why is an Intellectual Belief Alone Inadequate? - v14-20

Why is an intellectual belief alone inadequate? ²⁴

Because it can't really save you. Verse 14 states, **What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?** ²⁵

Romans, chapter 3, verse 28 says we are saved without works. ¹⁰ ²⁶ But Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 10 tells us we are saved for works! ¹¹ ²⁷

What this is saying is God wants you to surrender to Him just as you are. He can, then, mold you into what He wants you to be. As a result, you can honor God by doing good works! ²⁸

Because it can't accomplish God's will. Verses 15 and 16 continue, **Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go,**

¹⁰ Romans 3:28 - For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

When I was a preteen my dad came home from a weekend trip he took with his boss. Dad, a nonbeliever, was so irritated with his boss whom he concluded was a hypocritical Christian.

We lived in a foreign country which, for several generations, had been a European colony. The Muslim population was smoldering with anti European dissent. It was even a bit dangerous for white people to be alone in some locations at that time.

Dad’s boss was driving his vehicle, and on the way home from the trip, passed by a stranded car with an American license plate. However, instead of stopping to help, the boss continued driving on to their destination. It turned out, being a Sunday morning, that the boss wanted to get home in time to attend his religious services at the base chapel. From dad’s point of view, this did not put Christians in a favorable light! 29

Works, in this case helping people, is your response to, what the Bible calls, the Royal Law; **Love your neighbor as yourself**, found in Mark, chapter 12, verse 31. It is echoed again here in verse 8 of this chapter. ¹²

³⁰ The Lord implied that only those who expressed their faith charitably would enter His kingdom. ¹³ ³¹

Because it can't make you any more righteous than a demon! Verse 19 says, **You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder.** It was a giant step for a Gentile (a non-Jew) in ancient times to accept the concept that there was only one God!

In Mark, chapter 5, Jesus tied up His boat on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He was immediately confronted by a very strong man who lived in the tombs and was **with an evil spirit**. In verse 7 the demon possessed man fell at the Lord's feet and cried out with a loud voice, **What do You want with**

¹² James 2:8 - If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

¹³ Matthew 25:31-46.

me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that You won't torture me! Jesus drove out many evil demons from him and threw them into a herd of pigs!

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Because your faith needs to come alive! Notice verse 17, In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. Again, we have verse 20, You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? And again, we have verse 26, As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.³³

Adam was a perfect human being, but he was dead until God breathed into him the breath of life.¹⁴ A car may be in perfect running condition but won't run until you put gasoline in it. A vacuum cleaner will not clean a rug until you plug it in.³⁴

Faith needs works to make it come alive! Titus, chapter 2, verse 7, **In everything set them an example by doing what is good**.³⁵ Also in verse 10 we read,

¹⁴ Genesis 2:7.

Show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive. ³⁶

III. How Do You Know God Honors

This Kind of Faith? - v21-26

How do you know God honors this kind of faith? ³⁷

Because God justified Abraham. Verses 21 through 24 reads, **Was not our ancestor 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 justified by what he does and not by faith alone.** ³⁸

Abraham left the City of Ur with his family. He had no idea where he was going but remained obedient to God’s call. ³⁹

Abraham trusted God's word that Isaac would be born to him even though he and his wife were well beyond childbearing years. His wife, Sarah, simply laughed! Incidentally, the name Isaac means laughter in Hebrew. ¹⁵ ₄₀

Abraham was willing to sacrifice the son whom he loved on an alter because God told him to. ₄₁

Abraham trusted God by obeying Him even though he didn't understand and desperately wanted to! ₄₂

Because God justified Rahab. Verses 25 and 26 continue, 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. ₄₃

It is interesting to note here that Rahab, at this time, was a practicing prostitute. She was considered the

¹⁵ יִצְחָק.

least to succeed spiritually. ⁴⁴ But her faith was demonstrated in hiding the spies of Israel. ¹⁶ ⁴⁵

Because of her faith, she was rescued at Jericho and became one of the Lord's ancestors! ¹⁷ ⁴⁶

I believe to make this message complete we need to answer a final question.

IV. What are the Ingredients of Real Faith?

- Hebrews 11:3-7

What are the ingredients of real faith? ⁴⁷

To answer this question we need to look at Hebrews, chapter 11, verses 3 through 7.

By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. By faith Abel offered God a

¹⁶ Joshua 2:1 - Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. & Joshua 6:17 - The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.

¹⁷ Matthew 1:5 - Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab . . .

better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

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Recognize God as Creator! Verse 3, . . . understand that the universe was formed at God's command . . . 49

Worship God through the blood of Christ! Verse 4, By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did.

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Walk with God like Enoch walked with God! Verse 5, Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 51

Work your faith. Noah spent 120 years preaching and building that ark! Verse 7, By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

The story is told of a boy who snuck into a movie theater with his friend and his dog. During the movie the dog would laugh at the funny scenes and cry during the sad scenes just like the boys did. The friend remarked, "I can't believe that dog of yours. He laughs at the funny scenes and cries during the sad scenes That's incredible!" The dog's owner responded, "That is incredible. He didn't like the book!" 52

To the rest of the world your faith is either a book containing just words or a movie alive with actions!

What kind of faith are you going to have?

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