Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Dead Faith
Scripture: James 2:14-20
Code: 59-15

1986

We come now to our study of God's Word and how grateful I am in my own heart for this wonderful occasion to look at the precious revelation of our blessed Lord. Let's open our Bibles to James chapter 2 looking at verses 14 through 20. Let me read it to you.

What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith and has not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled. Notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body, what does it profit? Even so, faith if it has not works is dead being alone. Yea, a man may say thou hast faith and I have works, show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God, thou doest well. The demons also believe and tremble.

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead.

The psychologist, Dr. Alfred Adler holds an interesting theory of individual psychology. When dealing with people, he says, "Trust only in movement, life happens at the level of action." In fact, Adler goes on to say, "We are not what we say but we are what we do. What we do," he says, "is the real key to our intentions." Trust only in movement. He has discovered what the Word of God teaches. He has discovered what James is saying here. He has observed in human behavior from the viewpoint of psychology that the only real revelation of a person is through that person's behavior.

To sort of paraphrase James, faith plus nothing equals nothing. James, for example, describes the kind of faith that equals nothing, he calls it "dead faith" in verse 17, in verse 20 and again at the end of the chapter in verse 26...dead faith.

Now inevitably, people with dead faith always substitute words for deeds. They want you to believe that they are what they say when you must understand that we are what we do. Trust not in words, trust only in movement. True faith will always be seen in works. Dead faith will not be seen at all.

Now the point that you want to understand as you approach this passage is that there is a kind of faith that does not save.

There is a kind of faith in God that does not save. There is a kind of faith in Jesus Christ that does not save.

In Matthew, for example, chapter 3, the ministry of John the Baptist draws our attention..."And many people were being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River confessing their sins." In verse 7, "When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of snakes, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits fitting repentance and think not to say within yourself, we have Abraham as our father." In other words, don't count on your heritage, demonstrate by your works the legitimacy of your faith.

In chapter 5 of Matthew and verse 16, Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." In other words, the light that shines out of the life of a believer is the light of good works, demonstrated deeds.

In chapter 7 of Matthew, the same Sermon on the Mount, verse 21, "Not everyone that says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of My Father." It is not the sayers, it is the doers. Trust not in what people say, trust in what they do.

This goes on throughout the ministry of Jesus as an emphasis. It is particularly emphasized again in the gospel of John. For example, look with me for a moment at John chapter 2.

In John chapter 2 and verse 23, it says this, "Now when He...being the Lord Jesus...was in Jerusalem at the Passover in the feast day, many...follow this...many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them because He knew all men and needed not that any man should testify of man for He knew what was in man."

Everybody needs a man to show what he believes or to say what he believes but Jesus, He knows what men believe. And He said they believed but their belief was less than sufficient.

In fact, chapter 3 follows up the same idea. "There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." He is one of those who believed. "He came to Jesus by night and he said, Rabbi...notice the pronoun..., we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that You do except God be with him." Now we just saw back in verse 23 that the people who saw the miracles believed in His name. They believed He was sent from God. They may have well believed that He was a Messiah. And Nicodemus says "we” believe, it's a whole group. "Jesus answered and said, truly, truly I say to you, unless you are born again you won't even see the Kingdom of God."

Now what's the point? The point is he believed, he may well have believed in the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. He believed in the miracles. He believed in the name. He believed Jesus was sent from God. But Jesus said to him and to all like him, believing is not enough unless you are transformed. There is such a thing then as a non-saving faith.

In John chapter 8 we find again a graphic illustration of this very same kind of faith. Verse 30 and 31, "As Jesus spoke again the words relating Himself and His Father," it says in verse 30, "many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews who believed on Him, If you continue in My Word...that is in obedience...you are My "mathetes alethos," My real disciples and then you will know the truth and then the truth will set you free from bondage to sin and death and hell and judgment...all implied."

In other words, they said they believed and Jesus said your belief is not sufficient unless it involves a new birth, a transformation which leads to a life of obedience. Valid saving faith has always been verified by fruit. And a false dead faith is indicated by the absence of righteous actions.

Now it's clear that many people possess that kind of faith.

They believe in God. They believe in Jesus Christ. But not to the point of salvation. They may believe the facts about God, the facts about Christ, but they manifest no irrevocable commitment to Jesus Christ. They manifest no changed life that comes with true salvation marked by repentance and obedience.

The Lord was so concerned with this He spoke about it in the parable of the soils. He spoke about it, no doubt, eluding to it in part with the wheat and tares. He spoke about it in John 15 with the abiding and the non-abiding branches. He spoke about it in Matthew 7 with the professors and the possessors. This is a common issue in the ministry of our Lord. Intellectual belief is not enough.

In Hebrews 12:14 it says, "Holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." No man ever enters into the presence of the Lord without holiness. So we conclude that justification must have with it more than just a forensic statement about your position, it must have with it a real sanctification so that saving faith is manifest in works. The Apostle Paul put it this way, that we are His workmanship, Ephesians 2:10, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Now, beloved, let me tell you something that burdens my heart greatly. The church of Jesus Christ must deal with the soul damning impression that a simple knowledge of the gospel is equal to acceptance of saving faith. We must deal with the deception and the delusion that knowing the truth equals redemption. It's almost as if people think that what you don't deny, you must believe and that that would be sufficient. James will not permit any such deception to go unchallenged. People who believe the facts of the gospel but make no irrevocable commitment to shun sin and serve the Lord

Jesus Christ, which commitment is empowered in the saving work itself, must be confronted with the reality of their state. In fact, the whole of the epistle written by James is a series of tests by which you can evaluate whether your faith is a living faith or whether it is a dead faith.

The first test was the test of trials. Remember in chapter 1 verses 2 through 13? The test of trials...and your response to trials is an indicator of dead faith or living faith. The second was the test of temptation, where you place the blame in temptation was an indicator of living faith or dead faith. The third was the response to the Word that comes at the end of chapter 1. And then we have been looking in chapter 2 at the test of your response to the poor and the needy. James is giving a series of tests by which we can evaluate whether our faith is living or dead.

Now, in this wonderful second chapter and verses 14 through 20, he brings up the test of works. And by works he means righteous action, righteous behavior, behavior which is obedient to God's Word and which manifests a godly nature.

How we live then, beloved, proves who we are. This, I believe, is the composite test in this epistle. It sort of pulls all the other ones together. For every other test is a righteous work when properly responded to.

Now James has already brought up this issue. Go back for a moment to verse 22 of chapter 1. He has already introduced it when he said, "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your ownselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he's like a man beholding his face, his face of his birth, his Genesis face, as it were, in a mirror. He looks, goes his way, forgets the manner of man he was." In other words, he looks, sees his problem, does nothing about it, goes away and forgets it. "But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty-- which means the Word of God--and continues there, he is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." In other words, God says you need to be a doer, a continuer in looking into the Word of God and putting it into practice in your life. And again James brings up the same issue here in chapter 2.

Now may I say that no one is saved by works? Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says, "Not by works lest we should boast." We are not saved by works. If we were saved by works we would adulterate grace and grace would be no more grace. No one is saved by works--listen carefully--but no one is saved without producing works. That's the issue. Without producing works...the work of repentance and submission to Christ being the initial ones.

In Matthew 13:44 to 46, our Lord gives two parables about a man who found a treasure in a field and then a man who found a pearl of great price. In both cases they sold all to purchase the pearl. There is a sense in which salvation comes to those who give all they are and have to Christ to take all that He is and has for their own. But the self-deceived, for them faith is nothing more than a carnal glance and acknowledgement of the facts about God and Christ. There's no irrevocable commitment to an

obedient life, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and to obey His will.

So, James is dealing with dead faith, non-saving faith.

That is the issue. And as I told you some months ago, I think I have a great passion for this because of what I've experienced in my life with many of my close friends. And I gave you some months ago a long list of people that I have known in my life who walked away from everything I thought they believed and gave evidence to me of the deadness of their faith. They left such an impression in me, they are unforgetable. I see their faces. My mind echoes their names again and again and again and again.

They had dead faith. When it came down to the test of righteous deeds no matter how much they claimed, their faith proved to be dead.

And then I think to myself, "Buy how many other people are like them who in this life will never manifest dead faith? In fact, they may never know till they wake up in hell that their faith was dead faith because they're so deceived."

Now the background of this text, let me just see if I can't help you to understand that to which James really writes, the epistle was written to Jews. Back in verse 1 of chapter 1, it says, "The twelve tribes scattered abroad." He's writing to Jewish readers. They had identified themselves with the Christian faith. Some of them obviously were genuine and some of them were less than genuine, hence all of these tests are given in the epistle. But they had outwardly identified with the Christian faith.

In fact, verse 21 of chapter 2, he says, "Was not Abraham our father?" And again he embraces the idea that his audience is Jewish.

Let me give you a little bit of an idea of what they were thinking. Some of these Jews had gone from one extreme to another on the matter of works. They had experienced in all the years of their Judaism a tremendous amount of stress because Judaism by this particular time had become totally a works righteousness system. They were raised to believe in the efficacy of works. And along came the gracious gospel of salvation...the gospel that was to them joyous. Imagine living all your life under a system of works knowing you couldn't live up to the system. Imagine being required to keep laws you know you couldn't keep. Imagine being absolutely overwhelmed with a myriad of rules that no human being could ever live up, and believing that your salvation was dependent on your ability to do what you couldn't do. A tremendous burden. In fact, in Matthew 23, Jesus said, "The leaders who espoused that system bind on people burdens far too heavy for them to bear." And so here are these Jewish people typically oppressed by a guilt producing burden and along comes somebody preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ which is all about grace and all about liberation and all about freedom and

all about joy. And they hear that gospel and they say that's for me...wow, freedom from legalism sounded too good to be true.

And could it be that some of them misunderstood that freedom and went too far the other way? Going all the way from legalism to an unfounded and abusive liberty. They were under the mistaken notion that since works were not efficacious for salvation, maybe they weren't efficacious for anything and maybe they weren't even necessary. And could it be that James was recognizing in the congregation to which he wrote some people who were trying to espouse a salvation that was simply believing the facts and requiring nothing?

That doesn't sound too far-fetched. It's been espoused in every generation since. An illustration of this kind of legalism that these Jews might have been under has come out of some of the ancient rabbinic writings. For example, one that I found in The Expositor's Greek Testament says, "When Mar Ukba lay dying, he asked for his account. It amounted to 7,000 zuzim which is the sum total of all of his alms giving." In other words, that was his account in heaven...all that he had given God had kept a record of and he had 7,000 laid up. "Then he cried out, the way is far--that is into the presence of God--and the provision is small--he didn't think this sum would be sufficient to insure his justification in the sight of God and thus gain him salvation.

So he gave away half his fortune in order to make himself quite secure," end quote.

Typically the Jews were earning their way in with their works. In fact, early pagans...we have writings to indicate early pagans accused the Jews of joining Christianity because it was a cheaper religion than Judaism. And the new message of Christianity, grace and freedom and liberty and faith and mercy and forgiveness, looked like total relief, just believe. What a way to go. And so they went from legalism to antinomianism. It may well be that there were some like that in this association to which James writes. Obviously, whatever the cause and the background, there were some who felt themselves secure just being hearers of the word and were self-deceived. They were saying, "Oh yes, that's true...oh yes, that's true..." but never was it fleshed out in their life.

I daresay you know people like that, don't you? Do you know people if you approach them and said do you believe in God, they'd say yes? Do you believe Jesus Christ lived and died and rose from the dead? Yes. And you know as well as I do that they're not Christians. That's not uncommon. They possess a dead faith.

I remember a song we used to sing as a little kids in church, "Only believe, only believe." And I've often thought about that song. Now wait a minute, is that all there is?

Nicodemus believed before he came to Christ and was told he needed to be born again. It is not enough to just believe unless that faith is the faith that saves and transforms.

Now what is the character of dead faith? This is what James wants to point out to us. Let's look at our text. What is the character of dead faith? He gives us three marks of dead faith, three descriptions of the nature of dead faith.

First of all, dead faith is identified by an empty confession. It is identified by an empty confession, verse 14.

"What does it profit," or of what benefit is it, "my brethren,"

and I think he's speaking at that point to a Jewish brethren, Jewish audience, and of course collectively to the church that are identified outwardly as brethren. "What does it profit, or of what benefit is it though a man say he has faith but has not works?" What good is such a claim? "Can faith save him?"

Now look at it. If a man says he has faith...for the sake of argument, a man comes along, he makes that claim. "I have faith, I believe. I believe in God. I believe in Christ." He confesses to believe in the death of Christ. He may confess to believe in the resurrection of Christ. By the way, it's a present tense, what does it profit, my brothers, though a man continually go on making the claim that he believes? The word in the Greek text means anyone...anyone. What good is such a claim from anyone if he has not erga, works...if he has not product--if he has not good works, righteous deeds as the pattern of his life what good is such faith? The answer is it's no good at all.

That's the obvious answer. It's nothing but an empty confession, an empty profession, a claim with no evidence. If there are no works and no righteous deeds, you cannot demonstrate a changed life. If when true faith is placed in Christ, we receive a new nature, that new nature will manifest itself. And as we go to the parable of the soils again we see that good soil always produces what? Fruit...the fruit of the Spirit and the fruit of righteousness.

If we were to just look at James, we might see what some of those works were. If we went back to chapter 1 and verse 12, we might see endurance, patiently and triumphantly enduring through trials as a good work demonstrating true faith. That's one of the tests.

If we went to verse 18 through 20, we might there understand that another one of the good works is a proper hearing of the Word of God, an eager hearing of the Word of God. If we looked at verse 21, we would assume that purity of life, putting away filthiness is another mark, another righteous work. If we looked at verses 22 and following, we would see the fact of obedience to Scripture. If we came down to verse 27, again we would see love and compassion for the needy as another righteous work in keeping oneself unspotted from the world.

We might even look in chapter 3 and see things like control of the tongue, a proper kind of divine wisdom. We might look into chapter 4 and see humility. James himself identifies many of these good works and that's why I say in a way this particular portion is the compendium and the summary and the sum of all the other tests that he gives. What good is it to make an empty confession about your saving faith if you don't have any of those kinds of works in your life? If your life is not manifest by endurance...if your life does not manifest endurance, if it does not manifest a proper response to the Word of God, if it does not demonstrate the putting away of filthiness and wickedness, if it does not have a heart of obedience to the Word of God, if it does not have compassion toward those in need, if it does not keep itself unspotted from the world, where's the evidence?

In John 15, as I mentioned earlier, Jesus said, "Take the branch that has no fruit, cut it down, tie it up and throw it in the fire." That fruitless branch, I believe, represents a Judas disciple, represents somebody who is outwardly attached but there's no life flow and therefore there's no product. And you know these things. And so, James adds at the end of verse 14, "Can...and I might imply...that faith save him? Such faith as that?" Can that kind of faith acquit a man on judgment day? Can faith not accompanied by a dramatic change in moral character and conduct be true saving faith? What's the answer? No. Can such an empty confession save from a God...look at verse 13...who will be merciless to the man who shows no mercy? And you mean to say to me that a man can believe and show no mercy and still be saved? Some would say you can believe and have no fruit and still be saved, and Jesus says if I look at your life and I see not the fruit of mercy, there will be no mercy for you. Why?

Because Jesus Himself can evaluate the validity of faith based upon the product of that faith. If salvation is a new birth, if salvation is a transformation, if salvation is a total change, then it must demonstrate itself in the behavior consistent with that new nature. If I am a new person, there will be new factors in how I conduct myself.

Look at Romans 2. In Romans 2 we have the criteria by which God will judge. And in verse 6 it says He will render to every man according to his deeds. The final judgment will be according to his deeds. You say, "I thought the final judgment would be on our faith." The final judgment will be on our faith as indicated in our...what?...our deeds.

And he goes on to delineate it. "To the people who through patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality will come eternal life." In other words, it isn't that you're saved by those works, it's that those works manifest that you have a new nature. "But the people who are contentious and don't obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath will come." The converse of that is, true believers will not be contentious, they will obey the truth, they will obey righteousness. Tribulation and anguish on every soul of man that does evil. Glory, honor and peace to every man that works good.

In other words, we're going to be judged on the basis of what we've done because what we've done and what we do is the indicator of who we are. Can that faith save him? And the use of "may", the negative, indicates a "no" answer.

Now somebody's going to say, "Well, wait a minute. Isn't James in conflict with Paul?" This is the typical argument. If we accept what James says that we have to have works, aren't we denying what Paul said when he said faith alone, faith alone, grace alone, grace alone, and if you add any works to grace, you have messed up grace? Doesn't Paul say we are saved simply and only and totally by grace?

In Romans 11:6, "If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. And if there's any works, then it's no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." In other words, isn't he stripping grace of any work at all? Doesn't he say the same thing, in effect, I think it's in Galatians, isn't it, chapter 2 verse 16, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even as we believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified? Isn't Paul saying no works and James saying works? And aren't they in conflict?

May I suggest to you that James and Paul are not standing face to face in a confrontation but they're standing back to back fighting two common enemies. Paul is fighting those people who want salvation to be by works. James is fighting those people who want a salvation that doesn't demand anything. Paul is saying salvation is only by grace. James is saying that salvation only by grace produces works. There's no debate here.

There's no argument here, there's no tension here. It is not a face to face disagreement, it is a back to back defense against two different attackers. Paul is defending himself against legalistic salvation and James is defending himself against a libertine approach that says you can believe and have no change in your life and still be saved.

Go back to chapter 1 verse 18 and what did James say? "Of His own will begot He us with the word of truth." In other words, he presents a sovereign salvation by grace. God saved us by His own will through the word of truth. James affirms a salvation by sovereign grace. But then he says, "In order that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creation." In other words, to make us new creatures, to make us different.

Paul says the same thing. We are saved by grace through faith not of ourselves but we are His workmanship created unto good works. They both say the same thing. Both agree that there is a faith that does not save.

Turn for a moment to 2 Timothy chapter 2 and verse 19 and listen carefully to what Paul writes here. To show you how he agrees with James, "Nevertheless," says Paul writing to Timothy and speaking of those who err concerning the truth mentioned in verse 18 and verse 17, their word is an evil word, it eats like a disease, like gangrene, he says, "Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands sure." There are a lot of people trying to knock the foundation apart, a lot of people trying to offer another foundation, but the foundation of God is immovable and it has this seal. In other words, here is what seals the truth. "The Lord knows them that are His." And how does He know them? "Let everyone that names the name of Christ...what?...depart from iniquity." The mark of true salvation is a departure from iniquity.

In Titus, if you would notice Paul again making reference to the same thing. Verse 16 of chapter 1, listen to this, he's talking about people who claim to be believers, he says, "They profess that they know God," now follow, "but in works they...what?...they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate." That word "reprobate" has the idea of a confused disoriented and wicked mind. So they profess to know God but the denial comes in their works. It doesn't matter what you claim, it only matters what you demonstrate.

Chapter 2, he says it again in verse 7, "In all things showing yourself a pattern of good works." So James is considering an empty profession, an empty confession with no evidence, sort of an intellectual external acceptance of the facts of the gospel as opposed to a whole-hearted irrevocable commitment to give oneself totally to Christ and to exchange one's life for His life...one's sovereignty for His sovereignty.

That's basic. And Paul is in his particular ministry emphasizing the beginning of the Christian life, insists that no one can earn forgiveness, no one can earn a right relationship with God, that comes only from God's free sovereign grace. There are no human pre-salvation works. You don't have to repent in your own flesh.

You don't have to set yourself up for salvation by agreeing to do this, or agreeing to do that in your flesh. But where true salvation takes place, where sovereign grace reaches down and totally transforms a person, there will be an abandonment of sin and abandonment of self to the sovereignty of Christ as a part of that saving work.

I think about Ephesus, the very city to which 1 Timothy was written that we're studying in the mornings, and when the gospel came to Ephesus in Acts 19, immediately the text says the people who were deep into magic and the occult took all of their magic books having heard the gospel and believed...and what did they do with them? They burned them all.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God. It is an exchange of masters. So while salvation is all of God, it is also within the saving work that repentance and a turning from sin and an embracing of a new master takes place.

And I don't believe for a moment that a new-born believer understands the full implications of that. I don't think when I was saved I understood the full implications of my sin and turning from my sin, I don't think I understood the full implications of what it meant to submit to Jesus Christ, that's an ever increasing awareness even now in my life. No one is saved by works. But no one is saved without becoming a new creation and in the new creation comes the product, repentance, submission, obedience, love toward God and all the other works that the Spirit of God would produce.

So, back to James. In verse 14, he first describes dead faith as an empty confession that has no benefit at all. And this calls me to say to you again, remember 2 Corinthians 13:5 which says, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith," and how do you examine yourself? Not by looking at a point in time in which you went forward, signed a card, or whatever. You examine yourself by looking at your life and seeing the product.

What do you see? Because what you see reveals what you are.

Empty confession is nothing but dead faith and dead faith is counterfeit.

Secondly, James says dead faith is not only marked by empty confession, that is by words without deeds, but secondly, it is marked by false compassion. And here he moves specifically to the absence of deeds, false compassion. Look at verse 15, very practical. "If a brother or sister be naked and deprived of daily food," we'll stop there just to set the scene a little bit.

Here is a person who is naked. This is a kind of continual situation, a past condition brought into the present. Here is a person who is naked. It doesn't mean stark naked, without any clothing. It means poorly clothed, a person who is destitute of the necessities of life, doesn't have enough clothes. Probably indicating the person has not enough clothes to stay warm. So here is a person who is cold.

The word "destitute" means deprived of daily food, starving to death. Here is a person who is cold and hungry...very common situation, very severe. No food for the day and no garment to stay warm. Brother or sister indicates this is a Christian document. It indicates that he's writing to a group of people who at least outwardly are not only identified with him as a Jew but are identified very likely with the assembly of the redeemed.

This is an illustration very much like 1 John 3:17 and 18 where John brings up the same thing, how you respond to a person in need is the indicator of what's in your heart. I've told you that all along. James and 1 John are very close parallels, both providing tests of true faith.

So, here is this man or woman cold and hungry and one of you meets that person in your assembly, they come to visit you.

They're there in the assembly. You see their condition. "And one of you say to them, Go in peace." Now that's a common Jewish expression, you find it in Mark 5:34, "Go in peace," just pious, "God be with you, God bless you, Hope you do well." Empty words.

You're really rejecting their hunger and you're rejecting the fact that they're cold. So you say to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled." Aren't you generous?

Now that verb, "be warmed and be filled," both of those verbs, can either be in the middle voice or the passive voice in the Greek language. Middle voice is reflexive, would be this way, probably caustic or sarcastic, "Don't get in my pocket, buddy, warm yourself...feed yourself." If it's in the middle voice and both forms in the Greek are the same, then it's very sarcastic, it's very indifferent, it's very cruel. And what it says is, "Warm yourself and fill yourself...don't bug me with your problems."

If it's in the passive voice, it's a little less harsh and it would say, in effect, "I hope you can find somebody to clothe you and feed you, be praying for you." Either way, whether you're caustically sarcastically saying "Feed yourself, buddy, don't bug me with your problem," or whether you're saying, "I sure hope you can find somebody who can help you," he says at the end, "Notwithstanding, you give them not the things which are needful to the body, what does that profit?"

In other words, what good is that kind of faith? You mean to tell me that you're a new creature? You mean to tell me that you have the life of God in your soul, the life of a compassionate God, a loving God and you can't concern yourself with someone in need? Verse 17 says, "Even so faith if it doesn't have works is...what?...it's dead because it's alone." A faith with not fruit, a faith with not product is a dead faith marked by empty confession and false compassion.

I remember hearing the story about a queen, I wish I could remember which queen it was, I can't find the story. About a queen who was taken to the theater and according to the biographer, the queen went to the theater to see a drama and wept her way through the entire drama. From beginning to end it was...it was pathos, it was sad. And she really got into the spirit of the drama and she cried through the whole thing. This was in the time of the carriages in years past. And she went out to get in her carriage and it was a very cold and wintry night and she had left her coachman out there where he belonged. He didn't belong with her class. She found him frozen to death and according to her biographer she shed not a tear.

It's amazing how people can cry over fiction and not cry over reality. Have you noticed that? It's amazing how people can watch a movie or even hear a song and weep, but see a destitute person

and be absolutely indifferent. Sometimes I think in a world like ours where we have so much fantasy we literally spend all of our emotions on fantasy and we have none left for reality. I mean we have all seen so many disasters portrayed on television that we've pretty well emptied our emotions. And real life just doesn't seem so bad, does it. And unless the drama is really played to the hilt, it doesn't elicit tears out of us because no human tragedy in reality is nearly as dramatic seemingly as a fantasy. And so, James says if you have that kind of false compassion, that at best says I hope you can find some food and clothing, my friend, go in peace, I wish you well, but you don't give them what they need, what good is that kind of faith? That faith that has no works is alone and therefore it proves to be dead.

To look at the words of Jesus one more time and see how He speaks to this issue, we need only turn to Matthew chapter 25.

And here the Lord gives it to us in such clarity that even a fool need not miss this. Verse 31 says, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory. And the Lord will come in this time of judgment gathering all the nations, separating them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats."

And, of course, this is the division of men to go into the Kingdom and be shut out of the Kingdom. The sheep go to the right hand, the goats to the left. The king says to those on the right hand, "Come ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Why? Because you believed...it doesn't say that. He says here's the reason you're coming to the Kingdom, "I was hungry and you...what?...you what?...gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you took me in. I was ill clad and you put clothing on me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

And the righteous are going to say, "Now wait a minute, Lord, when did we ever do that? When did we see You hungry and feed You or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in or ill clad and clothe you? When did we see You sick and in prison and come to You? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Truly I say you in as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have...what?...done it unto Me." And here it is, the people who enter the Kingdom aren't the ones here who simply are said to believe, they are the ones whose faith is made manifest in true compassion.

On the other hand, the ones who are told in verse 41 to depart because they're cursed to entering everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels are the ones who failed to demonstrate compassion. And they go into everlasting punishment while the righteous go into life eternal. Again the point is judgment is on the basis of works. Not that our works earn salvation but that our works manifest whether our faith is truly saving faith.

And so, James says dead faith is marked by empty confession and false compassion. Thirdly, I suppose we could say it's marked by shallow conviction. Look at verse 18...shallow conviction. This is a difficult...this is a difficult verse in the original language to sort of sort out...whether James is arguing with an antagonist, whether he's referring to himself, whether the antagonist says this much or more, it's very hard to sort it all out. But the idea is clear. You see, the Greeks didn't use any punctuation. And so it's very hard sometimes to reconstruct all the nuances of a sentence. We have to do the best we can. The theme is very clear. The purpose is very clear. The point is very clear. But getting it all sort of sorted out with absolute dogmatism is really impossible because they didn't use punctuation.

It reminds me of a story my father likes to tell about an old Nazarene preacher by the name of "Uncle Bud Robinson." Uncle Bud Robinson was really a character. In fact, he's the one who said that he was going to bite the devil as long as he lived and when he didn't have any teeth, he'd gum him till he died. But he had more strange expressions. But Uncle Bud Robinson didn't know how to write or really compose things very well because he didn't understand punctuation. And they said that every time he wrote a letter, he wrote the whole letter without punctuation. And at the end, he put a whole lot of periods, commas, exclamation points and all of that and said, "I don't know where these belong so you put them wherever you want them."

Well, in many ways that's exactly the way the New Testament was written...with all the stuff available at the end...you could stick it where you wanted. And it's hard sometimes to reconstruct.

But let me give you what is certainly a viable alternative in looking at this particular passage. Reading it in the Authorized, "Yes, a man may say you have faith and I have works, show me your faith without your works and I'll show you my faith by my works." Now James probably, it seems to me, is referring to himself. James is the man. He's the man. He's a little bit humble and so he speaks in the third person. He certainly wants no boasting, we see that over in chapter 4 verses 6 to 10 where he exalts humility. In verse 10 says, "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He'll lift you up." So the man here I think is probably James. He possesses true faith. So he says to another man who is claiming to have faith without works, he says, "You have faith and I have works, show me your faith without your works and I'll show you my faith by my works."

Now the man who possesses true faith, very likely James sort of putting himself in this position, says, "All right, you're the antagonist, you want to argue the case, okay, you have faith.

Let's say that hypothetically. All right, let's say you have faith. And let's say that I have works. Here's the acid test.

Show me your faith without works, go ahead." Can't...impossible, can't be done. The word "show" means exhibit, demonstrate, put on display. So he says go ahead, show me your faith. How can you

show faith without works? You can say, "Well, I believe...I believe." Show it to me. Well, you can't. It's absolutely impossible to demonstrate saving faith without a product. How people can say there is such a thing as a faith that is real that has no fruit is absolutely ridiculous because how can they know that? James says show it to me. And if there is no righteous deed, if there is no fruit of righteousness, there is no way to demonstrate the validity of faith.

That's a challenge, by the way. That's a challenge and nobody can answer that challenge. Nobody can show their faith without works. James says, on the other hand, I'll show you the reality of my living faith by...what?...my works. It's obvious, there's no other way. Boy that puts the hypocrite on the spot. Show me. So when someone says, "I'm a Christian," you don't say, "Oh, when did that happen?" "Oh, 24 years ago and...da-dit-da- dit-da-dah." When somebody says I'm a Christian you say, "Oh, show me your salvation." What? Show me. Tell me about your life. Tell me about the pattern of your behavior.

Look at 2 Peter chapter 1. He says in 2 Peter chapter 1 that the divine power of God has granted to us life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue...would you notice that? He not only called us to glory but He also called us to virtue. And through the gospel He gave to us exceedingly great and precious promises that we through these things might be partakers of the divine nature, having already escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

We have already received in some measure that divine nature in the new creation, the life of God within us, the indwelling Holy Spirit. We have already escaped to some degree the corruption that is in the world through lust. John says we've already been delivered from the world. John also says in 1 John chapter 2 that we've already overcome the wicked one. So we have a new nature. We have in some measure escaped the corruption of our fallenness through the new nature that's in us. We have been delivered from the world and its threat to destroy us. And then he says, "Now you give diligence to add to your faith virtue, and to your virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control," and he goes through endurance and godliness and brotherly kindness and love. And he says if all these things are in you and abound, they make you to be neither barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. If all these things are in your life, you'll be bearing fruit. But if you lack those things, you're going to be blind, you can't see very far, you'll never really know whether you were purged from your former sins. You can't know unless you can see the fruit.

Now it may be that there is a time in the life of a Christian when there is a fruitless period, when there's a barrenness. And at that time you will lose the assurance of your salvation because you can't see the reality of it in a time of disobedience. You see, assurance is a gift from God, security is a fact, assurance is something we enjoy because of obedience. So Peter is saying you were saved to produce these virtues which assure you of the reality of your faith. If they aren't there then you don't know. You may be a Christian in a barren time, but if this is the constant pattern of your life, you're not a Christian at all.

So, let's go to verse 9 and James says a man can say I have faith, a man can say I believe but if there's no works there, he can never demonstrate it. And somebody might argue and say, "Well, I believe in God. I believe in one God. I'm a monotheist." And James says, "You do, you believe there's one God, or you believe God is one, the shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 and 5, the Lord our God is one Lord. You believe the basic theological doctrine of Scripture. You believe in the unity of God." The Jews always prided themselves on their orthodoxy, particularly believing in the one true God. "You believe that?

You intellectually believe that? Let me tell you something. You do well," sarcastic, oh, you're really something if you believe that. "Let me tell you something, the demons believe that and tremble."

What he's saying here is you believe that? Wonderful. I'll go one up on you. The demons believe it and they tremble. In other words, you're not even in the category with the demons.

They believe that, too, but at least they have the sense to tremble.

There are many people who give mental assent to the reality of God, mental assent to the reality of Christ, the facts of the gospel. I admit to you that orthodox theology is better than heresy, but orthodox theology may not be enough. You want to know something? There's no such thing as a liberal demon. You know that? I don't even think there's an amillennial demon. I think all demons are pre-mil, pre-trib, I think all demons are dispensational. I think all demons believe in a literal kingdom for Israel. I think...I know all demons believe in the deity of God. They believe in the trinity. They believe in the deity of Christ. All demons believe in the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. All demons believe God created in six days. All demons could sign the doctrinal statement of Grace Community Church, every one of them. There is no such thing as a heretical demon. They believe everything orthodox, everything.

And they shudder. Why? That word means to bristle, to have the hair stand on end, they are in a high degree of terror. Men have intellectual faith, follow this, demons have emotional faith.

Men say I believe that and it stops. Demons say I believe that and their hair stands on end because they understand the implications. That's metaphorical, they don't have hair. The demons go one better than men, they go one better than religious phonies, they shudder, they shake, they're in grave fear.

Whereas it says of men in Romans 3:18, there is no fear of God before their eyes. Men don't fear, demons fear.

So, he says, "You believe in God, do you?" And we could even add, "So you believe in the orthodox truth, do you? Well, the demons are one up on you, they believe and they shake. And they are fearful and afraid. Their kind of faith produces no peace. They're in a state of panic because they know the inevitability of what true orthodox doctrine indicates."

That demon said in Matthew 8:29 to Jesus, "What are You doing? Are You here to torment us before the time?" In other words, they all know they're headed for torment eternally. And they're saying, "Wait a minute, it isn't time yet." They know where they're headed. Intellectual faith is dead faith. Demons have more than that, they have an emotional faith. And so dead faith is inferior even to demon faith.

Thomas Manton, I have 27 volumes of his writings which I read frequently, he describes a non-saving faith in very graphic terms. "A simple and naked assent to such things as are propounded in the Word of God and maketh men more knowing but not better, not more holy or heavenly. They that have it may believe the promises, the doctrines, the precepts as well as the histories. But yet, lively saving faith it is not, for he who hath that findeth his heart engaged to Christ and doth so believe the promises of the gospel concerning pardon of sin and life eternal that he seeketh after them as his happiness. And doth so believe the mysteries of our redemption by Christ as that all his hope and peace and confidence is drawn from thence and doth so believe the threatenings whether of temporal plagues or eternal damnation as that in comparison of them all the frightful things of the world are as nothing."

Manton goes on to talk about this kind of shallow conviction that is nothing more than human faith or demon faith. He writes, "It is to be distinguished from temporary faith which is an assent to scriptural or gospel truth, accompanied with a slight and insufficient touch upon the heart called a taste of the heavenly gift and of the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, Hebrews 6. By this kind of faith, the mind is not only enlightened but the heart affected with some joy and the life in some measure reformed at least from grosser sins called escaping the pollutions of the world, 2 Peter 2:20. But the impression is not deep enough nor is the joy and delight rooted enough to encounter all temptations to the contrary. Therefore this sense of religion may be choked or worn off either by the cares of this world or voluptuous living or great and bitter persecutions and troubles for righteousness sake. It is a common deceit," he says, "many are persuaded that Jesus is the Christ, the only Son of God. And so are moved to embrace His person and in some measure to obey His precepts and to depend upon His promises and fear His threatenings. And so by consequence to have their hearts loosened from the world in part and they seem to prefer Christ and their duty to Him above worldly things as long as no temptations do assault their resolutions or sensual objects stand not up in any considerable strength to entice them.

But at length when they find His laws so strict and spiritual and contrary either to the bent of their affections or worldly interests, they fall off and lose all their taste and relish of the hopes of the gospel

and so declare plainly that they were not rooted and grounded in the faith and hope thereof."

He's right. And he pulls together the teaching of Hebrews and the teaching of 2 Peter to affirm what he says.

Verse 20 concludes our look at the passage. And James says, "Will you know, O vain man...that means empty-headed...will you know, will you...are you willing to recognize this, O you empty-headed man, that faith without works is dead?" He uses a different word for dead here than he used previously in verse 17.

He uses the word arga, it means fruitless, it means a tree that bears no fruit. You are as destitute as a dead tree, as a dead corpse. You are no better than a dead seed, a dead root, a dead nerve, a dead engine or a dead anything. So James says you have dead faith and it profits absolutely nothing...dead faith, shallow conviction, false compassion, empty confession.

To conclude our study, look at Acts chapter 8 and an illustration of dead faith, Acts chapter 8. Philip came preaching. The people listened to him as he preached in Samaria with a fiery heart, a man of God, a holy man full of faith. It tells us about his virtue back in chapter 6. And in verse 9, a certain man was listening, his name was Simon. He previously had used magic and sorcery to bewitch the people of Samaria, passing on that he himself was some great one. And they were all giving heed to him from the least to the greatest saying, "This man is the great power of God." And to him they had regard because for a long time he had bewitched them with sorcery. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized both men and women. Philip has a first class, first rate revival in Samaria.

People are really coming to Christ.

Verse 13, underline this, "Then Simon himself...what's the next word? believed." He believed. "And when he was...what?...baptized he continued with Philip." Looks good, believed, baptized, continued. Three good things. "And he was amazed, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." Believed, baptized, continued...

Verse 15, "They prayed for the people who heard the Word and believed to receive the Holy Spirit for as yet the Holy Spirit had not fallen on them," they were a new group in the development of the church. They laid their hands on them in verse 17, the Apostles did, they received the Holy Spirit. "When Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given," and by the way, I believe it was attended by miraculous sign of speaking in foreign languages, speaking in language by the power of the Spirit of God, there had to be some supernatural phenomena so that there would be a recognition that indeed the Holy Spirit had come. "When he saw that through the laying on of hands the power of the Spirit was given, he offered them money.

And he said, Give me also this power that on whomsoever I lay hands he may receive the Holy Spirit." Man, I'll pay you for this, this is magic that will really bring it in. I'll pay you.

And Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you." You know what he says there? You're going to perish and your money perish with you. You...because you thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter for your heart is not right in the sight of God."

He believed, he was baptized, he continued, he was amazed and he was damned. You see it? You have no part in this. Your money perish with you. And then he calls for the attitude of true faith in verse 22, what's the first word? Repent of this thy wickedness and pray to God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you because I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness and you are in bondage to iniquity. You're bound by sin.

It is possible to believe, it is possible to be baptized, it is possible to continue to listen, it is possible to be amazed by everything happening in Christianity and to be damned...that's dead faith. And what came out of the life of Simon was evidence of an unregenerate heart.

A native came into a tribe where a missionary had been working. He didn't recognize the native, he in fact recognized him to be from another area. And the native said to the missionary, "I want to know what you teach." The missionary said, "Have you ever heard the gospel?" He said, "No, I have only seen it." And then he went on to describe a Christian that he had met. Have you ever heard the gospel? No, I have only seen it.

You can hear about faith but the truthfulness of it has to be seen. And so James says look at your works, what do they tell you about your faith? Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time tonight, so important, so vital. Drive these things deep into our hearts. We do not desire to add anything to Your Word nor take anything away. Help us to realize that we are not talking about some kind of pre- salvation work, we are saying that where real salvation takes place in the unexpressable mystery of sovereignty and human volition, there is a change of life that produces repentance and confession of sin and a heart for obedience and love to You.

And help us to examine our own hearts to see if our faith is dead producing nothing or living.

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