



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Real Faith. Real Life.

Part 7: Show and Tell

James 2:14-26 | Tim Badal | February 26, 2017

We'll turn to the book of James again today. For the past two months, we've been in our series "Real Faith. Real Life." James was written by Jesus' younger half-brother who came to faith and trust in Jesus years after his childhood, as he grew up in "real life" with the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ.



His letter is one of the first letters written that we now have in the New Testament. It was written to a group of people who were scattered as the result of trials and persecutions. They were believers who needed some encouragement and direction. And like those in the first century, we too need to know not only how to follow Jesus Christ, but also how to live in light of the change God has made in us.

We've gone through the first chapter, and today we find ourselves in the middle of chapter two. Up to this point we've learned five important truths and characteristics of what it means to follow Christ. We learned that real faith means we trust Him to get us through our trials and tribulations. Real faith also relies on Him as the only One Who can deliver us from the passions, temptations and desires we have which draw us in ways that are not God's ways.

We've also learned that faith is what allows us to trust in the good gifts God gives. It moves us to be people who are quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. It transforms us by reminding us how Jesus treated people of all statuses, backgrounds and ethnicities without partiality or favoritism.

You see, what James has been teaching us over and over and over again is that real faith is a transforming faith, a faith that has been changed by the power of Christ within them—and of course, within us as well. It leads us to live differently from how we lived before. This theme of faith will be continued in chapter two and throughout the rest of his letter. James will establish for us what the essence of real faith is.

Let's look at our text today, James 2:14–26. As we read it, we need to come to God with a question: what does real faith look like? If we've been in the Scriptures for any length of time, we will know that faith is a pretty important thing. As a follower of Christ, we need to know, "Is what I have, hope for and trust in real and true? Will it get me through the trials, tribulations and realities of my present life, as well as be what God requires in the life to come?"

James will address these questions clearly, telling us that as our eyes are open to what biblical faith actually involves, we'll know whether that is what we have. And if we don't have that faith, we're going to pray that God would open our hearts and minds, convicting our spirits that what we've been relying on and trusting in is ourselves and not the Savior, Who gives His grace freely to all who will receive it.

We have a lot of ground to cover today, so let's jump right in. Here's what James has to say to us:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

When I was in elementary school, some of my favorite days would happen—maybe quarterly—when the teacher would tell us that we would have “Show and Tell” on a Friday. You remember those opportunities you had to bring something that was near and dear to you from home, presenting it to your class. You were not only to tell them about something you had, but you could also bring it in and show it to them.

I remember one exploring journey I took when I was young when I found the skeletal remains of an animal. I didn’t know what kind of animal it was, but it was something of decent size. I took the skull home, and of course my mother told me to clean it up. But I remember that I wanted to show everybody this skull I had found. So the next time the teacher told us we’d be having Show and Tell, that was the first thing that came to my mind. I wanted to show them what I thought might be the skull of a dinosaur. It was probably a raccoon or possum. I remember that I stood before the class, telling them I had to wrestle the animal down....and all the other lies we kids sometimes tell to make ourselves sound much more interesting than we really are.

Show and Tell was an awesome time, giving others a tangible picture of what was near and dear to you. But that’s not always how it worked. When teachers have been shocked or perplexed often enough, they begin to tell you what you can bring, which can make the event less forceful or interesting.

Recently I found a list of the most incredible items that have been brought into classrooms for Show and Tell. Maybe these weren’t amusing at the time, but after the fact we can find them amusing. The first one was a hand grenade. Yes, a loaded hand grenade. How would you liked to have seen that? “Hey, everybody, I found this!” The pin was still in it, and they’re shaking it around. That’s quite the object for Show and Tell.

A fifth-grade girl brought in a painting that she thought was just mesmerizing. She had found it in her parents’ attic and little did she know that while she thought a little girl had painted this picture, what she had was a priceless Monet painting. Mom and Dad didn’t even know they had it. It took the art teacher to identify its value.

A number of times kids have brought in loaded guns. No doubt this was especially shocking to their teachers and classmates. Or I like this one—Show and Tell often meant the child would bring his favorite pet to school, and one child brought in a poisonous rattlesnake. I’m sure that got a rise out of the class. Finally, the one that I like best is when a child brought in his favorite dog. The problem was the dog had rabies.

So as you can see, Show and Tell can turn into quite an event—far greater than the skull I brought in all those years ago. But why is Show and Tell so effective? It allows kids to share something that’s important to them on the inside—to not only speak about it, but to bring a three-dimensional item they treasure.

James has been telling us over and over again that faith is something we not only tell people about, but also something we show. It’s that double dimension, if you will, of how we illustrate our faith. All of us are really good at telling other people things. We all know the phrase, “Talk is cheap.” As Christians, we can talk a great game about our walk with Christ as our Savior and Lord. But James is concerned, because he knows—as we’ll learn next week—that there’s great power in the tongue. The tongue can boast about things that really aren’t true. It can tell stories like mine at that Show and Tell so long ago, speaking of things that aren’t reality.

James’ concern is that the people in the churches who are saying they love and follow Jesus may not be living up to their claim. This is expressed in one of the most famous passages in Scripture. It’s a passage that at times has divided churches. It has been said to contradict other parts of the Bible. But it is important, because it gets down to the theological underpinnings of what faith is and the roles faith and works play in our lives.

His message to us is this: if someone has faith, let them tell of it, but also show it. According to James, the showing of our faith is in itself the very fabric of our faith. We'll be looking at this message from three angles: the importance of faith, some illustrations of faith, and the implementation of faith.

1. The importance of faith

Look at verse 14: *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"* Now, I'm not sure if the reason James is asking this question is because it's part of an ongoing conversation. In each of the other dialogues we find in the book of James, we know them to be real-life situations. I believe that while he doesn't name anyone, this is also a real-life conversation, a debate within the early church.

When he asks, "Can someone have faith but not works?" it leads to a question he wants an answer for: does that faith save him? Faith is one of the most important things God reveals to mankind, and is an important commodity in the life of any believer. In fact, you cannot be a believer without the element of faith. We're told in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. So if your desire is to please God, then you must exercise this gift He gives that we call faith.

Faith must be understood theologically and biblically.

What does the Bible have to say about faith? James is actually talking about two things—faith and works—and we need to look for the dividing line between these two. If you get that dividing line wrong, then your understanding of your salvation will be mired in confusion. He wants you to understand that faith has a certain place in salvation, and works has a certain place as well. Let's look at these two important terms.

First, faith is trusting in Jesus as being sufficient for all we need as sinners. Faith believes that He is the ultimate power source, that He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Faith rests, hopes and relies on that being true. Because it is true, faith leads us to live differently as the result of our trust and hope in the knowledge of Jesus.

I don't usually do this, but I've brought a prop with me today. It's a simple house lamp. Notice that it's dark. It's not doing what its inventor created it to do. A light is designed to dispel darkness so we can see better in a dim place. But at the moment this light is doing nothing. It's not connected to a power source.

Like this lamp, you and I are dark in our sin. We are not doing what God has called us to do, how He has created us to live. So we have a problem. He has called us to live in relationship with Him, but we're disconnected. God is the white cord in my right hand; our lives are the cord in my left hand. We were once connected in the Garden of Eden, when Adam was in a right relationship with God. But sin severed that and over the rest of human history we have entered life dim and dark. The Bible says we're dead. This is where we are when we're dead in our trespasses and sin.

Faith however recognizes God's gift that gives us an alternative to our dead and dark lifestyle through which we fail to live out our purpose. That alternative is Jesus Christ. He is the One Who can bring light into darkness, life into death. He came to give us salvation and illuminate our hearts and minds, so we can understand how dead we were in our sins. Faith is the mechanism by which we are able to have life in Christ.

Faith says, "I know where the power source is." I want to be clear on this. You did not gain this understanding of the power source on your own, but it's through the teaching and preaching of Jesus Christ. It is through the revelation of God's Word. Jesus came and said, "I am the light of the world, and anybody who connects themselves with Me will be a light as well" (John 8:12).

So faith takes our lives and connects them to the ultimate power source. Faith is the very thing that allows our lights to be turned on. Faith is the realization that without God, we have nothing. Without God, we will never fulfill our purpose. Without God, our sins will never be taken care of, so we must stay plugged in to Him, because the second we unplug from Him is the second our lives will utterly fall apart.

In other words, faith is not a "one and done" thing. It isn't like you plug in to God for a little while, and then you can unplug. In order to remain lit, we have to—by faith—continually rely on and rest in the power and work of Jesus Christ. It's the mechanism that not only allows us to enter into relationship with Him, but also it allows us to continue in that relationship.

Now, why is He the ultimate power source? In John 17:4, as part of the longest recorded prayer we have of His, Jesus says, "Father, I have completed the works You sent Me to do." There were necessary works that were required of Him that none of us could have accomplished. Jesus came in the flesh and dwelled among us, living a perfect life. It was something Adam did not do, nor

can we. He lived perfectly according to the plans and purposes of God, according to the regulations of the law, so He might fulfill the law in His death, burial and resurrection.

As a result, we realize we can't work out our salvation on our own. We can't justify ourselves or our actions, so we know we're broken, lost and in need of a Savior. Faith awakens our hearts, and through the preaching and teaching of God's Word we come to know we're lost without Jesus. We must now bow, throwing ourselves at the mercy of the court of God, saying, "Jesus, save me, for I am a sinner."

While our salvation is part of what faith does, it also does more. Faith changes us on the inside. Faith moves and compels us, culminating in love for God and others. When we are moved to compassion, faith is being lived out in our lives. When we are moved to do what the Holy Scriptures call us to, it's faith that makes that a reality. The Holy Spirit works in correspondence with our faith, moving and equipping us to do the very things we would not do on our own.

This is solely because of the work of Jesus Christ, what He has done for us. It's faith that causes us to live in light of what He's done, and to seek to honor, glorify and obey Him. That's why faith is lived out as we trust in Jesus Christ—believing He has done everything He has said He would do, and that He will continue to do all He says He will do.

Because faith is essentially based in trusting and obeying God, that connects it to works. So what are works? They're the outpouring of that faith. What does a life that relies solely on God do? How does it live in light of Him? How does it honor and glorify Him? How does it obey Him? When James says works are an important part of the Christian life, he's not referring to the Ten Commandments. He's not saying we must follow the Torah to the nth degree. Nor is he speaking of the litany of rules with which the Pharisees had saddled the people of God. In our day, works are not the sacraments, or our church attendance, or any other regulation we've made up as necessary for our holiness.

If faith is trusting and obeying God, then the heart of works is revealed in what James calls "the law of liberty." It's a life of loving God and loving others. Faith is what moves us to love God and others, because without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). We can also say that without faith it's impossible to love Him. He gives it to us as a gift so we might in turn love Him. But then our love grows from a love for God to a love for one another—and that can't happen without faith.

So here's what we need to ask ourselves today: "Have I loved God to the fullest this week? Have I loved others perfectly this week?" We need to answer these questions in a way that's true. As we were reminded last week, we all fail in that. And we also learned last week that if we fail in one of these things, we are lawbreakers.

We can't say, "Well, I'm really good at this category, but regarding these others sins, I find myself failing." Once we fall in one area, the Bible says we're guilty of all sin (James 2:10). So we have a problem. As lawbreakers, we have a choice. Are we going to trust in ourselves? Are we going to go into that courtroom and try to defend ourselves, excusing our sin? Or are we going to throw ourselves at the mercy of Jesus Christ, the only One Who can save us, redeem us and make us whole? Faith allows us to trust God and obey what He says. It causes us to continually turn to Jesus so we might learn to live and love like He does.

Today, some armchair theologians are going to ask some questions. Maybe you're new to the Scriptures, and this little paragraph here is confusing you. So I'll take a brief time-out to address what some of you may be waiting to ask. You may want to know where I stand on this matter.

The first thing we need to see is that in this passage, James seems to sound very different from the Apostle Paul. In Romans 3–4, Paul talks about the relationship between faith and works, and it can appear that he's drawing a conclusion that's different from the one James draws. As you may know, the Bible should not and cannot contradict itself, but it looks like we have a problem here. It seems as though Paul in Romans and James in this letter are contradicting one another. Paul says that man is justified by faith alone, and it's not about works. But in our text here, James says that while man is justified by faith, "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works?*" (2:21). Wait a minute. Paul says we're justified by faith, but James says you can be justified by works. How do we reconcile that?

First, we need to realize that James and Paul are friends—and I've learned that you don't try to reconcile friends. James wrote this letter very early in the history of the church. Paul comes on the scene later. Paul would have had every opportunity to correct what James had written to the church—but nowhere do we find him doing that. Romans was written probably ten years after James' letter, but Paul doesn't feel a need to correct him. He doesn't say, "While James is a dear friend, I need to say he missed it when he wrote what he did." Paul leaves James' statements alone.

Second, we should notice that Paul is speaking about the faith that puts us in right relationship with God, and James is speaking about faith which—because we are right with God—should now affect the way we relate to others. James is talking about faith that operates horizontally, faith that impacts how we treat other people. Paul is talking about a vertical faith that impacts our relationship with God.

Third, Paul is speaking of a faith that operates at the beginning of the Christian life, whereas James is speaking about a faith that is either in the middle of the Christian life or at the end of it. We're looking back and asking, "How has this faith that I took into my life—this trust in Jesus I expressed at the point of my conversion—how has it been lived out since that time?" Paul focuses on the one moment of conversion when, through trust in Christ, a person goes from being a sinner to a saint in the eyes of God. James is concerned with faith that happens later on in life.

Fourth, in Romans Paul is speaking about lost people—sinners—and how they are justified and made righteous before God. James is speaking to a group of saved believers. Over and over again he calls them "my brothers."

Finally, James speaks about works that complete faith, whereas Paul is speaking about works that compete against faith.

Hopefully that helps you understand that they're talking about two sides of the same coin. There's no contradiction, but rather a clear distinction between what they're addressing. They're looking at faith from different vantage points, and we are all the more blessed because of this.

Faith must be understood practically.

But we must be careful to understand that faith isn't just theological or theoretical. Rather, we must examine the meaning and balance of faith and works practically. James asks, "What good is it?" or in another translation, "What use is it?" The idea of usefulness here implies that faith has no value if you're not using it to impact the lives of others.

Faith is something of great value to us. In fact, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 that three things will remain: faith, hope and love. While there are many other things God gives to us as Christians, these three are the greatest. And of course, the greatest of all is love.

So we must ask ourselves, "What does faith do in my life?" It's one of those ideas that can become rather esoteric, something that sort of floats out there like a cloud of data storage. Nobody can explain it. Our data just "went to the cloud." We don't know where it is. We don't know where our pictures are. I don't know where all my sermons are. But they're in the cloud, Pastor Keith tells me. Similarly, some of us might say, "I have faith, but I don't know what that means. I don't know what it involves or looks like. It's just kind of nebulous." But we need to know that faith has a practicality to it. James says, "You're going to use your faith, and your faith is going to have an impact on you and on those whom you serve."

I came to understand this when my brother passed away in 1990. What I watched was esoteric. My parents' faith put on shape and structure. It was their faith, their trust, their reliance on God, that was going to get them through that great trial. It would allow them to endure hardship. It was that faith that allowed them to "consider it pure joy" when trials of many kinds come.

I experience that faith in a real, practical way when my body and heart desire things that run contrary to the will and Word of God. When I find victory over temptation and sin, it is not me. I can't high-five myself and say, "Hey, great job, Tim. Way to show self-discipline." I have to recognize that it's this gift of faith that God has given me that empowers me to do the things that I'm not able to do or handle on my own.

Not only does faith do that, but as I exhibit and live out faith, it produces in me a love for God and others. When I love my wife as Christ loved the church, when I love my children as I'm called by God in the Scriptures to do, when I sacrifice self so I might serve people like you—God says, "That's not because of you. You can't put the pin on your chest and award yourself 'Father or Husband or Pastor of the Year.' That is My life being lived through you, through the conduit and mechanism of faith."

So what good is it if I say I have this faith—this reliance on and trust in God—and I never allow that faith to move me or change me, or allow it to serve others in any practical way? Faith has practical elements to it and when we are living in accordance with the will of God, we will see those elements lived out each and every day.

Faith must be understood personally.

Notice all the personal pronouns James uses. You and I. Faith isn't gained by osmosis or by association. Faith isn't a group issue. Faith is a personal issue. This means we can't rely on our parents' faith, on our spouse's faith, on our pastor's faith, on our friends' faith. It is something that must be realized by us as individuals.

Each one of us must come to the place where we bow the knee in faith, coming to grips with the genuineness of God's offer to be the power source we need in our lives. We've got to come to that ourselves. Now, God may use other people—your parents, your spouse, your pastor, your friends. He may use their faith and the way they're living out their faith to be an example.

Recently I was coaching a basketball practice for one of my sons, and one of my neighbors came to me whose son plays on the team. He said, "Can I talk to you after practice, Tim?" I said, "Sure." So later he came and said, "Listen, my wife and I—we're doing okay. Things are going all right. But we feel like we're missing something. We feel like there's something more to life. As we looked around at our friends and family, we wondered if someone else had what we're looking for. And both of us said, 'It seems like Tim and Amanda do.'"

He went on and said, "It's not the house you have, because our house is nicer. It's not the cars you have, because our cars are nicer. And your kids, we both know, aren't perfect, so it's not that." Now I'm thinking, "I don't know why you're talking to me." Then he said, "What we came to realize is that you have something we don't. You have Jesus in your life."

That was an unbeliever. Now, what caused him to say that? It was the exhibit of faith through a child who is trusting and relying on God. Unbelievers are watching and saying, "I don't have that. Why is their light bulb on and mine isn't? Well, I know they don't have a power source of their own, so there has to be something they've plugged into that has made that a reality." Yet my brother or friend or neighbor can't say, "Just say a quick prayer for me, buddy. Connect me up, okay?" You can't daisy-chain faith into someone else's life. It's got to be personally received.

That's why faith is so important. Without it we can't please God. Without it we can't live out the plans and purposes that God has for us. Without it we will never experience what true abundant life is all about. We need faith, and the Bible says in Ephesians 2 that faith is a gift from God and we have to receive that gift.

2. The illustrations of different kinds of faith

In verses 14–25 there are four illustrations of different types of faith. By looking at each of these, we can see that the first three are bad and the fourth one is good. Let's start with the three bad ones.

Dead faith

Look at verses 14–17:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Exhibit A, the first counterfeit faith, is a dead faith. Dead faith is a faith full of lip service but no lifestyle. How many of us have seen that, whether in our families or our own lives or the lives of people we know? They talk a great game about how much they love God and love to worship, adore and serve Him, but there's nothing there to prove or validate that. The walk does not match the talk. It has lip service but no lifestyle. It's a faith that sounds really, really good, but produces no fruit.

James uses the illustration of a brother—another Christian in their midst—who is lacking in daily necessities. The literal description in the text is that he's naked. He walks into your assembly naked. He has nothing, and he's emaciated because he hasn't eaten in a long time. You have every proof that this man needs help. He needs someone to minister to him.

Our brother walks in naked and emaciated, and Pastor Tim says, "You know, it looks like Brother Bill here needs some help. Let's pray for him. 'Lord God in heaven, we know You're the Giver of all good things. We know we are to model our lives after Jesus. So Lord, we pray for Brother Bill. We pray that Brother Bill will get a sandwich.' Can I get an amen? 'We pray that Brother Bill will get a sweater to cover his emaciated body. Lord, show Brother Bill that it's not right to walk around naked. Lord, allow Brother Bill's needs to be taken care of. In God's name we pray. Amen.'"

“Brother Bill, are you encouraged? Brother Bill, I have taken care of your needs. I have brought them before the Lord, and He will minister to you. Now, go, and be clothed and be fed.” That kind of faith is dead! Because my faith should move me with compassion to minister to him. Yes, prayer is important. But instead of praying about a sandwich, we should make him a sandwich. Instead of praying about a sweater, why not give him a sweater so he can be clothed? This guy needs help. He doesn't need help finding better food or clothes—he's got nothing. And our response cannot simply be, “We will pray for him.”

Dead faith is seen only in profession, not in practice. I could tell you that I have a love for my wife Amanda. I could tell the world how much I love Amanda. I could go on Facebook and do all the emoji's I want—“I love Amanda. I love Amanda. I love Amanda.” But what good is that profession if I don't care for her and nurture her and minister to her, if I don't spend time with her. And when I do spend time with her, I belittle her or cut her down. I tell her she's worthless. What good is that kind of love? Oh, but haven't I spoken clearly of my love and affection? That love for Amanda is dead.

Deficient faith

On the flip side of dead faith is what I call “deficient faith.” It's a “kissing cousin,” if you will, of dead faith. But for our purposes now let's separate it, because it's the flip side of dead faith. Dead faith talks a good game, but then doesn't live it. People with deficient faith are doing a lot and relying on what is being done to validate themselves before God.

Some of you come from this type of tradition. Some of you have been taught that if you believe the right things and do the right things, you're saved. For some of you today, I'm going to shock your world. You think by your very presence here each week that somehow you are building up credits in your spiritual account. “Well, if I'm here at a service every week, surely God will see that and say, ‘Well done. Way to go.’” Many people enter into the waters of baptism believing that if they do that, they will be saved. Or they believe if they pop a little wafer and a little juice into their mouth, by the time that bread and juice hits the back of their throat God has been given the message that they've done something really good.

Some of us serve, but not with a heart of gratitude for what God has done for us—not remembering that we don't have to do anything to earn His pleasure. Instead we think, “If we do this, God will be pleased.” So we're constantly in a “try hard, try hard, do, do, do” mode, instead of a “be, be, be, rely, rely, rely, rest, rest, rest” mode. As a result, some of us will stand before the throne of God and He'll ask us, “Why should I allow you into My heaven?” You will bring out the litany of things you've done. “I did this, God, and I did that.” And God will say, “Depart from Me. I never knew you” (Matthew 7:21--23).

Why? Because religion doesn't save. Your church doesn't save. Your good works don't save. Tradition doesn't save. If you gain anything from this message, gain this one truth: only Jesus saves. Okay? You can't get around it. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.” Upon the solid rock I stand. No other ground—because it's all sinking sand. We have to rely on and trust in that truth, and anything else we do is going to be dead or deficient for the demands of God.

Demonic faith

Next, there's demonic faith. You're thinking, “Wait a minute. Faith? Demons? How does that work? I've never thought about that.” I want you to know today, as James does, that demons have faith. He writes in verse 19, “*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*”

Here are a few more passages to consider: Mark 1:34 tells us that Jesus, when He came upon a demon-possessed individual, would not allow the demons to speak. “Zip it,” He would say. “Don't talk.” Now, why wouldn't He want the demons to talk? Because early in His ministry, Christ was not yet ready to reveal Who He was—and He knew that demons had the worst-kept secret in the celestial realms. Even though we did not esteem Jesus as being God, even though we did not see Him as something to grab hold of, as Someone from out of this world, the demons did. For all of eternity past, before the rebellion, the demons worshiped and praised and adored the name of Jesus. But when Jesus interacted with these demons, He said, “I don't want you to talk, because you're going to reveal Who I am, and I'm not ready to be revealed yet, nor to declare My identity in this way.”

In Luke 4:33–34, Jesus is interacting with a particular demon who says, “I know Who You are. You are Jesus, the Son of God.” This also happens in Luke 4:41: “You're Him. You're the Son of God. I know it. I'm not mistaken. I know Who I'm talking to. You're the King of kings and Lord of lords.”

You see, demons knew a lot more than the religious leaders of that day knew. They knew a lot about God. To be honest, they know more about God and more about Jesus Christ than we do in many ways. They were in glory before creation, and they saw

God there in all His majesty and splendor. But God says their faith is no good. It accomplishes nothing. Why? Here are three reasons.

1. When a demon says that Jesus is the Son of God, he has the right information, but it doesn't change him. Some of us also have all the right information about God. We've sat in church and listened to preaching. We know all the right answers. "Who do people say I am?" The demon says, "We know Who You are. You're Jesus, the Son of God." Did that do anything for them? Zilch. It didn't change them. It didn't bring a transformation. Some of us are taking information, but it's only staying in our heads and not impacting our hearts.

2. Demonic faith doesn't move you to love Jesus. "Jesus, You're the Son of God. I know Who you are. I know the right answer to the question. But it doesn't move me to say, 'I love You,' or 'I'll follow You,' or 'I'm going to do what You say.'" This is the love test. Does information about Jesus move you to love Him more?

After 20 years of marriage to Amanda, the more information I have just compels me to love her more. I love her more deeply now than I did on our honeymoon. Why? Because I know more about her, and the more I know, the more I love. Demons know God well, but they don't love Him.

3. The faith of demons is a faith of perpetual rebellion, not repentance. So they say, "I know You, God. I know about my sin. I know that my rebellion leads me away from You." But does that change their direction? No. Does it cause them to seek forgiveness? No. Do they submit to His will and Word? No.

Some of us find ourselves knowing a lot about God and the Scriptures, but it doesn't change us. It doesn't impact our lives. It doesn't call us to a place of submission, because we see it simply as information. Listen, if it doesn't transform you and cause you to love Jesus more and doesn't call you to repent, it isn't biblical faith—it's demonic.

You see, these three types of faith are useless, the text says, and are of zero value. They will get us nowhere. So what kind of faith does?

Dynamic faith

James uses two more illustrations to give us a picture of dynamic faith. He tells us that dynamic faith can be achieved through the grace of Jesus Christ. This kind of faith will cause us to do some things. But first he gives two examples from the Old Testament: Abraham and Rahab (Genesis 17–26; Joshua 2, 6). What we learn is that both of them exhibited the kind of faith that pleased God. But notice, within this dynamic faith neither of these people were perfect. You don't have to be perfect to have a dynamic faith. These people were far from perfect. Rahab was a woman from a pagan nation in a city called Jericho. She was part of a people who hated the God of the Israelites. Likewise, Abraham, with all the accolades he was given—being a patriarch, being God's man—he missed God's best numerous times in his life. He made bad decisions, even after he had heard from God directly. Yet God saw something in both of their examples that would prove to be effective.

So you don't have to be perfect. Stop trying to be perfect. You will never be perfect. Stop the "try hard-fail" mentality. What God wants you to do—in all your sins and imperfections—is to rest and rely on Him and Him alone, to rely on the only perfect gift of Jesus to complete the work that you and I can't. Faith believes and acts based on what Jesus has done for us, not what we can do for Him.

Second, this faith is possessive. This is seen in both Abraham and Rahab. They took God's words and applied them to their lives and situations. Scripture says Abraham waited for a son and he was given a son in his old age. Then what did God require after He gave him this promised son after all those years? "I want you to sacrifice your son. I want you to give him back to Me." That same God is now requiring the son He gave Abraham to be given back. Abraham knew what God was asking, yet he still did it. He did it not knowing the result or if there would be any return value. But what he said was, "I can trust God in all things—even in the hard things. I'm going to rely on Him. I'm going to allow Him to address His plan and purposes in my life. I am going to do what He says."

So it is with Rahab as well. She lived in Jericho, beyond the Jordan River. The people of God had been promised that land. The people in Jericho were rebelling against the word and plan of God. She heard about the things God had done to care for and protect His people Israel by His mighty hand. So she acted. She provided cover for the spies who had come in to Jericho. In that act, she was saying, "I trust God. I'm going to rely on Him. I'm going to allow Him to show His grace and mercy."

So both Abraham and Rahab knew the things of God and applied them to their lives by faith. It was real faith for real life that transformed them and caused them to act differently.

Third, dynamic faith is persistent. How far did Abraham go in following God? All the way to raising the knife over his son. He was ready to do what God required of him. How far did Rahab go in hiding the spies? She knew the punishment that would come by being a traitor to the people of Jericho. She knew it would mean death. But she did it. You see, with great harm standing before them, they chose to follow God instead of their own desires.

Faith isn't something that is simply esoteric. When the going gets tough, faith battles. It perseveres. It continues on in obedience. And at times it will allow us to accomplish and handle things we never thought were possible.

Finally, dynamic faith is put into practice. Both Abraham and Rahab could have said they had faith, but it would have been useless unless they were willing to show it. Without that, we wouldn't have known for sure whether they had faith or not. That's why we talk so much about doing things by faith here at Village Bible Church. What good is it if our faith is simply talked about, but no one can see our faith at work? What good is it for us to talk about the abundant life with Jesus Christ that we have if we don't show people how we've been changed by it?

You see, that's why half of the verses in James include commands. It isn't so that we can do things to be saved or do things to have a right status with God. It is to do things so that we can show the world and other believers that we have been changed and transformed by the saving work of Jesus Christ in our lives. Because if we don't do that, how will they know? If they don't see faith being lived out in our lives, how will they know? So the preaching we do here isn't to condemn us as believers, but to encourage us to live each and every day through the faith that God gives, and to rely on and trust in Him, and to allow those good works to come as a result.

3. The implementation of faith

Where do we go from here? As we look at a passage like this, we must respond. Verse 26 says, *"For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."* We have to ask ourselves some questions.

Living out biblical faith means we must recognize.

Second Corinthians 13:5 tells us that we must test ourselves to see if we are in the faith. When we come to a passage like this, we must ask, "Where am I? What faith do I have?" You can't ask your spouse to answer that question for you. You've got to ask, "Have I received by grace the faith that only God can give? Have I made that my own?" Or are you simply living out a dead, deficient or even demonic faith? If so, something has to change. You've heard the Word of God. You've had the love and grace of Jesus Christ extended to you by the power of His work on the cross. And you've seen and experienced that power of God working in and through the lives of others. So the question is, "Will you remain in your sin? Will you remain in your dead faith, or will you live in light of that truth?"

Living out biblical faith means we must internalize.

In other words, we have to incorporate faith into our lives. If we're living with any of the three bad types of faith, then today is the day you throw off that faith and throw yourself on the mercy of Jesus Christ. You should say, "Jesus, it's You alone I can trust. It is You alone Who has the power to save me. It is You alone Who can make me right with my Father in heaven. I will rest and rely on You alone for all I need. I trust that Your way of life is the only way that will allow me to fulfill my purpose and Your plan for my life." It means recognizing our sin and submitting to His holiness and power.

Living out biblical faith means we must not compartmentalize.

It's easy for us to have faith on Sunday, but not on Monday, right? It's easy to talk about faith in our small groups, but not in the workplace or school. We must be careful not to say, "Faith is something I have on certain days of the week, in certain situations and scenarios." Rather, faith must be part of every aspect of our lives. So be careful not to cause your faith to become defective because you're only using it in one place. Faith has to be ongoing. That light will not stay on if it ever gets unplugged, so we continually need to make sure we are plugging ourselves into His power source. And when sin and trouble come, we say, "God, You know me better than I know myself. Forgive me and make me more like Your Son." God says He will forgive, and He will minister, and He will care.

Living out biblical faith means we must prioritize.

But for this to become a reality, we must prioritize. Our faith in God is something that we should view as a treasure. Paul tells us we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). But this faith is not of ourselves, but it is a gift from God. And if it's a gift from God, we've got to cherish it. We've got to use it. We've got to protect it. We've got to rejoice in it. We've got to persevere in it. We've got to trust in it and we've got to hope in it.

Jesus gave us faith so that we might know Him and be known by Him. So let's do all we can so that we might grow in our faith and live according to this faith, serving Him faithfully and worshipping Him joyfully, the only One Who did all the work. Having faith means I rest in Him and Him alone.

Always remember this final truth: What saves us is faith alone—but the faith that saves is never alone. What saves us is faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone, because good works will be produced through that faith.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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