

James 2:14-26

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] that we read there in James. We're going to sing again. We're going to sing from Psalm 119, and we're going to sing verses 9 to 16 of that psalm, and we'll be singing to the tune Rockingham.

How can the young keep their life pure by doing what your Word demands? I seek you with my heart and soul, let me not stray from your commands. The stress of the psalmist here finding echo in the teaching of James, the importance of doing what God's Word demands, not only professing belief concerning what it says. So let's stand and sing these words of the psalm.

How can the young keep their life pure by doing what your Word demands? I seek you with my heart, how can the young keep their life pure by doing what your Word demands? I seek you with my heart and soul, let me not stray from your commands. Your Word I've hidden in my heart to keep me from the long of ending you. Praise be to you, O Lord my God, you, O Lord my God, here asking grace,

His ears, His ears, His ears, His ears, His ears, His ears, His ears, Hears, His ears, His ears, Stan, His ears, R calls, I love to follow your commands As others love to count their gold I meditated upon your ways And all your precepts I reflect

I take delight in your decrees Your word I never will neglect Are you saved?

[3 : 3 0] Is Jesus your Savior? Are you right with God? Are you God's friend? It's the same basic question posed in different ways.

And it is the most important question that you can face. And that you need to be able to answer. On the answer to that question hinges your present happiness And your eternal destiny.

It is a big question. The gospel, or the good news, is that we can be saved. We're sinners, all of us, but we can be saved.

God, through His Son Jesus and His saving mission, Has opened a way of salvation. And that salvation is experienced or enjoyed by faith Or by trusting in Jesus.

Such faith is what we can call, or we sometimes call, Saving faith. Now I want us to consider the verses that we've read In James chapter 2 From the perspective of trying to understand What is saving faith.

[4 : 4 5] What it looks like. And how can I know that I possess this precious resource That we're calling or describing as saving faith.

At a very personal level, I would encourage each of you to join me in this investigation Or this exploration with this question to the forefront of your mind.

Do I possess saving faith? Never mind about who's next to you. Never mind about somebody who you're concerned for. That's good and well. But this morning, I would invite all of us, Regardless of where you maybe would place yourself, If I were to ask you right now, I would invite all of you to have that question To the forefront of your mind.

Do I possess saving faith? Now, before we go any further in this investigation, I want to ground in the passage The legitimacy of considering James' teaching In this section from this perspective that I've outlined.

Let's read verse 14 And note the question that James poses there. Maybe the second question that he poses. What good is it, my brothers, If a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?

[6 : 08] And then notice the question that he poses. Can such faith save him? You can see there James' concern. I'm not saying it's his only concern In the course of what he teaches In this section of his letter, But clearly this is a significant concern On the part of James.

Whether this faith that the man he is considering Professes, whether it can save him. He clearly is of the view That there is such a thing as saving faith.

And he wants to explore this. And he wants people to be clear On what saving faith is. And what it looks like. James is concerned That his readers, That each of us, Be very clear on this matter.

Namely, the nature of saving faith. Or the nature of faith That saves. So, how does James tackle this question?

Well, he does so in two ways. He does so negatively, And he does so positively. He identifies faith that does not save. We could call it counterfeit faith.

[7 : 17] And he identifies faith that can and does save. We could call such faith Genuine faith For a degree of symmetry.

So, we have counterfeit faith And we have genuine faith Or saving faith. And that's what he does. He identifies these two kinds of faith, If you wish.

And distinguishes between them. For each type, Counterfeit faith And genuine faith, James gives examples.

Be they hypothetical examples, Very real examples, But nonetheless hypothetical, That he imagines. Suppose a man says, Or imagine somebody Having this opinion.

So, they're hypothetical examples Of those who possess Counterfeit faith. But he also gives examples, In this case, Historical examples, Real people in the history of Israel Who possessed genuine faith.

[8 : 19] Abraham and Rahab. So, two kinds of faith, Counterfeit faith, And genuine faith. Faith that doesn't save, And faith that does save. And for each of these two kinds of faith, Examples are given by James.

So, that's the manner in which We're going to make our way through The passage this morning. First of all, Counterfeit faith.

What is counterfeit faith? Well, it is the faith Of the man or woman Who claims to have faith, But has no deeds. Right at the very beginning Of the passage.

What good is it, my brother, If a man claims to have faith, But has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? And the question that we were looking at Just a moment ago To justify, Considering the passage in this light, Can such a faith save him?

Clearly, it's a rhetorical question That James is posing, But it's crystal clear What is the answer That James expects us to give? And the answer, of course, Is a resounding no.

[9 : 29] A man who claims to have faith, But has no deeds, Such a faith cannot save that man or woman. Why? Because it is counterfeit faith.

It's not genuine faith. Well, that's what counterfeit is. It is a claim to faith That is not accompanied by deeds. And James then goes on To give a couple of illustrations Or examples of counterfeit faith.

And we're going to look at The two examples in a moment. But before we look at his examples, I want you to note Two important preliminary points On this matter of Claiming a faith that is not genuine.

The first preliminary point That is important to note Is that the man described In verse 14, If a man claims to have faith. This man that James is imagining, This is a man who not only Claims to have faith, He clearly does, That's what James says, But it's very clear That this is a man Who is sincerely persuaded That his faith is genuine.

That his faith is, If you wish, Saving faith. And that is something To be very sober about. And we need to be very clear.

[10 : 50] Many live their lives Under this dangerous Misapprehension. They imagine that the faith That they claim is genuine. But in actual fact, It is counterfeit.

So they claim faith, And they're genuine in their claim. But their claim is a fraudulent one. But they don't realize it. They don't know that it's fraudulent. Indeed, it's far better To make no claim to faith Than to make a false Or misguided claim To genuine faith.

And really, By making this preliminary point, All I'm saying is, Be careful. Because it's not just Somebody else Who might be Under this misapprehension. It might be you.

Here is a man Described by James Who was under this Misapprehension. The second preliminary point To make is that James, For the purpose of his argument, Identifies the hypothetical Mind he is describing there In verse 14 As having faith Of a sort.

Even the question, Can such faith save him? Grants to the claim to faith The legitimacy Of being faith of a kind.

[12 : 03] So he's broadening, In a sense, His definition of faith. He's saying, If somebody claims to have faith, Fine, we'll call it faith. Let's call it faith. But, It is not a faith That saves.

It's not genuine faith. It's counterfeit faith. The reason why we need To be clear on that Is it's important As we go through the passage To be clear that The manner in which James uses the word faith Can vary.

Given this broad Definition, if you wish, That he employs. And that's very important When we compare What James says With, say, The apostle Paul. We're not going to do that This morning.

I think we will try And do it on another occasion. And I think lots of The seeming difficulties That we have Can be resolved When we understand The manner in which The author is using A given word.

So again, That's just a preliminary point. So what about the examples? Let's move on to these Two examples of Counterfeit faith. The examples are presented In the form of two individuals Those who claim to have faith.

[13 : 02] And let's call them To give them some identity Let's call them The well-wisher Spoken of in verses 15 to 17 And then the second Example of counterfeit faith Is somebody we'll call The believer.

Sounds very promising. We'll call this person The believer. So the well-wisher And the believer. And let's think about The well-wisher First of all. Again, we're still in verses 14 through to What?

16, 17. The man described here By James Who In the face of A brother or sister In need Wishes them well.

The man described Is clearly part Of the church Or the community of faith. The example contemplates The plight of a brother Or sister And the well-wisher We're told Is one of you.

So one of you Who belong to that church. Who belong to that community Of professing believers. If one of you Is faced with this circumstance. So this man Who is under the misapprehension That his faith is genuine Is part of the church.

[14 : 16] And the picture painted Of this man Is simply enough. A brother or sister Is in serious need of help. What does this man Who claims to have faith Do? Well he wishes them well.

I wish you well. I wonder if this man That James is imagining And no doubt he has met Men and women like that. He doesn't need to Do much in the way Of fabrication Even though it's hypothetical.

I wonder If this man Who expresses himself In this way I wonder if he even Realizes the shallowness Of his words. Or if he does Is the option Of actually doing something So burdensome That he opts Maybe with some embarrassment For the muttering Of this platitude.

Go I wish you well. Keep warm And well fed. But what does this man Actually do? This well-wisher What does he actually do? Well he does nothing. And James poses the question What good is it?

What good is it? And again The rhetorical question It's very clear What the answer to that is. You don't need to be A theologian To answer that question. It's such a simple question.

[15 : 26] It's no good at all. And what is James' Theological conclusion Concerning this well-wisher? This man we're describing As the well-wisher.

Well we have that In verse 17 In the same way Faith by itself If it is not Accompanied by action Is dead. Now let's be clear As we think about this Well-wisher James here Has chosen one example Of where action Is required.

Namely That of a hungry brother. But we can think of Other examples That could serve The same purpose. Suppose A brother or sister Is lonely.

Suppose A friend or acquaintance Is struggling With mental health issues. Suppose Suppose there are folks In your community Who are struggling Financially. Suppose there are families Who are struggling To hold it together.

And we could go on. There are any number Of examples That James could have employed To make his point. He chooses one That was relevant To those he was Writing to.

[16 : 35] Indeed you could Come up with your own Examples I'm sure. In summary What does James make Of this well-wisher's Christianity or faith? Well he says Very brutally But very honestly It's dead.

In the same way Faith by itself If it is not Accompanied by action Is dead. And so the question For us The question for you Is are you a well-wisher? Does this describe you?

You claim to have faith And yet when it comes To the crunch You fail to deliver. You don't act In a manner that is Consistent with your claim.

You're a well-wisher Or somebody of that kind. But then the second example That James gives Of what we're calling Counterfeit faith And it seems A contradiction But the second example Is the man we're calling The believer.

Now this character Is brought into the discourse Into the argument As James contemplates A seemingly plausible Counterposition To his insistence That faith Be accompanied By action or deeds.

[17 : 41] And this counterargument Is posed by An imaginary someone There in verse 18 But someone will say You have faith I have deeds.

But it could equally Be the other way around. You have deeds I have faith. Basically what this Individual is proposing Is that you know You've got different Kinds of Christians We're not all the same.

You know there's If you wish The spiritual Christian Who likes reading the Bible And likes praying. And then of course You've got the practical Christian Who likes to get stuff done.

And you know Let's not judge one From the other. You know perhaps If James had allowed His character To develop his argument He might have said Look at Martha And Mary You know Martha Was the spiritual one Who wanted to be seated At the feet of Jesus Listening to his teaching.

Or well I've got it The wrong way around Haven't I? Mary was the spiritual one Who wanted to be seated At the feet of Jesus Listening to his teaching. Well Martha Was busy in the kitchen Getting stuff done. But hey They're both genuine Disciples of Jesus.

[18 : 51] That's kind of the line This man This someone is taking. You know you have faith I have deeds Others have deeds Others have faith You know Why get so upset about it? Why make such a big deal about it?

Now how does James respond To this seemingly plausible Counter argument? Well he He refutes it In the following way He says this Show me your faith Without deeds Which you can't do This faith that you You profess And I will show you My faith by what I do In fact the only way That I can show you That I have faith Is by what I do And with this James introduces In verse 19 His second example Of counterfeit faith The believer Then in verse 19 What does he say?

You believe That there is one God And let's just pause there He's addressing This imaginary believer Who believes in God You believe There is one God Why is this man Being labeled Or why am I calling him Or labeling the believer?

Well For the simple reason That this is a man Who believes in God You believe That there is one God The man The woman Believes in God So It's not unreasonable On that basis To say This person Is a believer In that Limited sense of the word They believe in God So they're believers But it's not just That this man Believes in God That God exists This is a man Who believes In one God Notice How James is careful To use his words You believe That there is One God And that's very significant Because what James Is saying Is that this person This individual Is not only Somebody who believes In God But he believes In the God Of the Bible The language Of one God Deliberately And explicitly Picks up On the central Confession of faith Of God's people In the Old Testament That we read

In Deuteronomy Chapter 6 And verse 4 This was the verse That all Pious Israelites Not only knew But would recite On a daily basis This was their Central confession Of faith Deuteronomy 6 Verse 4 Hear O Israel The Lord our God The Lord is one This is what Distinguished them From all the other nations This profession Of faith Concerning the nature Of their God And so what James Is saying Here is a man Not only who believes In God But a man who believes In the God of the Bible He is a man Who is orthodox In his theology This is a man Who can recite The Apostles' Creed With a degree Of conviction Indeed this is a man Or a woman Who is able To identify The flaws In the theology Of others Or other Christian traditions And this is all Good stuff Surely this man The believer As we're calling him

[22 : 02] Surely this man Possesses genuine And saving faith And what does James Say about this man Well we know What he says Because it's such A familiar And striking verse You believe That there is one God Good Rather sarcastically Even the demons Believe that And shudder And so what's he saying He's saying You know Your profession Your belief In truth Concerning God It is good But it's not enough Even the demons Believe In God Even the demons Believe in Some of the core Truths Concerning God That is orthodox Theology In the pit Of hell Is what James Is saying But does such a man Who believes in God Who believes in the God Of the Bible Who ticks all the right boxes In terms of his theology

Does this man Possess saving faith James says no And why not Because his faith Is not accompanied By deeds It's all words He talks the talk But he fails to walk The walk And so you have The well-wisher Whose faith Is counterfeit And you have The believer As we're calling him Whose faith Is also counterfeit And in both cases For the same reason That their faith Is not marked By He's not accompanied By deeds By action But this second Scenario If you wish Or this second example Is maybe one We need to be Particularly weighty of In our tradition Where we Rightly Place great Importance On sound Doctrine And we would Describe ourselves Perhaps in distinction To others As Bible-believing Christians Or language

Of that Nature And the solemn Sombre reality That James Is revealing Or making clear In what he says Is that there will be Bible-believing Christians In hell There will be Those who Believe the Bible To be true Who tick the right Boxes in terms Of their theology Whose eternal Destiny will be A lost one That's what he's saying That is where They will end up Because their faith Is counterfeit They believe The right things But they don't do What is required Of them And so We need to Pause And reflect And we need To examine Ourselves Do you believe The right things About God While failing To do the right Things for God Why does James Use such a Brutal Comparison With the demons It is Pretty brutal

I think partly Because it allows Him to make His point In a memorable Way But partly Also I think Because the Stakes are so High James is Burdened by The reality Of men And women Meandering Their way To a lost Eternity Under the False impression That all is Well with their Soul Because they Believe The right Things Or they Attend The right Church And he's Saying be Careful Because that Alone is not Evidence Of possessing Saving Faith But let's Move on to The two Examples That he Gives Of genuine Or saving Faith What is Genuine Or saving Faith Before looking At the Examples Well It's really The other Side of The coin Faith That is Accompanied By deeds And the Logic As I Say Is clear Enough If faith Without deeds Can't save Then faith With deeds Can and does Save

And again James gives Two examples This time They're not Hypothetical Church Debaters But historical Figures Namely Abraham And Rahab Or Perhaps To explicitly Draw The deliberate And striking And deliberately Shocking Contrast That James Is making We could Call them The patriarch And the Prostitute Because that's Who they are Abraham And Rahab The patriarch And the Prostitute They are the Two examples That James Gives Of those Who possess Genuine Faith Saving Faith And I have To say That James His choice Of examples To prove His point Is nothing Short of Brilliant Is nothing Short of Inspired Which is not Surprising Given that he Writes To use the Language of Peter Carried along By the Holy Spirit This is an Inspired choice Of examples

[27 : 05] To demonstrate What faithing Saving faith Looks like In real people And let's just Notice these Two examples Very briefly And remember These are Examples of Genuine Or saving Faith Examples of Two people Whose faith Was accompanied By deeds In actual Fact James Is less than Convinced That it should Be necessary To labour His point About the Nature of Saving faith Notice how He introduces His examples You foolish Man Do you want Evidence That faith Without deeds Is useless It's as if He's saying Look I really You know Argue the case Sufficiently But hey We'll carry on Because there Are foolish Men and Women out There And here As well And I Include myself And so I'll just Take it One step Further To insist On the Point That I'm Making And the Examine And the James Is writing Principly

Though not Exclusively To a Jewish Audience And so To get Abraham On his Side Of the Argument Is to Seal The deal Jesus Or rather James then Tells the Story Of Abraham The archetypal Man of Faith The friend Of God As he Is described In this Passage How does Abraham Demonstrate That genuine Faith requires Accompanying deeds Or actions Well if we Just sweep Through some Of the Story of Abraham Some of Which is Made Reference To in The section And some Of which James assumes His audience Knows about Which also Emphasizes That his Audience Was principally Jewish He can Assume Knowledge About these Characters But you Remember the Story God had Promised Abraham That his Descendants Would be As numerous As the Sand On the Seashore As the Stars In the Sky And Abraham

Believed That promise But then Over the Years His Faith Was tested As his Wife Was unable To conceive But Abraham Continued to Believe Just Then in a Miraculous Way his Wife in Her Old age Gives birth To Isaac And you Can imagine The rejoicing When the Baby is Born But then One day God does Something Very Strange Almost Cruel Certainly From our Standpoint From our Perspective And I Stress From our Perspective It appears Almost cruel He orders Abraham to Sacrifice His son Isaac Now this is Devastating for Abraham In two Intertwined Ways He loves His only Son But not Only that All the Promises Of God Hinge On the Survival Of his Son But what Does Abraham Do This man Who believes The promises Of God What does He do He obeys In the Account in Genesis We're giving

A striking Insight Into the Faith of Abraham When Isaac The young Boy Isaac Oblivious To the Fact that He is The Sacrifice Asks His father Where is The lamb For the Burnt Offering And how Does Abraham Reply To that Heart Wrenching Question Of his Son God Himself Will Provide The lamb God Himself Will Provide The lamb And we Know the Outcoming In a Moment of High drama As Abraham Raises The knife An angel Calls out And instructs Him to Leave the Boy Unharmd And God Provides A substitute God provides A ram To take The place Of Isaac And Abraham Demonstrated In this way That he Possessed Genuine Faith As his Faith His Claim To believe The promises Of God Was accompanied By action It was accompanied By obedience

James tells us There in verse 23 That Abraham Believed God Not just That he Believed In God But that he Believed God He trusted In God As the One who Would provide What he Had to do Was obey Now we Live on The right Or blessed Side of History If you Wish In that We can Look back To the Cross We can Look back To Calvary And to Jesus Hanging on That cross And we See that God is Indeed The one Who most Wonderfully And sacrificially Provides For his People He provided He gave His only Son to Die on the Cross In our Place And so The first Example That James Gives Of genuine Faith The faith That is Accompanied By deeds Is the Glorious Example Of Abraham The father Of the Faith

[32 : 08] But then He gives Another example And his Second example Is of Rahab And what a Contrast From the Patriarch To the Prostitute It's almost As if James Is anticipating Some of His readers In awe Of Abraham Concluding Well I'm No Abraham So even If you're Right That genuine Faith Is only Genuine When accompanied By deeds Well that Genuine Faith That saving Faith It's beyond Me Because hey I'm No Abraham And I Couldn't Even begin To compare Myself To Abraham And if Saving Faith Is only For the Likes Of Abraham Well woe Is me Well what About Rahab Now with Rahab The stress In this One verse That she Is given By James Again He assumes That his Readers know The story The stress Is on what She did She acted With great Courage In saving The lives Of the Israelite Spies At the time Of the

Conquest But she Did so Grounded in Or as an Expression Of her Nation And very Rudimentary Faith In the God Of Israel The account In Joshua Where we Have the Details Of this Occasion Makes that Very clear When Rahab Is speaking To the Spies And explaining Why she's Doing what She's doing She says This The Lord Your God Is God In heaven Above And on The earth Below She's begun To believe In the God Of Israel The one God And that Faith In God Then Finds Expression In doing What she Does In Protecting The spies And sending Them on Their way That they Be not Arrested By her Fellow Citizens Rahab Believed In the One and True God And she Acted Trusting In the Goodness Of that God To show Her Kindness And save Her Her Faith Was Accompanied

By deeds And there's So much More that Could be Said But we Are not Going to Do that This morning But we May return To some Of this On another Occasion But all I would Say is This When we Think of These two Examples That James Gives Of saving Faith Of genuine Faith In the Eyes Of God And really That's all That matters Abraham And Rahab The patriarch And the Prostitute Stand Shoulder To shoulder They are United By this One bond Of Possessing Saving Faith And that's What the Gospel Does It unites The patriarch And the Prostitute The patriarch And the Prostitute Are brother And sister In the Faith Both Are clothed In the Righteousness Of the God In whom They Trust Well let's Draw things To a Close And draw The threads Together By posing

The question With which We began A few Moments Ago Are you Saved Do you Possess Genuine Or saving Faith Is your Trust Like Abraham And Rahab In the God Who Provides The God Who shows Kindness The God Who saves And is your Claim To faith Accompanied By deeds By trusting Obedience To the Commands Of God In the Service Of others And I Would encourage You I would Urge You To give That question The serious Attention That it Merits Let's pray Heavenly Father we do Thank you That you Are the God Who saves That you Are the God Who is The one God The God Of heaven And earth The living And true God We thank you

That you Are a God Who is Marked By kindness We thank you That you Are a God Who saves Your people We thank you For the Way that Has been Opened up For us And we Pray that You would Help us To know What it Is to Put our Trust In your Son Jesus As our Savior And as We do So enjoy Forgiveness Of sins Begin to Experience What it Is to be Redeemed To be Saved To be Part of Your people And to Live a Life That demonstrates That the Faith that we Claim Is indeed Genuine We fall Short We don't Do all That we Ought to Do All that We could Do Do We pray That by Your Spirit You Would Help us To Ever More Live Lives That are Coherent That there Would be An integrity Within us Between what We claim And the Manner in Which we Live And we Pray these Things in Jesus name Amen To be