

Good morning. Welcome to those of you joining us online, and our friends up in The :01.

I was in a meeting this week with a couple in our church who wanted to share about this experience they had recently when they were on a cruise.

I'll call him Jim, cause his name is Jim. Anyway, one day he started chatting with one of the servers, who was being very friendly. He was asking: how's your day going? And so they returned the kindness, and said: so how did you end up working on this cruise ship? And the man said: the Lord brought me here.

And they said: really! How's that?

And the man said—yeah well about 20 years ago, the families in our neighborhood had this thing happen where people from the US would come and they would give us these shoeboxes that would have toys in them. We used to look forward to them every year. And as a result of those gifts, and reading the messages about Jesus, my mother and I started going to church and then to Sunday School, and now here I am.

Well Jim and his wife were in tears because they said: we packed those! In fact, I used to be part of a group that would load up the boxes of boxes.

They couldn't believe that this simple act of kindness, packing a shoebox of small toys, probably worth no more than \$30, could change someone's life.

It was a small example of faith leading to a good work, which led to more faith. Our passage talks about this today, and we're going to unpack this some more.

What I'm reminded of as we come to this passage is a song written by Rich Mullins in the 80s, called Screen Door.

Rich was one of my musical heroes, with songs just steeped in Scripture, and an incredible musicality, he played the hammered dulcimer in his shows, I know there are some Rich fans out there, tragically he died in a car accident in 1997, but his song about this passage is called Screen Door because the line is:

It's about as useless as a screen door on a submarine, faith without works baby, it just ain't happenin'.

Then he summarizes it by saying: faith without works, it's like a song you can't sing, it's about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.

It's one of the most famous and most challenging passages in the NT, for what it says and for what it means when it says what it says.

So let's go to the passage, I'm reading from the NIV.

*14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

James proposes a question: what good is faith if it has no deeds, no works to go alongside that faith. He says two things in verse 14: is it good, and can it save a person? The supposed answer of course is no.

This is BIG news especially on this side of the Reformation, more on that in a minute. We have a NT Scripture telling us that faith alone isn't enough to save us. If you're paying attention, this should make you a little uncomfortable, so let's keep going.

James then frames up a hypothetical scenario, that is clearly intended to be comical in nature. He imagines a situation where someone shows up in the winter time to your front door. They say: please, it's cold. I need a coat and some food. You, with a closet full of coats and a pantry full of food, respond this way: "Go in peace, be warm and well fed!" And you slam the door.

Sort of a dark comedy moment for the New Testament I'd say. And a powerful one because he's proved his point. It's obvious. Anyone who says they have faith in God but refuses to do anything about it SHOWS (and this is the important point) that perhaps their faith isn't real.

James says that a faith that doesn't display itself through works is, in a word, dead. Not weak, not ineffective...he says it's dead. He says it's no faith at all.

He continues to lay out his point in the next section.

*18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."  
Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.*

So in this verse, James imagines a critic who says: what's the big deal? Some Christians have a strong faith, others have strong deeds, pick and choose. James says no: faith is displayed BY your deeds.

And then he has a bit of a mic drop moment.

*19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.* He says look: belief, huh? I'm supposed to be impressed by your belief? You know who has belief? Demons. They believe. They know that God is real. But their actions don't display that that belief makes any kind of difference.

Then in the next 5 verses, he uses the examples of Abraham and the example of Rahab.

But first, Abraham.

*20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless[a]? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.*

Ok so a quick jump back into Genesis. God tells Abraham to go offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. In the moment, this is not a metaphor, this is not a prank. Abraham goes to kill

his son, and God says: don't do it, there's a ram, offer him instead. It was a test, and Abraham passed it.

So what James is saying is that when Abraham passed that test by obeying God, his faith and his works were working together. They were not separated when that happened. And it says that his faith was FULFILLED by his deeds. They worked together.

Verse 23, he sums up that in all of this interaction, he was ultimately called God's friend. Which echoes Jesus' words too, that he calls his disciples friends. To be in covenantal union with God is to be his friend.

And then he summarizes the section about Abraham by saying that righteousness comes not just by faith alone, but by works too.

Again, I hope some of you are squirming here when you hear me say this.

Verse 25, he turns to Rahab.

*25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?*

So Rahab is commended for the works she did in lodging Caleb and Joshua- this act of hers shows her to be righteous in God's eyes.

Then James sums up the section with verse 26:

*26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

Again, a summary statement of all that he has said up to now.

So in a minute I've got 4 points, 4 implications from this passage that I'm going to unpack but first I want to quickly address what some of you might be wondering— doesn't this passage from James contradict what Paul says about salvation? Isn't this the problem Martin Luther tried to solve in the Reformation?

It's a very logical question.

James says in verse 24: A person is considered righteous (or justified) by what they do and not by faith alone.

Paul says in Romans 3:28: A person is made righteous (or justified) by faith apart from the works of the law.

There it is, a contradiction in the Bible.

I don't think so.

You have to understand that these 2 men weren't writing to each other. They were aware of each other to be sure, but they were addressing different areas of focus in their letters.

Paul was refuting the Judaizers, the people who believed that in order to be in God's family, you had to become Jewish first, you had to obey the law, PLUS Jesus. His point was: no, obeying the law doesn't save you.

James is refuting those who think that works were optional in the playing-out of faith. So he says—no chance. Works make someone righteous insofar as they work with faith to show that their salvation is real.

Apparent contradictions exist elsewhere too.

Jesus says both “He who is not against us is for us” and “He who is not for us is against us.” They don’t contradict, they are addressing different scenarios.

One last comment for those that care about this kind of thing. Theologian Scot McKnight said that James and Paul could be synthesized with this line: “as faith without works is dead, so are works without faith dead.”

So with all of that in mind, here are the 4 implications of our passage.

1. Works don’t save us, but show the presence or lack of a saving faith. James is very practical, saying: look, the proof of your faith is in the pudding. If your faith is real, it will be *demonstrated* by works.

Modern Christians can get very hung up on salvation.

What does it take for someone to be saved, that is to have the assurance that you are in the care of Christ, both now and forever.

I have at times been guilty of using a phrase that I no longer try to use ever, when inviting someone to put your faith in Jesus.

That phrase is this: “all you have to do”

We say to people “all you have to do is pray this prayer. That’s it. And when you die you will be with God forever.”

I think that’s a very dangerous thing to say to someone, and I don’t believe its fully and truly biblical.

Because what it suggests to someone is this: if you pray one prayer at ANY point in your life, this magical prayer, NO MATTER WHAT ELSE you may do in your life, you are in.

It’s what Dallas Willard calls bar code theology in his book *Divine Conspiracy*. Meaning, a lot of Christians prayed this prayer and were told- you’re in. You’re good. Your faith has saved you, and you don’t have to worry. Live your life! Be free!

The Scriptures are consistent, from the OT to Jesus, to Paul, to James, that works are essential. They don’t save you, no. But they are a sign that your faith is real.

Jesus doesn’t say “all you have to do is pray one prayer and then ignore everything I tell you to do forever and I promise you’ll be in at the end.”

He encourages his followers to count the cost. In Matthew 25 he says that those who are saved are the ones who put their faith into action and cared for the least of these. Paul says to remember the poor and to work out your salvation.

But the passage that says the most to me is when Jesus tells his followers that they are to take up their cross EVERY DAY. That doesn’t sound like a one-time decision that earns you salvation no matter what else you do.

Sounds like a lifestyle based on a decision to follow Him.

This brings me to my 2<sup>nd</sup> point.

2. A genuine faith should lead to a lifestyle of works. Over the years, a false dichotomy has been set up.

False dichotomy means- 2 things that seem to be in opposition to each other but in fact are not.

On one side is the so-called “social justice” side of things and on the other is “personal salvation.”

Physical needs vs spiritual needs. They don’t have to be fighting each other at all.

I’ve had interns who come here and find out that Christ Church is involved in all of these efforts to help meet the physical needs of people both here in Lake County and around the world, and it’s made them nervous. Because they’ve been in churches that have been told: there is no such thing as social justice. If you as a Christian are meeting the needs of people and you’re not telling them about Jesus, then you’re watering down the gospel, and you’re wasting your time. You need to care for their souls before you care for their bodies, because their bodies are temporary and their souls are eternal.

Maybe there are people here who believe this and you’re like: yeah, I believe, that, come at me.

I would recommend a book that helped me understand these issues more, by Tim Keller, caused *A Generous Justice*. It’s a little outdated in some parts, but the message is so powerful, and it’s been proven by the example of Keller’s church in Manhattan.

There need be no fight between meeting someone’s physical vs spiritual needs. They work together.

I go back to James’ example about saying to someone with physical needs: be warm and well fed.

What does that show? It shows that you’re selfish, that the faith you profess isn’t changing your heart.

*And the watching world wants to see that our faith is genuine.*

In fact, I would say that, especially in the world we live in today, acts of service is the love language of secular culture.

Most of you know about this concept of love languages. Gary Chapman wrote the book on it, to help couples know how to love each other.

The love languages are:

Words of affirmation

Quality time

Receiving gifts

Acts of service

Physical touch

Gary Chapman helped so many relationships because, for instance, someone whose love language is acts of service gets all these words of affirmation from their partner, and it doesn’t mean anything.

They say: if you really loved me, you’d serve me. So once couples know that, they can more easily give and receive love. (That’s a different sermon)

But when the world looks at the church, you'd think we thought the world's love language was something like:

- Holy living
- Biblical preaching
- Condemning words

Right?

We're like: Holy living "look at how holy we are! We don't swear that much, world—come join us in following Jesus!"

Biblical preaching- "Aren't you so impressed with our sound doctrine?!? I spent so many hours on this! I learned Greek! Come join us!"

Condemning words—"See with what precision we condemn those who aren't as holy as us. We're so good at it! Come join us!"

Those are not the world's love languages.

The primary love languages of the nonbelieving world

1. Sacrificial acts of service coupled with its essential partner
2. (1A) a lack of hypocrisy

That's it.

If the world sees that we are eager to meet the needs of the world, and we're doing it without hypocrisy or another agenda, they stop and go: oh. Wow. You do that? You care for the poor. You see a need and you meet it. I may not agree with your beliefs, but I sure respect what you're doing. And I actually might want to hear a thing or two ABOUT your beliefs, because I respect what you're doing so much.

Works can be the bridge that others see that might lead to faith being birthed in their hearts.

I have a friend who runs an urban ministry in a city in Texas. He's a conservative Christian, got a master's degree from Trinity Seminary like many of the staff here at Christ Church. Has views that a lot of the people in his city don't agree with. But he gets invited to speak at all kinds of different places...people donate money to his ministry all the time because of all of the good he does, in the name of Jesus, in his city.

He's figured out that when he meets the needs of his city, it shows the city that he loves the city, and by extension, that God loves the city. His faith leads to a lifestyle of works.

3. Faith and works exist in a symbiotic relationship.

That is to say: faith and works encourage each other.

When your faith is real and active, when you're connected to God, when your interior life is strong, it will naturally motivate you to be active in living that faith out. That's just the reality of what a strong faith will do.

Likewise, when you are committed to the regular pattern of doing good works, your exterior life, in any number of ways, what you'll find is that it will motivate your interior life. It will grow your faith.

Rather than having these 2 things be pitted against one another, faith and works strengthen each other.

It's such a cliché now but it's true that when people go on short-term mission trips for instance, they end up receiving more from the people they're serving than they gave.

4. We need the HS to help show us where and how to invest our time in good deeds. You get to the end of a sermon like this, and depending on your personality, you can feel encouraged, or you can feel broken.

Kinda depends on your personality.

Those of you who tend to be a little too impressed by yourself, will think: I'm good. Whatever, it's fine.

Then there are others of you who are on the opposite end where they think: it's never enough. There's always more I could be doing.

Neither extreme is helpful.

I want to remind you of this: you don't save you. You can't. Only Jesus can. Start by resting in that truth. Start by understanding that Jesus' burden is easy and light.

And listen to the Holy Spirit. There are times in your life when God will bring obvious next steps for you to live out your faith. Let me give you some examples.

About 15 years ago, one of the students in the high school ministry asked his dad to join him on our mission trip to Mexico. He reluctantly agreed, not knowing what he was signing up for. Well he loved it. As a contractor, he thrived there and came alive using his natural gifts not just for clients who can sometimes be a little bratty, but for people who were living in a home with a cement floor, a safe environment for their kids.

But he came home and thought: I don't want to wait a year to serve. There are needs here. So with the help of some other folks, the HOGS team was founded, and it's still going today. You can go to the website and search for HOGS (.../hogs)

You might not be able to serve every week but you can start by financially supporting a ministry like Compassion or IJM (International Justice Mission) that fights injustice in the name of Christ around the globe.

If you have a little more time, there are organizations in Lake County that would love to have your works—  
ReNew Communities and North Chicago Community Partners are the first 2 that come to mind, but there are others.

There's not one right way to do it. God has made each of you with your own gifts and strengths and passions, and the way one person does it is not going to be the way another does it.

We all have to rely on following the HS to know the path to take.

And what a privilege isn't it? It's a privilege to get to make a difference in someone else's life. God gives that to us.

As a friend of mine put it recently: it makes my day to make someone's day.

Each summer I've been a part of building a home for a family in another country, and there's just nothing like it. To give someone else something they could never have been able to afford, it's a reminder of the gift that Jesus paid for us.

May we be doers of the word, not to earn ANYTHING, cause we can't.  
But out of the overflow of what God has done in us...may we be known by the world as those who live out our faith.



The points from the sermon:

1. Works don't save us, but show the presence or lack of a saving faith.
  2. A genuine faith should lead to a lifestyle of works.
  3. Faith and works exist in a symbiotic relationship.
  4. We need the HS to help show us where and how to invest our time in good deeds.
- Which of the points made the most sense? Which confused you?
  - Do you think Paul and James contradict each other? Look at these 2 passages and talk about why or why not.
    - James says in verse 24: A person is considered righteous (or justified) by what they do and not by faith alone.
    - Paul says in Romans 3:28: A person is made righteous (or justified) by faith apart from the works of the law.
  - Talk about a time when your interior life encouraged your exterior life and vice versa.
  - Are there ways you think the Holy Spirit might be encouraging you to live out your faith in practical ways more?

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Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless[a]? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.