

Audio file

[\(Study 21\) Faith and Works 4526gsm_james_2_v14-18.mp3](#)

Transcript

00:00:00

I'm turning now to the scriptures to the New Testament to James chapter 2 to James chapter 2 and verses 14 to 18 Epistle of James chapter 2 and verse 14 let us hear the word of God what doth it profit my brethren though a man say he hath faith and have not works can't faith save him if a brother or sister be naked

00:00:29

destitute of daily food and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body.

00:00:44

What doth it profit?

00:00:46

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

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Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works.

00:00:59

Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

00:01:07

The Lord will bless His word to our hearts.

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Now this morning we're going to look at this subject of faith without works.

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Faith without works.

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What is the relationship between faith and works?

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Does the teaching of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, leave out works completely?

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Well, not really.

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Both are important.

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But the important thing to remember is that the grace of God in our salvation comes first.

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Without the grace of God, even our works though they might be good,

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and even honoring to the Lord in our own eyes, they are not accepted by Almighty God.

00:02:03

Think of creation.

00:02:06

Think of the flowers in our gardens.

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Hidden under the ground are the roots that hold up the stems and take the nutrients from the soil and bring it

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to fruition or to bear in the flowers.

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And so it is with salvation by grace.

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There should be fruit.

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And those fruit, or those flowers if you like, are the works.

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What James is saying here very simply is that a person's relationship with Almighty God depends on more on what he or she says.

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It's not just what he says or she says, there's more to it.

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James here is not picking out anything novel or new because of course his

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Half-brother, if I can put it like that, the Lord Jesus Christ uses these terms in His famous Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 7 verse 17.

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Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

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A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

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Now some have seen a contradiction or even a disagreement between Paul the Apostle's teaching on justification by faith alone, found of course in his magisterial epistle, the epistle of Romans, and this epistle of James.

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But Paul there is not arguing that there is no works

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that follows salvation.

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He's actually dealing primarily with those who think that religion, or better still, ceremony, or being a religious-minded person, then you do not need to be justified by faith alone in Christ alone.

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Even the Reformer, Luther, called the Epistle of James an epistle of straw.

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because he couldn't find in this epistle the great teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

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Or we call it the doctrines of grace.

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But notice how James starts.

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This is not a general argument to the world at large.

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This is addressed to the Lord's people.

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Notice how he puts this rhetorical question.

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It's a very useful tool, especially in evangelism.

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To put a rhetorical question to somebody or even in a discussion over doctrine.

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Put a rhetorical question.

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What do I mean by that?

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What does it profit my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works, can faith save him?

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Notice the sections here.

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What does it profit?

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What use is it?

00:05:28

What use is it?

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If a man says something,

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and yet there's no evidence or proof of what he is claiming.

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This is quite serious.

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In other words, what did it profit my brethren though a man say he hath faith?

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That sounds very good, doesn't it?

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I've got faith, you know.

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I've got faith in the Lord.

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I've got faith in God.

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Or as James very, very pointedly says in verse 19,

00:06:02

There are certain beings called demons or devils that believe in God.

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That's what he's saying.

00:06:11

You believe in God, you have a faith.

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Ah, but faith, and then he asks, Faith have not works?

00:06:21

Can faith save him?

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Faith alone, his own claim to have faith?

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This is very pertinent today.

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There are people who say, I have faith, you know.

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That sounds, oh, very good.

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What do you ask them, Who is your faith in?

00:06:43

What's your faith-based upon?

00:06:46

On what grounds?

00:06:48

Can you claim to have this faith?

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You see, we might think this is a first century epistle.

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But it applies to us today.

00:07:04

And this little phrase that has come to me again and again, and it's mentioned twice in this section, this whole section of James chapter 2, it's mentioned in verse 20.

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Faith without works is dead.

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James doesn't say it once, he says it twice, six verses later.

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Faith without works is dead.

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Now I don't know about you, but I remember a time in my own life where I might have been doing good works, and I may even have had a profession of faith, but it was

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The word here, dead, could be translated as lifeless or inactive.

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The faith that people claim to have faith, even those who may even go to church, they're churchgoers, which is not a bad thing in our day, that their faith is inactive, it's lifeless.

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I'm not saying this.

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James is saying this.

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I just want us to think about four truths this morning.

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Just 4 things.

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First and foremost, good works can never bring salvation.

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Many of us know this, but we live in a world where so many people think it does.

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Good works, kindness, charity, generosity, even religious good works cannot bring salvation.

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Truly converted men and women know this.

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Some of us had to be humbled

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to really consider it.

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Some of us were convinced that our good works was sufficient for salvation.

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Some of us were very convinced, be it Protestant or Catholic, that good works done in God's name made us Christians.

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Some of us were convinced that grace

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from the church and works by ourselves and faith in the church equals salvation.

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James is not saying this.

00:10:07

He's saying salvation by faith alone, and he doesn't say in Christ alone, but it's here in the whole epistle.

00:10:16

There will be fruit, there will be works.

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There's another type of idea that goes around that says grace plus my faith, whatever that faith may be, is equal to salvation.

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That's not the gospel, friends.

00:10:35

What about grace plus works?

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Is that equal to salvation?

00:10:43

No, friends.

00:10:47

It's salvation by grace alone, by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

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Our faith is not the focus of the New Testament.

00:11:04

It's the grace of God in Jesus Christ and Christ's work at Calvary.

00:11:15

Our faith is not in ourselves.

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In other words, our faith is in Christ.

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And you might think, Well, why are you teasing this out?

00:11:25

Well, probably because I meet a lot of people now who tell me, I've got faith, you know.

00:11:32

And I'm more encouraged by that, aren't we?

00:11:36

But then you ask them, Who's your faith in?

00:11:40

Well, it's in God, you know.

00:11:43

And you're even more encouraged.

00:11:46

You might ask something like this.

00:11:49

How did you come to faith in God?

00:11:54

Well, I've always had it.

00:11:57

You've always had it.

00:12:03

But the Bible teaches us that our faith is a gift from God.

00:12:09

Oh yes, I've had it since I was born.

00:12:14

And the Bible also teaches that our faith is in Christ alone.

00:12:21

Oh well I haven't thought about that.

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Well that's going a little bit too far.

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But friends that is the gospel.

00:12:31

Faith in Christ, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Let's think for a moment about other religions.

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I read this recently.

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You might know this, I'm sure you do.

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In the Hindu religion, works, religious exercises are important.

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But how does someone get forgiven for their sin of whatever description that religion would give?

00:13:04

Well, there's a story told by a missionary a few years ago now.

00:13:09

He was walking by the Ganges River, a huge big river in India.

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He saw this man, it was early morning, it was 5 a.m.

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He saw this man bathing in the river.

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The Mishri could speak the local language, he'd been there quite a few years, and he asked him a rhetorical question.

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Well, he asked him a question, first of all he said, What are you doing?

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He knew exactly what he was doing.

00:13:41

He says, I'm bathing.

00:13:44

Of course.

00:13:46

Why are you bathing at such an early hour?

00:13:51

Well, I want to know forgiveness for sin.

00:13:55

And the mystery looks at him and says, How many times have you done this?

00:14:02

I do this very regularly.

00:14:07

Then the missionary asks them a rhetorical question.

00:14:10

Have you ever known certainty that you're forgiven?

00:14:15

Oh no, I'll never be sure.

00:14:23

That's what we're, some of our brethren across the world are dealing with every day.

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That kind of mentality.

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So good works.

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will never bring salvation, no matter how good they are, no matter how God-honouring they might be.

00:14:48

In my first church in Birmingham, there was a dear lady whom we met in our door-to-door ministry.

00:14:56

And she's a lovely lady, she's now in glory.

00:15:01

And she'd been a very

00:15:04

she would put herself, she was a bit of a wild girl in her teens.

00:15:10

But she had done well and she married someone who was involved in the haulage industry and in those days it was doing very well.

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And she began to settle down.

00:15:22

She had two daughters and got married, two daughters.

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Everything seemed to be going well.

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Then she became a respectable member of the community.

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How did she do that?

00:15:36

She became a member of the local Church of England.

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And she got involved in everything.

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She was never absent from any meetings, no matter what they were.

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She wasn't somebody who wanted to be at the front.

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She would have said to me many times, I always wanted to be in the back, serving, working, teas, coffees, special meals, homeless, shelters, whatever it was.

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And so we met with her and talked to her.

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She's a lovely lady.

00:16:20

She died now, she was 92, I believe, when she passed away.

00:16:25

And she

00:16:26

She came to us a few times and then she said to me one evening when I was sitting in our sitting room, she said, I've been coming to you for the last few months.

00:16:37

I've heard things I never heard about.

00:16:41

How come all the things I did in the church, I never heard the gospel?

00:16:51

I said, okay.

00:16:54

What do you mean by that?

00:17:01

I've heard more about Jesus Christ.

00:17:04

I now know that he's got the Lamb's book of life.

00:17:10

I know that I need to trust in him as my Saviour and that my name will be written down there.

00:17:17

How come for 40 years I went faithfully every week and I got involved in everything?

00:17:23

But I never heard about these things.

00:17:28

I said, Well, the Lord's timing.

00:17:32

But do you know the Lord Jesus now?

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She said, Oh yes.

00:17:37

Oh yes.

00:17:40

Last week, when you were preaching, I heard you speaking about the Lord Jesus.

00:17:47

I went home and I asked the Lord Jesus to be my Saviour.

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She had been a very kind, generous, hard-working member of the Church of England, but she didn't know Christ.

00:18:04

She wasn't convinced that her works would bring her into salvation, but she thought that was enough.

00:18:12

I wonder how many more are like that.

00:18:15

How many more think that good works will bring me salvation?

00:18:23

When Christ spreads out his arms on the cross of Calvary and is that where we take his words that he uttered one day and he says, come on to me, believe in me, trust in me and my finished work.

00:18:39

Believe that when I died on Calvary's, here dying on the cross, I've come to save sinners.

00:18:46

Even those who thought their works was enough, you can be saved.

00:18:52

You can be forgiven.

00:18:53

He can be right with God.

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That's the message of the gospel.

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So the first thing was his good works will never bring salvation.

00:19:05

Secondly, a mere profession of faith is not enough.

00:19:10

Notice the words here.

00:19:12

Though a man say, this is verse 14, though a man say, his words seem to be sufficient.

00:19:24

We take him at his word.

00:19:26

I am a believer.

00:19:28

I've been a Christian all my life.

00:19:32

I'm a good person.

00:19:33

You hear this regularly.

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Let's listen to dear Matthew Henry.

00:19:38

A dear bare profession may sometimes seem to be profitable to gain the good opinion of others, but what profit will that be for any gain when they lose their souls?

00:19:52

How sobering.

00:19:54

But there's not just his works, his lack, or he's missing something.

00:19:59

What's he missing?

00:20:01

Well, he doesn't have real faith.

00:20:05

It's an outward profession without inward confession.

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That's why baptism is so important in the New Testament.

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We are professing our faith in Christ verbally,

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But we're also demonstrating it physically.

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Baptism pictures what's happened in the heart of a person, a young person or an older person.

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Just to mention my friend again is now in glory.

00:20:39

She was 80 when she was baptized.

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And she lived a fine Christian life for the rest of her days.

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A mere profession.

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She probably would say this now, words are not enough.

00:20:57

You need to have faith in Christ.

00:20:59

But there's something else.

00:21:05

A mere profession.

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It's bare, as Matthew Henry said.

00:21:12

It's isolated.

00:21:15

It's got no fruit.

00:21:19

Words.

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seem to be so cheap today, even words regarding the gospel.

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But God doesn't just listen to the words.

00:21:32

He reads the heart.

00:21:37

That's one of the great discoveries of some of the great preachers, even religious men like Whitfield and Wesley, and some of the characters of the

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revival of the Second Great Awakening in the United Kingdom.

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They had all the works, and they even had the words, or so they thought.

00:22:03

But it was a mere profession.

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Now something else is needed.

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Dear Whitfield one day was staying with a friend of his, and his friend was very kind and very generous and very thoughtful.

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Did everything for him.

00:22:23

Whitfield got up the next morning at breakfast time.

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He had preached the day before.

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He was off to somewhere else the next day.

00:22:30

He got up and he was having his breakfast.

00:22:33

He was speaking to this dear man, his good friend, and he said to him, One thing thou lackest.

00:22:42

You have so much, and you seem to have, but you lack something.

00:22:51

What did he lack?

00:22:53

He lacked faith in Jesus Christ alone.

00:22:57

And the man looked at him and says, Well, what?

00:23:00

He says, You lack Christ.

00:23:04

A little while later, he got a letter from this dear friend, Nes, now I lack no more.

00:23:12

So it's not just a mere profession.

00:23:14

It's not just the words.

00:23:16

They're not enough.

00:23:18

Third,

00:23:19

A living faith always produces good works.

00:23:25

Always.

00:23:28

Now notice how James now applies this practically in verse 15 and 16.

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He says, 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 ye give them not those things which are needful to the body, what does it profit?

00:23:46

Verse 17, Even so faith, if it had not works, is dead being alone.

00:23:54

And here, I wonder, is James thinking of a particular occasion when he was sitting in a Christian meeting?

00:24:05

And notice how he puts it.

00:24:08

He says, If a brother or sister.

00:24:11

He's speaking about Christians, not about the world.

00:24:16

Not about visitors, not about the poor in general, but the poor as believers, if a brother or sister be naked.

00:24:28

He speaks to the brethren in verse 14, and a little earlier in the same chapter, he speaks about the brethren.

00:24:36

My brethren, chapter two, verse one, My brethren have not the faith.

00:24:40

And he gives that example of the rich man and the poor entering the same

00:24:46

church assembly.

00:24:48

But here he's got a poor person, a poor man, a poor brother who's naked.

00:24:55

And what is the word naked?

00:24:58

Well, it speaks of his desperate condition.

00:25:01

He's not literally naked, but he's so poorly dressed, his clothes are of no use to him.

00:25:11

They're tattered, they're torn, they're soiled.

00:25:14

and they cannot even keep out the weather.

00:25:19

He's destitute.

00:25:21

Word here speaks of left behind.

00:25:24

He's lacking even in the most basic of things.

00:25:30

He's destitute of daily food, of daily nourishment, of daily care.

00:25:37

We don't see much of this in the Western world.

00:25:42

You might see this in certain parts of Europe.

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But you definitely see this in parts of Africa and Asia.

00:25:52

Destitution on a scale that we have no idea about.

00:25:59

And even I say this with sadness, our brothers and sisters this morning who are destitute.

00:26:06

True believers, destitute.

00:26:09

Desperate and destitute.

00:26:16

Perhaps we've seen something of this in missionary films.

00:26:21

I mean, true ones.

00:26:24

Maybe we've heard it in some of our mission reports at our prayer meetings.

00:26:28

The destitution and desperation that's pictured in this text.

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How would you respond?

00:26:37

That's what James is doing.

00:26:38

He's saying, how would you respond?

00:26:41

How would you prove that you have real faith?

00:26:44

Well,

00:26:46

Would you do this, verse 16?

00:26:50

O my good brother, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled.

00:27:00

Sounds good, doesn't it?

00:27:02

Notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful.

00:27:05

In other words, you give them lovely words.

00:27:11

But your hands are tied behind your back.

00:27:15

Your hands stay firmly where they always are.

00:27:22

You may say nice things, but they're of no profit.

00:27:32

Now, I know some people would say that, you know, how can we help people?

00:27:39

one of the reasons we as a church have special collections is for this very reason.

00:27:44

To help destitute and desperate believers in other parts of the world.

00:27:53

They don't have what we have.

00:27:58

We can give to them, not wanting anything back, but showing our practical love and concern for them.

00:28:09

I'm sure none of us here will be like James, pictures a person full of nice words, warm words, but no practical help.

00:28:20

By the way, the word depart in peace, you might think this is a religious commendation, it's not.

00:28:28

The word here is not the same word as you might hear from the Lord Jesus saying depart in peace.

00:28:36

These are words of go well.

00:28:40

That's the idea.

00:28:42

Go well.

00:28:47

But if, firstly, good works cannot bring salvation, and secondly, a mere profession of faith is not enough, and thirdly, a living faith always produces good works, doesn't it?

00:29:00

When we see our brethren suffering, doesn't our heart not yearn for them?

00:29:08

We may feel powerless.

00:29:11

One other thing about our collections, we endeavour to make sure that they get to the Lord's people first.

00:29:23

Because often the Lord's people are overlooked by authorities and by large organisations.

00:29:30

And do you know what happens?

00:29:31

You've heard this before if you've been to our prayer meetings.

00:29:36

The support comes from like-minded churches to these people who are destitute.

00:29:42

Maybe they've gone through some natural disaster and they have enough and then they start to give to their neighbours.

00:29:54

And that has a gospel effect.

00:29:59

That has a momentum of itself because the neighbours

00:30:03

And I've heard this from one or two myself in person.

00:30:07

I've spoken to some who've come over from other parts of the world after great disasters.

00:30:10

And pastors have said to me, he never realized the effect that us helping others from other religions even with the basic needs, with daily food, with rice, which of course is so important in that part of the world, and other things, is having an effect on them.

00:30:32

I remember one man with tears, he said, another man from another religion, a family of eight or nine children, he says, how come the government isn't helping us?

00:30:42

We've been forgotten.

00:30:44

And yet you Christians, whom we've despised for so long, are reaching out to us.

00:30:52

Your God must be a kind God.

00:30:57

You see the difference?

00:30:59

Your God.

00:31:02

Of course, this pastor then spoke to him about the Lord Jesus Christ.

00:31:07

And not long after, himself and his wife became believers.

00:31:11

They had watched this pastor and his little church, but now they had seen practical faith.

00:31:20

They had heard perhaps about salvation by grace, but now they saw that there are works that follow our salvation.

00:31:31

Let me tie up this with a last point, and it's this.

00:31:36

Good works are an evidence of real faith.

00:31:43

In verse 18, O ye a man may say, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works.

00:31:47

Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

00:31:52

Thou believest that there is one God thou doest well.

00:31:54

The devils also believe, and tremble they shake, they shiver.

00:32:00

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

00:32:06

In other words, James is saying, yes.

00:32:08

Yes, a man says, notice the word says again.

00:32:10

It's just words.

00:32:13

Thou hast faith and I have works.

00:32:15

Great.

00:32:16

And we have this image of two men, one who's a believer, the other who's perhaps a professor of faith says,

00:32:28

You have faith and I have works and is that enough?

00:32:32

Show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works.

00:32:41

In other words, good works are an evidence or a fruit of real faith.

00:32:47

There's no apparent contradiction here.

00:32:53

salvation by grace alone and faith in Christ alone by faith alone will produce fruit from that grace James here is saying there is a fruit that comes forth from our salvation from our faith in God from our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ what are these good works let me list three good works

00:33:26

Good works are seen in a practical way, especially to other believers.

00:33:33

They're seen in a practical way.

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I'm not thinking here of church activity or ministry.

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I'm just thinking of practical things.

00:33:43

There might be a change in our attitude to other people.

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But whatever it is,

00:33:52

It will be seen in a practical way.

00:33:53

Secondly, good works bring glory to God.

00:34:00

Good works bring glory to God.

00:34:02

And here we're more thinking of the church and the ministry and serving the Lord.

00:34:08

Bring glory to God.

00:34:12

Evangelism, having this message of the gospel, wanting to reach out is a good work.

00:34:22

It's a blessed work.

00:34:25

God blesses that work.

00:34:28

The great picture of the sower going out and scattering the seed.

00:34:32

Some of the seed of the gospel will fall on hard ground, stony ground.

00:34:39

Some of it will fall on ground where there is very little soil.

00:34:45

Some of it will fall in places where there's thorns and weeds grow up and choke.

00:34:51

the little plant that was growing through.

00:34:54

But some of it will fall on good ground, prepared ground, perhaps even ploughed ground.

00:35:06

The heart of people we know not, but God knows all their hearts.

00:35:11

When we're doing evangelism, we're sharing the message of the Gospel, doing a good work.

00:35:19

And some might not be able to go out physically anymore, but we can pray at home.

00:35:26

In our homes, we can pray that the good seed of the gospel will fall in prepared hearts.

00:35:37

The other aspect of this is witnessing for Christ.

00:35:40

It's a good work.

00:35:42

It's not easy.

00:35:44

I grant it.

00:35:46

Some are better at

00:35:47

sharing the gospel one to one than others, but it's a good work.

00:35:52

It's a blessed work.

00:35:55

There was an evangelist being challenged one day, he was an open-air preacher, by an atheist.

00:36:02

This atheist was very proud of himself, he was well known, and he says, Prove to me that your Christianity is true.

00:36:10

It's quite a challenge, isn't it?

00:36:15

The preacher without Paul has said,

00:36:17

If you can bring me 20 people here tonight who have been changed by your atheism, who are once drunkards and addicts and involved in the pleasures of life and so many, then you have something to say.

00:36:35

But he didn't stop there.

00:36:42

He says, I will bring 50

00:36:46

who have had their lives changed by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior.

00:36:55

I found this little hymn this week.

00:36:56

I thought I might share it with you.

00:36:58

If we can witness, Lord, for thee, let us despise our fleeting breath.

00:37:03

Give us the opening heaven to see, and make us faithful unto death.

00:37:09

And lastly,

00:37:10

If good works are practical and good works bring glory to God, thirdly, good works will be a blessing to others.

00:37:18

And of course we know this.

00:37:21

These good works are a blessing to others, particularly to the church.

00:37:27

When we're serving one another and serving the Lord together, that's a blessing.

00:37:32

That's a real blessing.

00:37:35

May the Lord get all the glory.

00:37:38

Amen.

00:37:42

O God, our gracious Father, how thankful we are that we have this marvellous gospel to indeed rejoice in and to share with others.

00:37:54

We thank you, O Lord, that many of us have been brought from that place of despair and even that place of darkness into the light of the gospel.

00:38:05

We thank you, O Lord, that some of us had to be arrested

00:38:09

and awakened and even humbled and brought to our knees before we looked onto Christ alone as our Savior.

00:38:17

But we're thankful, so thankful, that that work has been done.

00:38:21

And we thank Thee, O Lord, for this Gospel that can be spread even this week across the nations and across the whole wide world.

00:38:29

We pray, keep us in Thy favor and in Thy keeping.

00:38:33

We hear our prayers, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

00:38:37

The love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.

00:38:43

Amen.