

James 2

Last time James talked about vain religion. He admonished these Jews to be doers of the word. But not to think that doing the word meant holding onto Judaism. He was asking them to keep the engrafted word, the perfect law of liberty. And he was warning them against this vain religion that is accompanied by an unbridled tongue. That's just ceremony that doesn't actually change what you say or what you do, as he's admonished them there. He said that kind of religion is of no profit to them. That isn't keeping the word. He said if they think that is true religion, they're deceiving themselves. If they have that and an unbridled tongue, and filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, their religion is defiled. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and keep himself unspotted from the world.

In other words, to love their neighbor as themselves, and help those that are in affliction. To help the poor, and to be holy.

And so he went on to warn them against respecting persons, against despising the poor, and treating the rich specially, showing them deference. He said don't be partial. Don't respect persons. Don't be judges of evil thoughts. That's not pure religion, that's contrary to both the word of Christ and the OT law. If they are doing that, they'd be breaking both of them, they'd be disobeying Christ, and they'd be breaking the OT law as well. If they think that just because they keep all of the OT religion and ceremony, that they're profited by it, they're deceiving themselves. That religion is vain.

But if they fulfill the word of God, the engrafted word, the commandment of God in the NT, and love their neighbor as themselves, then they'll also fulfill the law that really matters: to not respect persons, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God.

And so he points them to be hearers and doers of the word of the Son, not of vain religion.

And as we've pointed out, James's theme has been to be single-minded, not double-minded. To be consistent in what you say and what you do. To hear the word, and also do it. Both in speech and in deed.

And so James has been admonishing them to be consistent, to be wholly conformed to the word of God.

And we pointed out last time how that is the definition of faith. Faith is when you hear the word of God, and believe it. So that there is a singleness, a conformity, between what God said, and what you believe. And true faith is of a nature that when you believe it, that belief compels you to also make your life, your thoughts and words and deeds, also conform to the word of God. So faith is about you living your life consistently with the word of God. To have your beliefs be consistent with the word of God, and then that spurring you on to making your life consistent with those beliefs. So that your life is lived in conformity with what God said.

And that is what James is going to be talking about more today. He's going to be talking about faith. Faith that is true, and faith that is dead.

And really, James has been talking about faith right from the start of the book. This isn't the start of a new subject, this is what he's been talking about here all along. But he just hasn't introduced that term yet.

It is interesting, because a lot of people see the book of James as a pro-works anti-faith book. Some people try to use it to teach works salvation, that you have to do something in order to be saved.

And it is really rather ironic, because that's not what James is saying here at all. He's actually offering a defense of faith. His entire epistle is about faith.

From the very start he was speaking of our hope, the patience being worked in us, through our faith and hope in Christ's return.

And from there he spoke of asking God for wisdom, and the need to do that in faith. The need to do that from the persecutive of somebody who is hoping in Christ's return, who has that faith, that will work patience in them.

And then he moved on to talking about how they needed to not speak their own words, but to hear the word of God. That they need to be hearing the word of God, and responding to it. And what is that, but faith? That's how faith works. You hear the word of God, and believe. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

So James's foundation here, is faith. That's the common denominator among the Jews that he's writing to, that's the thing that he's admonishing them based on. That they've professed faith.

And he's not telling them, "Well, that's not really important, you can forget about that, what you really need is works." He's telling them that they need to stay in the faith, and not be double-minded, they need to be believing God wholly, and looking to him for wisdom.

He's telling them that they should have faith, that they should be hearing the word of God, and believing it, and therefore doing it.

James is telling them that they are not under the law, that they're not under bondage, but under liberty. That they need to hear the engrafted word, *which is able to save their souls*. The word, he said, was able to save their souls. The word.

James is defending faith here, to a group of people that have been caught up in a works-based system. That have been caught up in a God-fearing religion. And these people have now come to Christ. And so he's approaching faith from that perspective.

He knows that these people are used to looking to religion, and following the law, for salvation. And he wants to continue to bring them from that OT mindset into the NT mindset.

And as he does that, he needs to balance two different things, two different dangers that present themselves, when you have a group of people like that, that have been under a strict set of rules, being called out to something different.

The first concern, is that they'll try to continue to follow a rules-based system. That they'll try to take that same basic structure, and use it as a framework for the NT. That they'll essentially take the NT, and try to just make it OT 2.0. Just a new law that they need to keep. That they'll just apply all of the same OT concepts, the same basic OT way of thinking and of doing things, and come up with a new religion that is just the NT done the OT way.

And unfortunately that's what a lot of people do, to a greater or lesser degree. Throughout history, at various times, people, whether they were coming out of Judaism or paganism, have essentially just taken what they already had and infused a little "Christianity" into it, and came up with their own flavor of "Christian" religion.

And that's part of what James is trying to combat here. Now that these Jews are being scattered from the religious center in Jerusalem, he's telling them that it is time to fully lay aside all of this vain religion, and just receive the engrafted word, which is able to save their souls. To lay that aside, and walk by faith.

But James knows that when doing that there is a second danger. There is a danger, that as people are freed from a strict set of rules, they won't know how to restrain themselves outside of

that law. That they won't know how to be holy, outside of that religious system. And that as a result, once freed from bondage under the law, they'll just come into bondage under sin. They'll just ignore all boundaries and become filthy.

And so James has been carefully warning them against that as well. He's been careful to direct them to live by the word. To hear and do the engrafted word, not to just throw off all restraint.

But to walk in the faith, in conformity with the word of God.

Not to become filthy, or speak superfluity of naughtiness. But to be holy, to be as the firstfruits, to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

So that's the two main aspects of James's message, the two polar opposites that James is trying to steer them away from. He doesn't want them to throw off all restraint, nor does he want them to turn their faith into a religion. Rather, he wants them to continue to live by the word of God. But not the law of Moses now, but the perfect law, of liberty. The engrafted word. To hear it, and live by faith, and do it.

And so last time we saw James dealing with that one part of this, dealing with those that might just want to turn their faith into a religion. And now this time James is going to deal with the other side of that, people who would say that holiness doesn't really matter, works don't matter, what you do doesn't matter. That basically there's no rules, it's all good.

And so James needs to deal with that. He's dealt with this some from the other side, but he knows that he needs to address it from this angle as well. He needs to explain, in so many words, what the relationship between faith and works is.

So that people don't say, "Oh, you mean all that I have to do is give to the poor, and I'm OK?"

He's anticipating how people will respond to some of what he's just said. There are people from that religious perspective who are going to be saying, "But if you don't have hard rules, people are just going to be profane. You can't just let people run wild." And then they'll be people that like being freed from the shackles, and just think that it's faith that counts, and you shouldn't really worry about what you do, or what you say, as long as you have faith, as long as you believe something. But that's certainly not what James has been saying here. And so he's going to make that clear. He's going to explain to them the nature of faith, how faith relates to what you say and do.

Verse 14

James 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

So James poses a question.

And he's going to answer it.

James knows that they might be struggling with this, they might have questions. So he asks his own question.

He's trying to drive home the points he's just made, about how they need to be sincere, and single-minded, and holy, and living in accordance with the word.

That they shouldn't just say, "I've got religion. I've got faith. I'm OK." They need to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

So James asks a very practical question.

"What doth it profit, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?"

And it is important to understand that James is speaking here in the most raw and practical of terms. He's not speaking spiritually, he's not talking about some spiritual reality. Throughout this whole book so far James has been very down to earth. He's been offering very practical admonition. Everything that he's said has been connected to the raw realities of their experience, of their persecutions. He hasn't been up the heavenlies here. He's been illustrating his points with very practical figures that they can directly relate to. Things from the natural order, like the sun withering the grass, or the shadow of turning. His admonition has been in clear and practical and tangible terms.

And so when James asks what it profits to have faith without works, he's speaking in the most practical of terms.

He's not talking about their eternal soul, and whether works make a difference in whether you go to heaven or what you get there. That's not his primary point.

He's asking them what does it profit them, *today*, if they say they have faith, and don't have works.

What practical benefit do they reap by saying, "I've got faith," and not having any works to back up that statement? What would it benefit them? What would they be any bettered to get up each morning and say, "I have faith." What's the practical benefit of that? What does it profit?

And he's going to explain what he means by this, he's going to illustrate it, just like he's illustrated his other points.

Verses 15 & 16

James 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,
16 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; what doth it profit?

So here is what James means by his question, "what doth it profit?" He illustrates it for us. He's talking about it profiting just like someone would be profited to receive food and clothing.

If you say to somebody who's hungry, "be filled," but you don't give them anything to eat, what does it profit them?

It doesn't do them one bit of good. You haven't actually done anything of practical benefit to them, you haven't actually filled their need. Your words didn't do them any good.

Now, do you notice something here?

It's vital, it's really important to understand.

Let me ask you, who was it, that was profited or not profited? In James's analogy who needed to be profited?

Was it the person doing the speaking, the person who said something?

Or was it the person who heard?

It was the person who heard them right?

This person said, "Be warmed and filled," but it didn't profit that *other* person.

So when James asked, "What doth it profit, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works," who is he talking about it profiting?

The person saying he has faith?

Or somebody else?

In his illustration it wasn't the person who said it, it was somebody else.

So he's actually not talking about whether saying you have faith profits you, first and foremost. He's actually talking about whether it profits anybody else.

If you say you have faith, but don't feed the poor, then it doesn't profit the poor, they still don't get fed.

I mean, James told them here to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. He just told them not to despise the poor.

And he's still talking about the poor. That's something that he's going to continue talking about throughout the book. The need to help the poor.

And so if you say you have faith, and you don't help the poor, what does it profit?

It doesn't. They still go hungry. The fatherless and widow continue to be afflicted.

It doesn't profit.

You can say you've got faith, you can even go and say to the poor, "Be warmed and filled," but if you don't actually fulfill the word, you're not doing anything for them. If you're just speaking the word, but not doing it, if you're not a doer of the work, then you aren't profiting anybody.

Verse 17

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

So you can say you have faith, but James says that if you don't have works, that faith is dead. It is dead in the sense that it isn't a living, moving, working faith. It is a faith that isn't animated in any way, it isn't motivated in any way, it doesn't do anything. It doesn't move and act. It doesn't work.

Either it is on welfare sitting in front of the TV, or that thing is dead. No other way to describe it.

Without works, faith just has no substance to it. It's just meaningless. It's lifeless. It has no effect, it is just undetectable. It might as well not even be there. It is nothing more than a corpse.

Verse 18

James 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

So James says that that faith is invisible, its undetectable.

He challenges them to show it to him.

So you say, "I believe in *faith*, I don't believe in works." OK. Show me your faith.

James says, this isn't about faith versus works. This is really just about faith.

Here's what he'll say to people who think like that: "So you've got faith, and I've got works? Well, show me your faith without your works, and I'll show you my faith by my works."

James says, "You think you've got faith and *I've got works*? No, I've got *faith*. And you can see it by my works. Now where's your faith? Let me see it. Show it to me."

This isn't about a conflict between faith and works. Both claim to have faith here. James is making it clear that he has faith, too. That's not the point. The point is that if you don't have any works, how can anybody see your faith? What does it profit? What good is it? What meaning does it have? In practical terms its meaningless.

James says, "I've got works flowing out of my faith. My faith is alive and working. Your faith appears to be dead."

"You can't show me your faith. You say you have it, but I can't see it."

"You can see that I have faith. You know that I believe the word, because when I hear it, I do it. How do I know that you believe the word, when you hear it, and don't do it."

Do you see how James is still looking at this from the perspective of showing this to somebody else? How this is about how your faith profits others, whether they can see it?

This isn't about whether the faith means something for *you*, whether it has implications for *you*. It is about whether it profits anybody else. Whether anybody else can see it, whether they are benefited by it. It is about whether your faith is tangible in any way.

Because if you'll remember what Paul said in Hebrews 11, faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Faith is supposed to be substantial, it is supposed to be something that is seen. It is something that people look at, and when they see it, they know that you are believing God, that you are following the word of God. That that is what is motivating your actions.

That's what faith is.

And if nobody can see it, if it doesn't have any substance, then how is that faith?

It has to be tangibly manifested, or it isn't faith. If God said something, and you say that you believe it, but it doesn't stir you to action, then what kind of belief is that? It is a belief that's meaningless, it's not good for anything.

Verse 19

James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Now this is interesting.

James gives us an example of a belief that would fall into this category of being a dead faith. If you believe this, you have a dead faith. If this is the essence of what you believe. Guaranteed that your faith is dead. It isn't a faith that profits, because it isn't a faith that is tangible.

He said, "thou believest that there is one God."

Do you know how many people believe this, and think that they have faith?

Jews believe there's one God. Catholics believe there is one God. Muslims believe there is one God. Your average Joe on the street believes there is one God.

And that's a dead faith. That's a faith that doesn't profit.

Because that's a faith that doesn't result in works.

I mean, you can believe there is one God, but what does that tell you that you need to do, what action do you need to take based on that? It doesn't really have to inform your daily living.

You can get up every day and say to yourself, "there's just one God." So what?

They believe something, but it isn't accompanied by works, because it doesn't require works to go with it. It is a belief in something that doesn't demand a specific response.

And so, of course there's just one God. James says, "thou doest well" in believing that. But, "the devils also believe, and tremble."

The devils believe there's just one God. They've seen him. They tremble at his presence. What good does it do them? It doesn't spur them to works. They continue in rebellion against him. And that's exactly what 99% of people who believe that there is one God do, too.

Verse 20

James 2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Do you see what James is doing here?

James is not attacking faith.

It's ironic how messed up people will get in their interpretation of what James is saying here.

They'll try to say that James is promoting works, that you have to have works in addition to faith.

That's not what he's saying at all.

He's saying that works flow out of faith, that works and faith are the same thing. That if you have faith, you'll have works.

He's not attacking faith, and saying that you need works *in addition* to it. He's saying that if you believe the word, then when you hear the word, you'll do it.

He's saying that faith is tangible. That it is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

He's not saying that faith is *accompanied* by works, or that it needs works to be added to it. He's saying that faith *is* works. Just like the rest of the Bible does.

Faith is when you believe God, and that belief is genuine, it's of a quality that stirs you to action. You believe God's words, his promises. It gives you faith, it gives you hope.

You hear the word, and because you believe it, you do it. And so you have faith. You're conformed to the word.

So James isn't attacking faith, he's explaining what faith is.

James isn't saying you need to have works too.

He's actually doing the opposite. James is attacking faith *plus works*. James is attacking belief, plus works.

Belief in something that doesn't impel you to take action, plus works that are just arbitrarily added to it. That are just made up, that don't stem from that belief, that are added on top of it.

In other words, belief plus religion.

That's what James is dismantling here. He's still attacking religion. The idea that they should just engage in some kind of religious works, while believing something that isn't really faith.

Believing that there is one God, and then participating in a religion that teaches that.

Like Judaism. (Remember, he's writing to the twelve tribes.)

James is pitting biblical faith, against beliefs that don't motivate to action plus religion.

He's making it clear that you can't just have some beliefs, however true they may be, that don't actually demand a specific response, and think that that will save you.

And you can't just slap some religion on top of that, and think that that will save you.

You have to believe God's word, and have faith. Be conformed to the word of God. In your beliefs, and thus your thoughts, words, and actions.

And that conformity, that unity, between what you've heard in the word of God, and the way that you live, that is faith. That is tangible. That is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

That does profit. That is visible. I can see that. And it tells me that you have faith, that you are living in accordance with something that I can't see.

It's ironic, that the book of James is a great defense of faith, a great defense of faith against religion, and belief plus works. He's defending faith here, not promoting works as a means of salvation.

So James is still addressing the problem with religion. Religion that is just beliefs, or religion that is beliefs plus works. He says that doesn't cut it. That kind of "faith" doesn't profit, and it won't save you. That's a faith that is dead.

Remember what he said before about religion being vain? That if your religion didn't affect your actions, that if it didn't even affect your mouth, if it didn't bridle your tongue, that that religion was vain.

And what did he just say here? He just called the man that has this non-working belief, a vain man. He's a vain man. His belief, his religion, is vain. It's not faith, it is just belief. Or belief plus works. Just religion. And his religion, is vain.

Verse 21

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Now, here we have another thing that throws some people off.

People get messed up in this passage because they don't understand two of the key words that it uses. Because they are words that have been appropriated by theology.

And so when people see the words faith and justification, they don't understand the biblical meaning of them, the simple meaning of them, they only understand the theological meaning of them. So they come to the wrong understanding of what the Bible is saying, because they don't know what it means when it uses these words.

So let's take a look at this word justification.

Now, theologically, what justification means, is that your sins have been forgiven by God, and you've been imputed righteousness. That's the way we use the term when we are speaking theologically. That when you are justified that means that you are righteous in the sight of God.

But that's not what James is talking about here.

Here is how the Bible uses the term justification.

Here is how it is used in the law:

Deuteronomy 25:1 If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall **justify** the righteous, and condemn the wicked.

So when they came before the judge, on the one hand they could justify them, on the other hand, they could condemn them.

So you have justification, and condemnation.

When you come before the judge, a claim is being made, that somebody is guilty of something. And that claim is probably being disputed. And so evidence is presented, and the judge issues a verdict.

The judge either that you are righteous, that you're not guilty, and you go free. That would be being justified. You'd have been declared to be just in your actions.

Or, he says that you aren't righteous, that you're guilty, and he condemns you.

At least that is what they were supposed to do. If they were unjust judges, they could justify the wicked, and condemn the just. An sometimes they'd do that.

But do you see how justification is about saying something? Even in court, it is about people testifying, and then evidence being presented. And you being declared innocent, not needing to be punished, or being condemned to punishment.

So this justification is about speaking, it is about words and actions, and that the words ought to match up with the actions. The evidence needs to match what you testify, or else you won't be justified.

A man comes claiming innocence, but you don't condemn him based on his words, or his looks, or his standing. You justify him based on his actions. If he is indeed found to be innocent, justify him, but if he's guilty condemn him. Justify him, based on his actions, based on his works, based on whether he'd transgressed the law or not. Not just based on his words, based on what he says.

Job 11:2 Should not the multitude of words be answered? and should a man full of talk be **justified**?

So if a man comes to the judge, full of talk, a multitude of words, is he going to be justified? Just because he's talking, just because he says so much that he impresses you and you just declare him innocent?

No. In fact, the opposite. The more you say, the more likely it is that you're going to say something that's not so. So no, the man who is full of talk probably shouldn't be justified, because he's going likely have said some things that are false, that are vanity. And when the case is enquired into, the truth won't justify him, because what he said won't match up. He should have kept his mouth shut.

Job 13:18 Behold now, I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be **justified**.

Job says that now he knows he will be justified, because he knows what he wants to say. He's prepared his case, and he's going to make a case that he knows will be true, that when it is inquired into, he'll be justified in what he said.

He's ordered his cause, he's carefully prepared it, and knows it is true, so he'll be justified. His claims will be justified because they have been carefully prepared. They're not just a multitude of vain words, he's making a tight case that is really in accord with the evidence.

Psalms 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be **justified** when thou *speakest*, and be clear when thou judgest.

So David said that he had sinned against God, so that God would be justified when he speaks, and clear when he judges.

God would be justified when he speaks and says that all men are sinners. Because people would be able to see, that yes, that's true. Even David sinned. All men are sinners.

So again, speaking. You speak something. You say something. You make a claim. And that claim is either justified, or unjustified.

We use the term the same way today. When somebody makes a complaint, we say that they're is justified. They're justified in being upset, they're justified in the complaint they are making. There's reason for it, there's cause for it, there's justification for it, they have indeed been misused, they've a right to be upset. It's justified.

That's the same way that the Bible uses the term.

That's the same way that James is using it here. He's talking about Abraham being justified in his claim to faith. Not about him being justified before God. Abraham never made a claim to sinlessness. That isn't the thing that he was justified in. Never said that. Couldn't be justified in that, because it wouldn't be true. There's nothing that Abraham could do that could justify that claim, because it would be totally false.

But there *was* a claim that Abraham had faith. And as James said, show me your faith.

And so that claim that Abraham had faith needed to be justified. It needed some substance to it. That's all that James is saying here.

You see, there's other scripture that specifically says that Abraham *wasn't* justified by works before God.

And James isn't contradicting that.

Romans 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

2 For if Abraham were **justified** by works, he hath whereof to glory; *but not before God.*

3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

So Abraham was justified before God, by believing God, by faith.

He believed God, and God counted that to him for righteousness. And so it was through his faith that Abraham was justified before God.

4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that **justifieth** the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

So Abraham didn't do a work that justified him before God, as righteous. God counted Abraham righteous, and justified him, put away all guilt, all his sin, without works, because of his faith.

And James is not telling a different story here. But he *is* talking about a different kind of justification. Because he's talking about a different thing being justified. He's not talking about Abraham being justified before God. God doesn't need to see works in order know if your faith is real. He can see the heart. But he's talking about Abraham being justified *before men*, so that we could see that his faith is real.

He's talking about Abraham's claim to faith, the claim that Abraham had faith, being justified.

So he says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

Let's look at that story in Genesis chapter 22:

Genesis 22:1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

So God is tempting Abraham, he's testing Abraham. He's giving Abraham a command, to see if he is going to obey.

You say, "Doesn't God know whether Abraham is going to obey?"

Of course he does.

Do *you* know whether Abraham is going to obey?

Sometimes we put something through a test, to prove that it will pass. Not because we don't know if it will, but because we do know that it will, and want everybody else to see too.

I mean, if it wasn't for this event, folks, would we be talking about how great Abraham's faith was today?

What else are you going to point to to say that Abraham is a man of great faith? Folks, just about everything else he did he did wrong. This is the one thing that he got absolutely right. This is the one thing that we point to, when we talk about Abraham's faith.

And God wanted that. He could see Abraham's great faith, and wanted us to see it, wanted it on full display. And so he tempted him, put him through this test, so that all the world would know that Abraham was a man of amazing faith.

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

So Abraham follows what God said.

He didn't just say, "Oh, I believe you."

It was a command, it demanded a response. He could either obey, or disobey. He could just believe something and call that faith.

So if Abraham does truly believe, this is a test that is going to put that faith on full display, as we said, when he obeys.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

And this is the real measure of Abraham's faith, right here.

Abraham didn't just follow God's latest command. Abraham believed the word of God. He still believed the whole word of God. Everything that God had told him.

He still believed that his son Isaac was going to become the father of a great nation, even though God told him to offer him for a sacrifice.

Abraham didn't see this as a contradiction. It didn't shake his faith in what God had said before. He said, "We're going to go and worship over there, and *we're* going to come back. My son is going to grow older, and have children, and all the earth will be blessed in him."

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

8 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

Now he knew that he feared God. *Now we* know that he feared God.

Do you remember how James said, "thou believest that there is one God"? There are a lot of people who say that, who say that they fear God. That there is one God, and that they fear him. But how do you know whether they fear God?

If they obey his word.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Now, God had already made this promise to Abraham. God had already made this promise to Abraham decades before Isaac was ever born.

So did Abraham receive a promise from God by being obedient? Did he receive a promise from God through his works?

No. He already had the promise. But because he kept it, God confirmed it by an oath, saying, "By myself have I sworn."

You say, "But wasn't God already going to fulfill it?" Yeah.

"Didn't Abraham already believe he was going to fulfill it?" Yeah.

But in the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

It was in the mount of the LORD that Abraham saw the sincerity of God's promise, and had it confirmed to him yet again.

And it was there that all the world got to see the sincerity of Abraham's faith.
In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

Indeed.

Verse 22

James 2:22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

We certainly do.

But look closely at what he said. What is it that was working here?

He said that "faith wrought with his works." So it was the faith that was working. That wrought, that worked, with his works.

His faith was working. It wasn't works in addition to faith, it was working faith. It was faith that wrought with his works.

And you can see Abraham's faith at work there, not just in what he says, but what he does.

God spoke. He believed it. We know, because he did it. Did what God said.

So faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect.

Now, when he says that faith was made perfect, what does that mean?

Well, the word perfect, as it is used in scripture, often means "complete." Something that is perfect is total, or it is finished. It is fulfilled.

And so sometimes it can mean that something is manifested, it is made visible.

It can mean that something is made full, made complete, in its manifestation. In its operation.

And I could give you a dozen or so verses here that show that, but I've just chosen the few that are the most obvious, that will make that perfect to you. They'll make it manifest to you, you'll fully appreciate it.

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made **perfect** in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

So God told Paul that his strength was made perfect in weakness.

That is, when Paul was weak, he had to rely on God's strength, and so people could see that God was sustaining him.

God's strength was made perfect through Paul's weakness, God's strength was manifest. It was given an avenue through which it could be put on display. It could be perfected.

1 John 4:12 No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is **perfected** in us.

And so John says something similar here about God's love. Just as people could see God's strength through Paul, people can see God's love through us.

They can't see God, no man has seen him at any time. But if we love one another, God's love is perfected in us. It is manifested. People can see it. It is put on display.

And so that is the same thing that James is saying here, about our faith. That by works faith is made perfect. That by works, faith is made manifest. It is put on display. That it is through those works that faith is made apparent, that people can see it. Same thing he's been talking about through this whole passage.

The term perfect doesn't mean that something was created, or that it was made real. God's strength existed regardless of Paul's weakness, and God's love exists regardless of whether we show it. But it is made perfect in the sense that it is made tangible, that it is able to be experienced here by us.

So Abraham had faith before that. He had imputed righteousness before that. But his faith was made perfect, it was completed for us, it was fulfilled, it was put on display and made wholly manifest, it was perfected, when he offered his son Isaac on the alter. It was perfected by his works. Then we could see it, it was tangible.

Verse 23

James 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Something is being fulfilled. What God said before is being manifested, it is being fulfilled, it is coming to pass, it is being justified.

So you see, this ultimately isn't about *Abraham* being justified. He isn't the one who made the claim to faith. It was God who said that Abraham had faith. It is God that was being justified. It is the scripture that was being justified. It is the scripture that was fulfilled.

The scripture said that Abraham believed God then, 7 chapters earlier in Genesis 15:6. But it was fulfilled, we got to see the truth of it, later, when Abraham obeyed God, in chapter 22.

The scripture wasn't made true because Abraham obeyed God. But it was justified because Abraham obeyed God, it was made manifest that it was true, the evidence was presented that showed that it was true, because Abraham *obeyed* God, when it had said that he believed him.

So this is about something being fulfilled, about a claim being justified. Not about procuring something through works. Not about procuring salvation through works. But about having righteousness by faith, and having that faith manifested to the world.

Verse 24

James 2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

You can see from the story of Abraham, how we justify Abraham as having faith, and even God, even the angel of the LORD, justified Abraham as having faith, when he showed through his works that he was both a hearer and *doer* of the word of God.

We see Abraham's faith, the proof of him having faith, the fulfillment of his faith, was when he did what God said. When he followed the word of God. When he heard a word that said to do something, and he did it. When we saw his works.

Not just by when he said he believed God, or when God said he believed God, or when the scripture said he believed God. But we can justify him fully only when we see that faith, as he responds to a word from God that demands a response.

Not just when he believes that there is one God. But when he does what the word of that God says.

So a man is justified, when there is evidence presented to show the truth of what was testified. When there is works. Because faith is supposed to be the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Faith isn't supposed to be just a testimony, a claim that is made. It is supposed to also supply the evidence itself. It is supposed to show the substance of those claims. And so faith is supposed to justify itself. It is supposed to show the evidence to back up its claim. Faith is supposed to be a working faith. And it is by that work that a man is justified in that, not by faith only, not by a claim only. But by evidencing it.

Verse 25

James 2:25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

James wants to make sure we get the picture, so he gives us another example of a person whose faith is justified by works.

And this time it is the harlot Rahab.

So let's look at what it says about Rahab in Joshua.

Joshua 2:1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

5 And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

7 And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

So Rahab here makes a profession. She lays claim to a faith. That she believes that the LORD is the one true God, and that what he said is going to be done unto them in Jericho. And so she asks that they would save her alive.

14 And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.

So they make her a promise. But it does have a condition. She needs to not tell anybody about what they've told her and what they're going to do.

So they promise, but there is a condition, there is her end of the bargain that she'd got to keep up. They're not just going to trust her fully, despite her claim to fear the one true God now that she's heard of what he's done.

They're not just going to accept her faith.

15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

16 And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

17 And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear.

18 Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee.

19 And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him.

20 And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.

21 And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window.

So they made it very clear, that this was going to be up to her, that this was going to be based on her works, that they weren't just going to accept her faith. That she needed to keep quiet and she needed to bind the scarlet thread in the window, and that if she wanted her family to be saved, they needed to come into her house.

Here is what it says in chapter 6, when they got ready to take the city:

Joshua 6:17 And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

Doesn't mention her faith there, does it? They're basing this on her works.
Then in verse 25:

25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Again it makes clear that Rahab was delivered based on her works, not just based on her claim to faith.

James said that Rahab was justified by works when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way.

So she was justified by that.

Do you see how she was justified?

Who was the harlot Rahab justified before? Was she justified before God as being righteous?

No, she was a harlot.

It didn't say anything about her being justified before God.

But she was justified before the children of Israel in her claim to faith. So that they saved her alive and let her dwell among them.

If she'd told the messengers, "Oh, I fear your God," but didn't do anything to help them, what do you think would have happened to her?

If they hadn't come to her and she hadn't helped them, if that hadn't happened, and when they came in to destroy the city she came out and said, "Whoa, wait, wait, I believe in God! Don't kill me!" What do you think would have happened? If she'd come out and made a claim to faith, without those works, what would have happened to her?

If she hadn't tied the scarlet thread in the window, what would have happened to her?

She'd have been slain just like everybody else. The children of Israel wouldn't have believed her. She'd have had no way to justify herself. Without those works, she wouldn't have been justified in her claim to faith before the children of Israel.

And you see, that's what James is talking about here. He's talking about how the twelve tribes scattered abroad can justify their faith.

How is somebody going to know whether they are of faith? How are they going to justify their claim to faith? How are their brethren, the children of Israel, going to see their faith?

He's telling them not to expect, in their persecutions, for their brethren to just accept their faith. Sometimes that would be dangerous, just to accept that somebody is a believer, they might be trying to deceive you and throw you and your brethren in prison.

It is perfectly right that they'd want them to justify themselves, when they say they have faith.

And without works, how are they going to do that? James said, "Show me your faith without your works." They can't do it.

So there will be times when they will be challenged, whether because of the persecution and the need to be careful who you trust, or whether just because it is the natural thing to do, they'll be challenged to show their faith. And if they don't have any works, then people aren't going to believe them. And James says, "I totally agree. Your faith is dead. By works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

If you want the children of Israel to believe your claim to faith, like they believed the harlot Rahab's, if you want them to believe your claim to faith, like they look back on their father

Abraham's, then you're going to need to back up that claim, you're going to need to justify it. By having a working faith, a living faith. A faith that people can see. Like Abraham and Rahab did.

Verse 26

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Now, do you understand what he just said?

He didn't say that what you need is works, not faith. He said that works are an integral part of faith. That without works, faith is dead. Without works, faith is like a body without a spirit.

You say, that kind of sounds backwards, why is faith the body and works is the spirit? It seems like faith is the spiritual thing, and works is the carnal thing. Shouldn't works be the body, and faith be the spirit? Isn't that kind of a messed up analogy there?

No. It's perfect.

Because you see, faith is a carnal thing. Faith without works is a carnal thing. Believing is a carnal thing. Belief is carnal.

You see, everybody on this earth believes things every day. It is a totally natural thing that the carnal man does.

And so when we hear the word of God, and believe it, that is no different. As an unregenerate man he hears the word of God and believes, just the same way that he believes anything else. Up to there it is a completely carnal, natural event.

But you see, it is then, at that point, when you believe, that God's Spirit fills you, and he borrows you again.

And from then on, when you rejoice, when you follow the word of God, when you bear fruit, when you work, it is a spiritual thing. God's Spirit is then within you working through you.

So the belief is carnal, flows out of your body, your mind, your soul. But the works flow out of the Spirit of God.

And so as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

And you see, that's the only place that those works can come from, from God's Spirit.

As Paul said:

Romans 8:7 ...the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you...

And so it is impossible to please God, just by believing something in your carnal mind. It isn't subject to the law of God, and it *can't* be subject to the law of God. And so you cannot please God just by professing faith, just by your carnal mind believing something, just by believing that there is one God. That's not going to make your mind subject to God, you'll still break the law, and you still won't please him.

They that are in the flesh, cannot please God.

But what you need is the Spirit. And those that have true faith, living faith, who have believed on the finished work of Jesus Christ, they've received that Spirit. The Spirit of God dwells in them.

And then they have faith. Because then, and only then, can they have works. The fruit of the Spirit. Then their faith is alive, because it has a spirit, it has works. By the Spirit of God.

Because they are no longer in a carnal belief, trying to bring their carnal mind into subjection to

God's law. Now they are not a body without the Spirit. But they have the works of faith, the fruit of the Spirit, their faith is alive.

So to be absolutely clear, I'm not teaching here, and James is not teaching here, that if you have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, that if you believe that Jesus Christ came to earth as a man and died on the cross for the sins of mankind, and that he paid the way for your pardon on Calvary, and you rejoice in that, you love him for it, you thank and praise God for that pardon of your sins:—that that isn't enough. That you then have to go on and do good works, or else you're not saved. That's not what James is saying. He's not saying that your works are what save you, so that if you believe that, and have that faith, but you don't have any works, you'd die and go to hell. Or if you stopped working, you'd go to hell. That's not what James is saying. But he is saying, that if you believe that there is one God, and you believe that there is a Christ, and you participate in a religion to try and get closer to God, and you call that faith, you say you are believing something, but you aren't actually following the word of God, you aren't actually heeding God's commands, then that isn't a living faith, that's a dead faith, it is an unprofitable faith. It isn't a true faith that is based on you hearing God's words and believing them and taking action on them, framing your life by them.

He's not saying that it isn't Christ's work that saves us, that it's our own work. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying that we aren't saved by grace. He's saying that we are saved thought faith, but if it is faith that we're saved by, then don't you need a faith that is alive? A faith that is tangible? Because you want it to have tangible effects for you, when God's wrath is poured out.

When James asks, "can faith save him?" some people assume that the answer must be no. That that's what he's implying. I mean, if he asks the question that way, argumentatively, isn't he assuming that our response is going to be yes, and isn't he trying to challenge that? No, that's not James point. James is leading here. He's assuming that we'll answer "yes." But his response is then to ask, "OK, if your faith is what is going to save you, then where is it? Show it to me."

His premise is that faith can indeed save you, but he challenges them as to whether or not they actually have faith.

If their faith is invisible, if it is undetectable, then how can they be so confident that they have it and it will save them? Yes, the just shall live by his faith, but when Christ comes to judge and destroy those who have no faith, will he see theirs? If their faith is apparently dead, then is it a saving faith?

James's point is not that faith cannot save them. His point is that it does, that God does save us based on our faith. And that faith means that you believe the word of God. And thus you believe God's commands. And thus you follow them. That is, you have works. If you don't have works, then where is your faith? Aren't you believing what God said? Then shouldn't you be doing it?

You could summarize what James is saying this way. There is no such thing as personal faith. Faith isn't something that is just a personal matter, that you just keep to yourself, that is just down in your heart. Faith is tangible, it is substantive, others can see it, and it profits them. All the world is blessed by faith, as God told Abraham that all the world would be blessed, because of his faith.

Faith is a living, working thing that you can't keep to yourself, because what God says is so radically different from the way most of the world lives that when you frame your life by the word of God, your faith is clearly visible in a multitude of ways, because of how you live and walk.

So when James asks "can faith save him?" his answer is "yes."
But really, his answer is a little more complicated than that. He doesn't answer it just yes or no. There is a sense in which it is true, but there is also a sense in which it is not true. James is also answering the question in the negative, in the sense that he's asking if faith can save you in the most raw and practical terms.

Can faith itself save you?

I mean, think about it. Can faith save you? You say, "yes, we're saved by grace through faith." Well, that's true, but is it faith that actually saves us? I mean in raw terms, when God gets ready to pour out his wrath, is it faith that saves us from that? Does faith have some magical, mystical power, that just shields us from the wrath of God so that it can't hurt us? Is faith this force, that just picks us up and moves us out of the way? Is it just this mystical force all its own, so that all you have to do is say the magic words, think the magic thoughts, you just believe this magic thing and it has a life all its own, it has mystical power to protect you?

No. Of course not. But you say, "Well, but when you believe, God borrows you again and fills you with his Spirit, and saves you from his wrath."

Exactly. And that is James's point. It isn't the faith that saves you, it is the fact that God takes action in accordance with that faith.

And his question then is, do you?

It's God's work in accordance with your faith that saves you, that profits you.
And and it is only your work, in accordance with that faith, that profits others.

Faith doesn't have a life all its own, a power all its own, a force all its own. Faith is dead, being alone. Works are what gives life to faith, that make it actually accomplish something. Unless some other force, unless God or you or somebody comes along and does something, faith itself does not have life, have power. It doesn't accomplish anything. It doesn't profit.

You see, James is trying to point out that this is not a religion, and faith isn't some mystical magical force that accomplishes things by its own power. Faith doesn't profit, without works. Faith doesn't do anything on its own. Just believing something doesn't do anything all on its own. Action has to be taken, a work has to be done, in accordance with that belief. And it is a work that God does in accordance with that belief that saves us. But it is then works that we do in accordance with that faith that profits others.

Too many people get caught up in a kind of mysticism, where they see faith as an inner resource. They see it as some kind of power, some kind of force. They have this mystical idea that just thinking a certain way, or saying a certain thing, has some power behind, that it causes things to happen all on its own.

That's just mysticism folks.

And James is saying, no, absolutely not. If you think that, you don't know the first thing about faith. Faith is hearing, and doing. Faith is saying, and doing. A faith that doesn't have a doing aspect, that isn't a faith at all.

That's just mysticism, and religious voodoo. It is unscriptural, and James says that's what the devils say and do, that's how they behave. That's where the devils are.

So again, James is not teaching works salvation here. As we said before, he's doing the opposite. He's not telling us to do good works, and that is how we are saved. That we need to take part in a religion.

Instead, he's telling us that religion can't save us, faith can't save us, just believing something, in some abstract sense, can't save us.

That all of that is carnal. That all of that is just religion. That all of that is just mysticism.

That we can call that "faith," we can say that people have a "faith," but faith can't save them.

That religious conviction, that personal belief that there is one God, that doesn't save you.

True faith, is working faith. True faith, is when you hear the word of God, and do it. Not when you just decide to believe something, and be religious.

James is not promoting religion here. He's refuting it.

He's pointing to the people, like those who today use the term faith to talk about Catholics, and Muslims, and anybody who believes in one God, and say that they have a faith. Who want to promote "interfaith" movements, and say that we all have faith, and it is all the same, we all believe that there is one God, and that's what counts.

And James says no. That's not what counts. You can be sure the devils are a part of that movement, because that's what they believe. The devils are all members of the ecumenical movement.

What counts is not that you believe in one God.

What counts is that you hear the word of God, and do it.

James isn't promoting religion here. He isn't promoting works salvation.

James is showing that religion is vain, and that what you need is true faith. Not just a faith in name, but a faith in deed. A faith that has works. Where you both hear the word of God, and do it.