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Oaks Early Risers Bible Class

The Oaks Baptist Church
Grand Prairie, Texas

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Living Faith James 2:14-26

Lesson Background and Introduction

It's easy to allow the issue of faith versus works to overshadow something else James stresses: the specific economic needs—the reality of life for so many in the ancient world—that drives much of his thoughts in James 2. The first half of the chapter (verses 1-13) warns against discriminating against the poor in favor of the rich; economic need also is an integral part of his argument regarding faith and works in the second half—today's text. In popular usage, faith often equates to mere belief, an intellectual acknowledgment of the existence of God. James shows us that true, saving faith goes much deeper than this: it touches every aspect of our lives and guides our every action. The examples that James uses—Abraham and Rahab—highlight these points. Consider that it was not Abraham's mere acknowledgment of God's promise that justified him. Rather, it was his action on the basis of that promise that justified him. Likewise, it was not mere verbal acknowledgment of the Israelites' God that justified Rahab (Joshua 2:8, 9). That acknowledgment went hand in hand with her actions in sheltering Israelite spies from certain death (2:2-4). She undoubtedly risked her own life in doing so. Certainly, we are saved through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8, 9); we cannot earn salvation by our works (Romans 3:27; 9:32; Galatians 2:16). But what type of faith saves? The type that works. A profession of faith must be accompanied by action; otherwise it is no faith at all. A profession of faith that is unaccompanied by the works God intends we do brings disrepute on the faith we claim to have. Unless the Word is changing us inside and out—in heart and mind to speak and act—our faith will be no faith at all.

(Adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

A Visible Commitment - Those who have a saving Christian faith are being transformed by the Holy Spirit. They are thinking and acting like Jesus. James considered it impossible to declare saving faith in Christ, but then publicly behave in a totally opposite way. The new Jewish believers had to change their assumptions within their culture once they became Christians. Their emphasis was no longer obeying rules to please God. James said, if you are a follower of Christ, your behavior will reflect your commitment.

An Example - James offered an example of authentic, saving faith versus superficial faith. If an impoverished person entered a Christian gathering hungry and wearing raggedy clothing, but the congregation ignored the person's need, that's an example of dead faith. It shows this church has no Christlike qualities if they wave the person off saying, "Hope you get your needs meet somewhere, God bless you," and refuse to give actual help.

The Demons Know - James continued to speak about superficial faith by pointing to the demonic host. They recognize who Jesus is, and they can say they believe in God, yet this acknowledgment does not save them. Saving faith is shown through godly, loving actions.

Two Faith Examples - James used two Old Testament characters to give an example of living faith. Abraham listened to God's instructions and took measures to sacrifice Isaac. He knew this was the son identified in God's covenant, but he believed the heavenly Father would somehow work this all out. The Lord did after seeing great faith on the part of Abraham. The prostitute Rahab in Jericho believed the report about the power of Israel's God. She put her faith into action by hiding the Israelite spies and helping them escape.

Faith Lived Out - A churchgoer who claims to follow Christ but simply mouths prayers and Bible verses without a sincere commitment has not demonstrated saving faith. He or she cannot say with the apostle Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20, KJV)

(Adapted from the Echoes Commentary)

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:
What matters is not faith and works; it is not faith or works; it is faith that works

POEM FOR THE WEEK:
Faith is the power that prompts us to go
And give to the hungry, bread—Faith means much more than a doctrine or two,
For faith without works is dead. —Woodrum

SCRIPTURE FOR THE WEEK:
Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead
(James 2:17 NKJV)

(from "Our Daily Bread", Aug 03, 2012)

Series: Many Faces of Wisdom

UNIT: Faith and Wisdom in James

NEXT WEEK

Taming the Tongue
(James 3:1-12)

NOTES AND CROSS-REFERENCES

Illustrating Dead Faith (James 2:14-20)

Dead faith is non-profitable (14)

Non-profitable faith is faith that is in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2)

Non-profitable faith is faith not accompanied by love (1 Cor 13:2)

Non-profitable faith is when our works deny knowing God (Titus 1:16)

Dead faith is not providing needs (15-16)

By withholding good from those to whom it is due (Prov 3:27-28)

By trying to avoid or get rid of those in need (Matt 14:15-16)

By not helping the helpless when given the opportunity (Matt 25:41-46)

By closing our hearts to those in need (1 John 3:17)

Dead faith cannot produce godly results (16-17)

Because results comes from unproductive lives (Titus 3:14)

Because results come from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6)

Because results bear bad fruit (Matt 7:17-20)

Because results have been choked by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22)

Because results causes us to be ashamed (Rom 6:21)

Because results don't come from a faith that has matured (2 Peter 1:5-8)

Dead faith can't produce actions God desires (18-20)

Actions that don't respond to daily opportunities (Matt 25:41-43)

Actions that don't put God's word into practice (Luke 6:47-49)

Actions that hear the word, but doesn't do it (Ezek 33:30-32)

Actions that do not result in being obedient (Matt 21:28-31)

Illustrating Living Faith (James 2:21-26)

Living faith results in being justified (21,24)

Justified apart from the Law (Rom 3:28)

Justified resulting in peace with God (Rom 5:1)

Justified by faith in Jesus (Gal 2:16)

Justified by being led to Christ (Gal 3:24)

Justified by being counted as obeying the Law (Rom 2:13)

Living faith is saving faith (22-23)

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8)

There is such a thing as false faith, which does not save (Matt 7:21)

The faith that does not save is a mere profession of faith that does not result in a life of good deeds (Matt 15:7-9)

The faith that does not save may be doctrinally correct, but there is no change of heart or behavior (Matt 23:27-28)

Genuine saving faith results in a life of good works, whereas false faith does not (Matt 5:14-16)

Living faith is doing good works (25-26)

God created us to do good works (Eph 2:10)

Good works are obvious (1 Tim 5:25)

Good works include being generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18)

We should encourage each other to do good works (Heb 10:24)

Good works comes from living a life full of honorable conduct (1 Peter 2:12)