

The Loving Response of Living Faith

James 2:14-17

May 19, 2024

James Chapter 2 is where we will be today. Today we're going to be looking at one of the more well known texts in Scripture. But as we get into this, I don't want to go through the entirety of the background of James in, in, a review because it would be so easy for me to take up way too much time with that and we do have a communion service later. So for now, let me just quickly remind us, let's quickly remind ourselves of kind of the large section that, that, we came out of, last time we were here in James; in James chapter 2, the first 13 verses of it.

Because that passage does kind of, the passage we're going to look at today, just does kind of flow out of that one. And if you remember, or actually even, even, if you don't remember, if you weren't here, but if you've ever just read James 2:1-13, it is about sinful partiality and, and, how out of place sinful partiality is in the believing community. How out of place it is for Christians to fall into the sin of sinful partiality. And it, it, is because it is essentially a denial of the gospel.

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

Those who have truly understood the gospel of Jesus Christ, those who have been regenerated to live a new life in him, will not, and in fact cannot continue to look at others in the same way that the world does.

It doesn't make sense for those who have understood the gospel to do this; essentially assigning value to them based on how they are able to contribute to your own good, your own happiness, your own success. So the fact that James is, is against this, is speaking against this so strongly in the first 13 verses of James 2, makes logical sense because the fundamental starting place for becoming a Christian is, one: is a place of complete humility. Complete humility.

The gospel message teaches us, and I'm going to, it's so important for the, that text and for what we're doing today to have the gospel firmly in your head, because the realization that you are totally and completely helpless before a holy God. The beginning of the gospel helps to inform our thinking. You are totally, completely hopeless before a holy God, no matter how good you might have thought of yourself. No matter how good

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

we might have thought of ourselves morally before coming to Christ. No matter what in our lives we could point to, in order to demonstrate how good we were doing. Whether we gave a bunch of time and money to charities or whether we could just, whether we could just, you know, easily identify other people who are worse than us.

No matter what we might have been feeling about ourselves at the time, when you became a Christian, if you've become a Christian, God changed your heart and the gospel message broke you. You came to understand that you were no better off than anyone else. You stood in a hopeless condition, awaiting judgment from a holy God before whom you stood condemned. His requirement was perfection, and you lived your life not only as imperfect, but as his enemy. You had no hope for anything other than eternity in hell.

That was all you can look forward to, unless God would take mercy on you. And that is exactly what has happened. Because God's character cannot be compromised, and because he is perfectly just, he cannot just look past your sin. Your sin has

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

to be paid for. So God sent his Son. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, the one who is truly God and truly man, and he lived the perfect life that was required of you; never sinning, not once, not in action, not in deed, not in word, not even in his thoughts. And, he then, Jesus went to the cross, where he died a death that he did not deserve. The only person in human history to die a death that he didn't deserve.

On the cross, Jesus Christ took our sins upon himself. He took the full wrath of God that we deserved in an eternity in hell. That's what you and I had earned and Christ took it all on himself that day, the full eternal punishment for all who would believe in him. His robes for mine, that's what we just sang. He was an innocent man with no sin to pay for himself, so he was able to take the place of the guilty man. And because he is God, he is infinite, so he is able to take the eternal punishment for all of his people in a finite amount of time on the cross.

He dies a real death is buried in a real tomb, and then rose from the dead in a real, physical, glorified body, proving that this atoning sacrifice for the sins of every single Christian

GRACE CHURCH

was accepted by God. And now that this resurrection is the first fruits, the guarantee of a people who will share in the same resurrection into eternal life. And now every person whose eyes have been open to see their sins, as God sees their sins, and turns from their sin toward God, in repentance from sins, and with faith in this gospel will participate in this resurrection and live with God.

Their sin now being fully paid for, credited to Christ on the cross, and his righteous life given to them, reconciled to God through Jesus, adopted children and co-heirs with Christ for eternity. This is the gospel, that those who are in Christ believe, truly believe. So when we say that we have faith in the gospel, we don't mean it the same way that many today use the word faith or belief; a mere belief in something, anything, really, that we cannot physically see. I have faith that my team is going to win. I have faith that I'm going to get this job. I have faith that God is going to heal me. I have faith that things are going to start getting better soon.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

Faith with nothing really to back it up, that is not what we mean. When we say that we have faith, we mean that we have faith that what God has said in his Word is true. That this gospel is true. That we really believe that these things happened in history and that God is using them, as he said he would in our lives and in this world.

So it is because this is James's understanding of what it means to be a Christian that he can tell these early Jewish believers that therefore showing partiality towards one person over another based on worldly standards is totally out of step with all that you claim to believe in the gospel. Knowing what you know, believing that, believing what it is that you have been saved from, how can you, a guilty and yet redeemed sinner, possibly look down on another person?

How can you treat others in a way that the holy God refused to treat you? How could you look at someone else primarily with hopes about how they might benefit you? How can your life be helped through their riches, power, or influence? How can you see them that way? How can you possibly look at people like this

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

when God has already shown you, that he is the one who provides all your needs in a way that no one else possibly can? If he has provided you with eternal riches, how on earth can you look to someone else with anything other than a desire to serve and love them in the same way that you have been loved?

In light of what God has done, why would you look to someone else to meet your inferior temporal needs, since he's met your much greater spiritual needs? To look to them to meet your inferior temporal needs would be a demonstration that you don't trust the God who ransomed your soul at the cost of his precious son to meet your easy needs. So that is the ground for the strong words that James had for this congregation in verse 13 of Chapter 2. Look what it says, "Therefore judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy."

In light of these glorious gospel truths. How can you, as he says in verse 1 of chapter 2, how can you possibly hold to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and at the same time hold an attitude of personal favoritism? Something is way out of place, if that's the case with you. So all this as, as review is

important for us to keep in mind, because it really is the continuation of that same mindset that brings us into this next major section of James's teaching in verses 14 through 26 of chapter 2. So it is extremely important that you have that mindset, that you take this gospel message in your head. As we read through this section, this often confused, often misunderstood, often misused section of Scripture.

When we are talking about faith in this passage, you need to be thinking about, thinking of gospel faith, because when you have that in mind, what true faith in the true gospel looks like, then the idea that you could believe that and live out your life in this world, without faith in that glorious gospel, actually affecting you, then it really is easy to see where James is coming from, as he talks about false faith.

Even though we're going to limit our study today to verses 14 through 17, let's just go ahead and read all the way through verse 26, so that we can see the entirety of James's argument. We'll come back to the rest of it and other points in time, but as we go through it, you will be able to easily track with,

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

easily see, what James's main point is in this section. James 2 starting in verse 14, "What use is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself.

"But someone will say, 'You have faith; and I have works. Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.

"And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified

by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."

So as you read through that passage, there can be little doubt what James's point is, right. Verse 14, "Can that faith save him?" Verse 17, "faith that has no works is dead by itself." Verse 20, "faith without works is useless." Verse 26, "faith without works is dead." His statement, James's statement in verse 13, which preceded this passage that I just read, the judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy, is totally consistent with what we are reading here.

The idea there was not that failing to show mercy invalidates your faith, but that those who have been shown great mercy will necessarily show mercy to others. This is probably the section of the letter that James is most well known for. But there is a sense in which the, the, main theme of the entirety of the letter has to do with, what does true faith look like?

It's just a little more black and white, a little more pronounced here. So with the background again of the gospel firmly in our minds for context, this morning we're going to get into the beginning of this very important and timely argument from James. As we look at verses 14 through 17, we're going to do this in three points, point one will be, point one: The question, point two: The illustration, point three: The conclusion.

The question, the illustration, the conclusion, so point one: The question. And we see that in verse 14. Verse 14 says again, "What use is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" So again, much has been made of this particular section of Scripture in an attempt to show some sort of contrast with most of the New Testament teaching, that we are saved through faith alone, apart from works. Trying to show a contrast between what James is saying here and that message.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

Martin Luther famously took issue with James, because of what we see here in this passage, thinking that it seemed to be in contradiction with that great Reformed doctrine of faith alone through grace alone or grace alone through faith alone. Many have even made the claim that James here is refuting Paul, were going after Paul in particular and his teachings. Paul's teachings, that are probably best summarized in the words of Romans 3:28, where Paul says, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law." And so we hear that verse and we read what James says. And perhaps at first glance, this might cause some trouble. That's why it's so important to have in our minds that understanding of the gospel that we just talked about. Because anything that James is saying here, it flows easily, it flows naturally, it flows logically out of that understanding of the gospel.

James is not trying to argue against faith and for works, when it comes to salvation. That is not what he, do, what he's doing. It's actually precisely because James cares so much about faith that he takes up this argument. Remember, again his, his, statement in verse 1 of chapter 2. "Do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal

favoritism." The concept of faith is very important to James, and you can see from that statement that the idea that, that someone who would abuse that, someone who would abuse, in their speech, the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus, or someone who would claim that faith, while at the same time including sinful practice, that's something that James couldn't stand for. He's going after that, not the teaching of Paul.

So what we have in this section is James not attacking faith, but defending true faith. He's not allowing people to claim it who don't have it, and he's making sure that it's described and defined correctly. Paul would have no problem with what James says here. In fact, Paul says similar things throughout his letters, and he doesn't deny for a minute that our actions demonstrate whether or not we have true faith. In fact, in, in the chapter right before that, that verse from Romans 3:28, that I read in Romans 2, verses 12 through 13, Paul says, "For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified."

So even though Paul clearly states, that it is not works of the Law that save us, he also says that it is the doers of the law who will be justified. He's, he's, essentially saying the same thing that James is saying here. Not that being a law doer is what justifies you, that's not what he's saying, but rather that this is the, the, description of those who are justified, those who are justified by faith, are law doers, are works doers. That is exactly what is going on here in James.

James's point in this passage is not to show what it is that justifies, but to show who it is, that are justified. What do they look like? What is the demonstration, that they are those who have been justified? What are their lives look like? Are we just basing this on the things they say? Notice that, this is what the passage is about. This is how it is introduced. James is not trying to examine faith itself, he is interested in examining the person's claim to faith.

Again, in verse 14, "What use is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?" This passage is an examination of the claims of a person. It's not an examination

of the efficacy of saving faith. It is so important that we see that, in the question that James is asking, the questions he asks throughout this passage, because that's the very thing that leads to so much confusion over this passage; misunderstanding that. And it also seems that the main concern that James has in the term, when he uses the term, works, isn't necessarily the understood, works of the law, that Paul often means, but merely deeds of mercy. You can see that from the context here, careful though, not that we should draw too strong a line between the two; when you are being merciful and loving towards others, you are fulfilling the law.

But the way James frames the illustration in verses 15 and 16, demonstrates to us that his concern actually seems to be the actions that should just naturally flow out of the one who claims to have faith. If you really understand that gospel, that we just discussed, if you really believe that, then it's not that you would necessarily need to be commanded to live out your faith in love and service to others. The commands are good, they're helpful, but you now obey the law, not begrudgingly, but because it's what naturally comes from the one who understands the great salvation that they have been given.

Another thing to point out, to help us see we are accurately understanding what James is asking, is found in that second question in that verse. Can that faith save him and that faith same? It's crucial that you see the word depending on your translation, the word "that" or "this" or "his" there in your translations, in front of the word faith. That helps to clarify a bit more that we're talking about this particular type of faith that this person has and not true biblical gospel faith.

So if you have a King James Version, it, it, leaves the article in the Greek, which is there; it leaves it untranslated and that's not helpful. So it just says, "Can faith save him?" You need some word there to differentiate, this faith from true faith. That's the helpful and that's the accurate and consistent way to translate this passage. So this is the question. It has nothing to do with the saving power of faith alone. That is not. James is not even talking about that.

The question is whether or not the type of faith that a person claims to have is really the type of faith that is described

throughout the rest of the New Testament as saving faith. Several commentators pointed out this picture, gave this picture. I think it's a good one. The rather than standing against each other fighting about faith, it is best to picture James and Paul as standing back-to-back defending the same faith, but against opponents coming from opposite sides.

And any pastor who's been shepherding for any amount of time can attest to you the fact that, that they have had to deal with misunderstandings about faith coming from both sides; different deceptions coming from different places. For those who believe that they can earn their way to heaven through good morality or legalism, or who think that God might have purchased their salvation, but it's now up to them to keep it through their good works. Those people need to be shown that all of salvation, from justification to sanctification to glorification, that's all of God. It's all a gift received through faith, and actually thinking that we could do anything to add to it would be an insult to what God has done and would indicate that you don't really believe, what you say you do about what Christ accomplished on the cross; if you think you need to add to that.

But for those who think that they have, that all they have to do is intellectually adhere to a certain set of historical facts about the person and work of Christ. Since they've already done that, they're essentially now free to live however it is that they want to live: Antinomianism. Those people need to be challenged with the truth that we see here in James. A faith that doesn't produce a change toward righteous living is a dead and a fake faith, and it is this latter issue that James is dealing with. It is probably more, more, significant for us, more significant in our time. It is the bigger issue. It seems like an American Christianity, and it is such a helpful point for our own reflection today.

So this is the question we need to be asking ourselves as we examine this text today, not whether or not God saves us by grace through faith, that question is settled. You don't need to answer that question. The question for us isn't whether or not faith justifies, but rather is the faith that we hold to, the true faith, the type of faith that justifies or is it the type that just talks?

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

Do you possess saving faith? This is a question that we should be asking ourselves as we examine this passage. This is one of those passages where it is really easy, as I start in on it, and maybe you've already done it, to dismiss it because you've heard it so much and start listening on behalf of someone else and someone around you. Like I hope, I hope that guy over there, listening, to that guy I talked to you last Sunday, he needs to hear that or my, my, husband here, I'll, I'll take the kids out. You just, you just stay and listen now. Don't listen on behalf of someone else. Fight the urge to do that. Take the time this morning to examine yourself in light of this passage.

If you remember here, it's not impossible for people to slip through our membership process only to discover later that although they had no problem stating the facts of the gospel and possibly even believing them, nonetheless, as time went on it was revealed, that it has been demonstrated. that the faith that they had or professed wasn't a saving faith. If you're a visitor, if you're a non-member or you're someone who's maybe been regularly attending for a while, and as we look at this today, ask yourself, is this you? Maybe it's part of the reason that you've not joined a church. True faith isn't evident in

you. Maybe you are someone who's looking to church to serve you, rather than to serve in it.

Examine yourself today, teenager, young person. Maybe you're thinking about whether or not your faith is truly your own, you just kind of running on the coattails of your parents. You're in that time of life where you've really got to start asking the questions now. Maybe I do believe this, but is it changing me? Are you just saying and even maybe believing the things that you know you should? Is there any actual demonstration that you have true saving faith? Think about that today, young person.

And children, you children in here filling out your little worksheets right now with this verses on it. Is he sitting here with your parents, as you fill out your coloring sheets. Think about all the things you've heard about Jesus from your parents and in Sunday school. Listen, today is, if, if, you really love Jesus, then the way that you will show it is by loving others. That's what, that's what James is saying here.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

You treat your brothers and sisters with love and care. Or are you looking out for yourself? This was this letter. This section of this letter was written to challenge and confront us in our thinking. So don't make the mistake of trying to apply it to others before you examine yourself. "What good is it if someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can that faith save him?" It is whether or not we are truly saved that is at stake here. The stakes literally could not be higher.

So with that question in mind, let's get into point two: The illustration. Point two, the illustration. As we look at verses 15 and 16, again, "if a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and you, "and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?"

As we move further along in this passage in coming weeks, whenever I'm back up here, and again, we're going to see some of the other ways the true faith works itself out. But the particular challenge toward our faith, that we're looking at today is the challenge of how do you treat others? How do you

treat others? So in verse 15 James presents a scenario, and then again, this is probably something that he is familiar with, something that actually happens, especially in this culture. But more than likely the, the, conversation that takes place is, is, a hypothetical scenario that's maybe a little strong, maybe a little exaggerated in order to help prove the point that works are necessary to verify true saving faith, to those who may be doubting it.

So the situation in verse 15, "a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food." It's showing someone who is absolutely destitute. It's kind of, it's kind of shows that James is, is, is laying out a pretty extreme case. You can see that the response of the person in verse 16, an illustration to be warmed and well filled. You can see that, that in there, that yes, they recognize this person is living in a extreme situation. They're impoverished. They're destitute.

It's and it's hard to imagine as you read that response, anyone actually being that uncaring, anyone saying something along those lines and then just leaving them alone. James's point here

is not to say, just don't be like that. He's not trying to set an extremely low bar, so everyone can go well, there you go, I'm not like that; So I'm fine then. No, that's not his point. The point isn't, be better than this guy. The point is to show those who might deny that their works mean anything, to show them that those people who deny that; to give them an argument that they can't argue against. Surely you can't argue against this example. Surely the person in this scenario doesn't have true faith, do they? No one would say that such a person, as we see in this illustration, possesses a faith that can save. How could someone who really believes all that God has done for him in Christ, treat a fellow brother or sister with contempt and no mercy?

The picture here is, by the way, of a brother or sister that means a fellow Christian. Many times the, the, Greek text just uses the word for brother to talk about fellow Christians and expects all Christians to see themselves under this banner and just like it does, actually, in verse 14. And sometimes some translations just add the word sister, even though it's not there to try and make that connection for us. But that's not a good practice because of passages like this, where James

actually uses, in the Greek, both terms. This is probably to help us see these people in even greater destitution; as a sister in such a case must be someone then who does not have a husband or father whose responsibility it would be to take care of her. So while you may see a man in need and think that they can probably do something about it; in the culture that James writes to, that wouldn't really be the case for a woman.

And again, notice he's talking about fellow Christians, as is usually the case in passages of Scripture in the New Testament that are about helping others in poverty. It's about helping. How do you see, how do you treat other Christians? It's not that we shouldn't be considerate and compassionate to unbelievers; of course we should. But it's especially the case when it comes to fellow believers. Why is that? It's because we, we, know them. We know them.

If they are a part of our church, we can trust that they are striving to obey Christ, that we are able to help them, while still being good stewards in a way that, that we just can't with

unbelieving poor, that we don't know. So we don't take a passage like this to just, to just, to free you from this.

We don't take a passage like this and get convicted every time we see someone on the side of the road holding a sign that says they're hungry. Unfortunately, we simply have no way of knowing what will happen to anything that we give to them, and we have a responsibility to be good stewards, statistically and dramatically statistically, and unfortunately, it is far more likely that giving money to that person on the side of the road is aiding them in sin and not actually helping them.

But that should not be the case with our brothers and sisters in Christ. They are part of a system of mutual accountability and have the same Holy Spirit that is leading them toward the same holy life that you have, that same Holy Spirit. And while the response in verse 16 seems like an extreme response in order to make his point, that situation in verse 15 probably isn't that extreme. Remember again, many in the Jewish Christian community that James's writing to are going through some pretty

severe financial trials, as, as indicated by what we talked about way back when we were in chapter 1.

The word for no clothing. I, it can literally mean no clothes whatsoever. But the reply in verse 16, to be warm, implies that this is, that this probably means, that this is a person without the outer garment that was needed to live comfortably in this culture. The warm outer garment that someone would bring with them everywhere and even sleep in.

It also says that they're in need of daily food. So again, so the idea is not that, that, that they are merely hungry right now, but that they don't have the means to, to, access daily provision of food. So to truly help this person would be more of an imposition than merely buying them lunch one day. It's going to require an, an, investment.

So in verse 15, and we get this picture of this need, and it is a real need among brothers and sisters in Christ. And so how should one with true faith respond to this need? How should they respond? Well, not like this. Not like we see in verse 16.

Here we see a picture of the type of way that false faith responds. How those who are mere practitioners of religion rather than those who possess a true faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, would respond. Again, even though this is kind of an extreme response, we can still pick out, we can still see principles. We can still see characteristics of false faith within it.

So first, as we look at verse 16, notice that false faith can be godly sounding. False faith can be godly sounding. That's a principle of or characteristic of false faith. It can be godly sounding. Notice what the hypothetical man says to the needy brother and sister, go in peace was a common polite and courteous way of saying goodbye to someone. Certainly wasn't a rude thing to say, and to tell them, to be warmed and filled, is also a nice sounding sentiment. Certainly, you know, better than telling them to die hungry.

These are kind things to say. They certainly aren't full of animosity, but the person is really just comforting themselves

in this case. Comforting themselves in their own so-called faith, simply because they have extended themselves all the way to the point of not wishing ill upon someone. That's how low the bar of faithfulness is for them. And it's actually not very hard for us to do that also. Because we know all kinds of religious cliches to tell people when they're going through a hardship.

We know the, the right religious thing to say, so we can say it and then kind of get on to the next thing that we're dealing with, "all things work together for good." God's sovereign over your situation. I'll be praying for you. Those are all true things. Those are all right things. You should be praying for them. They're all true things. They're all good things. They're all right things. They're kind of like the good sentiments of telling someone to go in peace and to be warm and filled.

In fact, we should say things like that to one another. But we are to do it as we are ministering to one another, not just as we're passing by. So we can learn in church. We can learn all of the right things to say just by being here and watching other people. We can learn the right things to say. But it is the

action, it is the works, it is the actual expenditure of energy, time, resources, that distinguish true faith from false faith. This is a word for those of us who might say nice things, in order to, to lay down religious sounding cover with our words as we kind of excuse ourselves then from actually loving, serving or helping others.

Thomas Manton gave this crushing indictment. Thomas Manton says, "Words are cheap, compliments cost nothing, and will you serve your God with that which costs you nothing." So false faith can sound godly. Secondly, we can see that a false faith is selfish, sometimes secretly selfish. False faith is secretly selfish. Each of these characteristics are related. They overlap, and this is probably the kind of overarching one that explains all of the characteristics of false faith that we see here.

Selfishness is at the heart of what we said about using words to lay down religious cover, and it's at the heart of the next two characteristics we'll talk about as well. But notice that the phrase that is spoken here, it's kind of subtle. It's kind of interesting it's a phrase that ends a conversation. It's not

a greeting, "Go in peace, be warm and filled." The person is trying to leave, indicating that the spiritual sounding words really are the only thing they intend on giving. They're either dismissing the person from their presence, or they are dismissing themselves from the conversation. Either way, what is important to them is that they are done with the interaction now.

For this person, this is the end of the matter. I have engaged in this subject to the extent, that I'm going to; the end of their interactions, the end of their dealings with this impoverished brother or sister. Maybe they'll tell, you know, their spouse when they get home of this trial this person's going through. But other than that, this is it for their involvement. What is important to the one who is speaking in this illustration is himself. He gives nothing but words that cost him nothing. He has no desire to give of his time. So false faith is secretly selfish.

Thirdly, and related to it, but I, wanna, don't want us to think of him separately, to make this sound even more abhorrent;

false faith cares nothing for the needs of others. False faith cares nothing for the needs of others. The illustration said that this person does not give them what is necessary for their body, doesn't give them what is necessary for their body, So there is something that is needed for their body for them to continue to physically live. And yet this person with false faith is content to leave them with nothing, but well wishes. And there is an argument here that needs to be made from the lesser to the greater.

So the illustration that James uses here doesn't just say, that this person doesn't give them what is necessary, it says, doesn't give them what is necessary for their body. James didn't need to add the word body, but he does. And by doing so, it demonstrates the even stronger point that if this person of supposed faith won't even give of their material resources to help someone with physical, real physical needs, then what chances there, that they would ever even care to give anything for this person's much more difficult spiritual needs.

The physical needs of the brother or sister, in this illustration, they're upfront. They're obvious. The person walking by has to see them. They can't be ignored. They can't be ignored. The person with false faith has to say something about it if they're going to continue to have a false profession. I got to do something because it's right up front. They see it, can't be ignored. Spiritual needs are much easier to ignore by those who don't actually care, because these are needs that require one to get under the surface a little bit to investigate a little bit. You don't just walk by.

It's easy to walk by someone and see them keeled over, desperate for food, to see them shivering from the cold. As you see that, you, it's easy to notice that, but it's harder to notice when someone is walking by you, who is struggling with loneliness, who is hurting, who's struggling to trust God, who's enslaved to a sin, or something like that. Requires investigation, requires actually a relationship. You have to investigate. You have to be attentive. You have to get to know someone.

But if someone doesn't even care enough to help with the needs of the body that are staring him in the face, why would he ever be expected to even try to, try to meet the needs of the soul. Those are needs that aren't near as obvious, require actual effort, require the building of a relationship, things that would extend to far beyond just giving religious sounding words and pass. So false faith doesn't care for the needs of others.

Fourthly and finally, we need to see the characteristic that false faith is useless. False faith is useless. In this final little question of verse 16, "What use is that?" The understood answer is, no use. It's of no use. It's nothing. This type of faith isn't just an immature faith that needs to grow. It's not a growing faith. It's a worthless faith. The faith that just says things and moves on is an immature faith. It's worthless faith.

You don't start off in the Christian life as one who just says nice things and encouraging things, but doesn't get involved. And then as your faith matures, you actually start to love and serve and help those in need. That's not how it works. Yes, you

do develop and grow and get better at loving and serving and caring for others, but there is never a time where you merely say things without ever acting. That is, that is not a faith that's better than no faith. It's a false and useless faith. It's not that saying kind words and offering religious platitudes is better than nothing. It's useless. It does no good. It has no point. In most situations, saying nothing would have been better.

So we can use the illustration to pick out the principles of false faith that will help us then to better examine ourselves when it comes to our interactions with others. So I, I, am pretty confident, I'm hopeful, that none of our church members would act this way, the way we see this person in this illustration, if they came across another one of our members who was cold and starving.

But the question remains, do you truly care for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Do you truly care for them? Are your interactions with them about truly helping and serving them? Serving others? Or are they actually about you trying to do as

little as possible and removing your own discomfort with the situation as soon as possible; doing that while also trying to find the difficult balance of the appropriate minimum expectation for Christian behavior?

When you see someone struggling with physical limitations, how do you respond? Are you willing to spend your own finite resources, time, money, energy to help them out. In the church, within the church, this is so much more than just throwing money their way. It can be that, a little bit sometimes. But it's involvement in their life.

So it might mean in a financial struggle, it might mean helping to figure out why are they continuing to struggle financially, trying to come alongside to help them, maybe, maybe through discipleship. Maybe trying to help them understand biblical financial practices; could mean coming alongside of them and trying to help them find a job. Could mean that. Maybe they have a physically debilitating, they have physically debilitating needs. Maybe they need help doing things, moving things, getting to church. Maybe they're in chronic pain. Maybe it would just

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

help them to have someone who didn't just say they were going to pray for them, but actually sat down and prayed with them. Maybe they're lonely. Maybe they need someone to meet with them, pray with them, call them every once in a while, to take time out of their own schedule for them.

What about spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ? There are, of course, spiritual needs underlie all physical needs. Even the examples we just gave, as well as a multitude of others. All the trials of different people are going through right now; the need to be strengthened by God and encouraged in the truth, to have brothers and sisters in Christ come up beside them, help them endure the trial in a godly way, to actually rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Investing the time and effort to actually do this.

We should be noticing these things in one another and then leaning into them. So if you're not noticing, if you're not noticing, you don't know of the trials, the pain, the difficulties that your brothers and sisters in Christ, in this church, might be going through right now, but you are well aware

of your own, that might be a sign that you're self-absorbed. You need to really consider whether or not your faith is genuine. It's your own trials that get the bulk of your time and energy and thinking and your prayers.

And just as bad, if you know of some of these things or maybe you've just seen someone and you kind of suspect it, you suspect some problems or difficulties in someone's life and it hasn't manifested in you, in, in, in, in any other way, than maybe talking about it with your spouse or asking someone else about what's going on with that person. It has never resulted in you actually trying to find a way to talk to and possibly love and serve that person. You noticed it. Ask yourself, along with James, of what use is that? Of what use is that.

In that case, the case of being that way. The only difference between you and this person in the illustration, is that you have successfully avoided the uncomfortable conversation where you were forced to say Christian sounding things that you don't actually mean. That's the difference. False faith is marked by selfish avoidance of spending your time and energy on the lives

of others, all while laying down religious sounding cover words. That's what false faith is.

Then true faith is marked by selflessly looking for ways to serve our brothers and sisters while speaking words that we really mean and that we prove that we mean, as we back it up with loving actions. This is the demonstration of the one who has truly understood and truly believes the gospel. The one who is grateful for the love and mercy that he has been shown will look for avenues to show that same love and mercy.

With this in mind, we ought to be quite concerned with the answer to, to, this question. Ask yourself. Ask yourself and be real. Would a brother or sister in Christ be better loved and served in a time of suffering and need by coming to you, or by coming to someone who believed that their own salvation depended on their good works? How would they be better loved and served? To use James's wording again, who would be of more use to them?

Couple of final words before we close with the third point.

Final words on this one. If you are someone who hears the words

of this illustration and automatically throw yourself into the category of the brother or sister who is in need, that's where I am. There's a good chance you have false faith. Your outlook on life then, if you're coming from that perspective, allows you to look at everyone else and see how they're not responding to you. You can easily throw them into the category of someone who just talks the talk because they don't seem like they care to help you. It's just another way of being selfish, just another way of not caring for others while covering it over with religious sounding words and concern.

Also, I think a good application to what we are talking about here would be for it to have any in effect on our prayers. It is one of the most wonderful things in the world to hear someone say that they will pray for you, but only if you know that they will.

I think many times the current version of "go in peace, be warmed and be filled" is I'll be praying for you. That's good. It's good. You should definitely pray for them. Maybe go beyond that. Tell them, maybe, tell them what you are praying for them

about. Pray for them, right. Then pray for them as you receive the text. Tell them you're praying for them as you receive the text. If they're in person, pray with them. Pray with them then.

I love, I love after every service we do here. I love how much our church loves each other. How much everyone sticks around, talks to each other, talks to each other about real, meaningful things, spiritual conversations, talking about the sermon, sharing with each other personal trials, life issues with one another. I think a good next step, though, in the life of our church would be to see more praying with each other during those conversations. It's an immediate, tangible way to give of your time and energy to your brothers and sisters in need.

Well, that brings us to a final point. A final point that's short. Very short allows us to wrap up this section Point three: The conclusion. The conclusion. Verse 17. Here's the conclusion, even so, or "therefore just the same faith, if it has no works is dead by itself." This is the final conclusion on the matter. He states it again at the end of this entire passage in verse 26. He's actually expanding on what he has just said. He's just

being even stronger. Not only is a faith that fails to love others a useless and pointless faith, it's no faith at all. It's a dead faith. Works are the movement that prove that faith is alive and not dead. Just like movement and action, at least somewhere in the body is the proof of life and a living being, so are works to faith.

The word for dead. The common Greek word, *nekros*. It's the common word for a dead body, something that's lifeless, a corpse. A corpse faith. Again the absence of works is not what makes the faith dead. It is the evidence that the faith is dead. The reason that it is dead is because it is not actually attached to the life-giving vine that is Christ. That's why it's dead. It's dead because whatever type of faith this might be, it is not the type that is connected to Christ who is our life.

I mean think of the biblical language you've given the Holy Spirit at conversion, who what? Who lives in you? He lives in you. He doesn't just exist in you. He isn't just a long for the ride like some divine parasite watching as you make decisions and live your life the way you want to. He indwells you. He

empowers you. He works through you. The gospel teaches us that those who have been redeemed by God through Christ are united to him. We have union in Christ and that union produces spiritual life in us. We don't have to try hard to produce spiritual life. It's, it's, just come from us because that's the nature of that connection.

The picture James is using here is no different than what his older brother Jesus says, in John 15, in this famous section John 15, 4 through 6, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit from itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."

They're burned. The dead branches that Christ talks about here is the dead faith that James is talking about, is speaking of in our passage. The fact that they don't produce fruit, they don't

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

produce selfless love towards others is not the thing that makes them dead. They are dead because they do not have the connection to Christ that they claim they have, and the selfish way they live is the proof of that. They're not just immature branches, that are just waiting to produce larger fruit. They're not waiting to produce fruit. They're waiting for the fire. They're dead branches.

You will not live with Christ for eternity if you are not one who lives in Christ now, and no one who lives in Christ fails to produce fruit. This is not just James. This isn't just my interpretation of this passage; this is the testimony of the New Testament, John in 1 John 3:17 and 18, "But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

Brothers and sisters, look at your lives, look at your treatment of others. Ask the hard questions about whether or not you're in the faith. Ask them. Ask them honestly. Remember the

GRACE CHURCH

Greeley

picture from Matthew 25, that that we opened the service with, sheep and goats being separated according to what they did, not what they claim to believe. What they did. Was it actual saving faith or just a claim to faith? The demonstration is what they did. Practically speaking, if, if, you look at what you actually practice, what you actually practice, what's actually in your life, not what you say you believe. In your life, does the Church, do others exist for you and your benefit, or do you exist to love and serve them?

Paul, and we'll close with this, demonstrating once again that he is in lockstep with what James is saying. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, he says this, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith." And what does he mean by that? Does he mean take a theology exam; see if you really believe the truth? No. Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you not recognize about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Praise God, if that's what you see when you take the test. Do you not recognize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless indeed you fail the test. Let's close with that.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

Father God, this is a strong passage. It is so important for us to understand. It is indeed a blight on American cultural Christianity, this antinomian faith that revolves around ourselves and our, our desire to be loved and to feel special. It's not a bunch of people running around with that type of faith, a faith that is really there to benefit them and allows them to look at everyone else in a way that, how can they benefit me.

Father, I pray for any in here who are self-deceived, that this passage would open their eyes to that truth, that you'd use it in their lives for that. And that you those who are yours in here, those who have true faith, who are growing in these things. That you would use this passage to help us to excel all the more. That we may indeed not fail the test. That we would be so thankful for the brothers and sisters in Christ that we have in here. That we would reach out to them with love and compassion, not just with the stuff we notice on the outside, but actually making it our business to notice.

GRACE CHURCH

Grace

And we would appreciate the family that we have here and union in Christ. And that, that would now as we close this service and get ready to head into our time of communion, that would be on our minds, the reminder that we have been united together through the blood and body of Jesus Christ. We're to serve one another like that is truly the case. Pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.