

## STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES: PART IV

**Speaker:** Dr. Joseph John

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**Scripture:** James 2: 14-26

For the last 3 weeks, we have been studying the book of James who interestingly, is the brother of Jesus. As Pastor shared, the major theme in this book is spiritual maturity. The tone in the entire book of James is very different from many of the New Testament books in that, he is very direct and sometimes uses very heart-hitting words.

Three weeks ago, Pastor shared from James 1 about trials. James starts by saying, "Count it all pure joy when you go through trials." Quite an outrageous statement! He then explains that we need God's wisdom to consider all that we go through, especially when we go through tough times. That is actually for our good. so when we go through trials, we have joy in those trials.

Two weeks back, Pastor spoke from James 1:19-27 which talks about the various aspects of our faith, especially stressing that our behavior must be consistent with our belief, and also, allowing God's Word to transform us and change us.

Last week, Pastor spoke from James 2:1-13, which was mainly about faith removing discrimination. It was regarding the change of attitude; we should not have any kind of partiality or any discrimination when we come to worship. We all come from different backgrounds, and James has very strong words if somebody shows any favoritism towards anybody. He was talking about someone who was richly dressed and being given a place of honor. God will judge, and it's a warning that we need to treat everyone equally because we are all one in Christ.

Today, we look at **James 2:14-26** and the theme is: Faith proves itself by works.

Let's start with **2:14-17** (NIV)

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

This portion (vv. 14-26) has 4 examples of faith. The first two are 'bad' examples which we should not follow. Ant the last two are good examples. So, one such example is seen here. Many people sometimes have a problem with the book of James because it puts a lot of emphasis on our life or what we do, or our deeds. Let's not get it wrong. The aspect is whether our faith is really resulting in works, or behavior. Is it showing what we believe? Hebrews 11:6 makes it very clear. *"without faith it is impossible to please God."* Faith is an absolute necessity. But the point James is making here is that if we claim to have faith, then that should result in a change in our behavior.

Let me read for you a parallel reading from the apostle John.

**1 John 3:17-18** *<sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

I hope that makes it clear. It's basically saying: How can you say that you have God's love when you don't show pity to someone? You have the material possessions and you see somebody who is in need, and you don't show any pity? That is the point here.

James 2:14 puts it nicely. "What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith..." If that's the case, that faith should result in action. The point in this particular case appears to be a person whose faith is just intellectual; it has not affected his heart. How? Suppose a person comes to the fellowship of the church and is without clothes and daily food, and one of you says to him: "Go, I wish you well"? The point is that seeing his situation has made the church member feel absolutely nothing, this faith has not touched his heart. It has just stayed here in the head. James makes it very clear that this particular person's faith has not affected his behavior. That is the kind of faith we need to examine. Has your trusting in the Lord affected your heart, the way you behave, the way you relate with others, your relationship with the Lord? That's the point! So let's not get it wrong.

Another example we see is the example of the Good Samaritan. This Jewish man was attacked by robbers and left half-dead. The first person to pass by was a Levite, another Jew, but he had absolutely no pity on this man, and he just went on. The second person to come was a priest who again was well versed in the Law. He too, did not have any pity on this Jew. Finally, a Samaritan came. He was an enemy, but he had pity on this half-dead Jew and he took care of him. That's the point! Among the three, the person who really practiced what he believed was a Samaritan. Genuine faith should affect a change in our lives and good works. That is the point James is trying to make here. The particular person mentioned here has only an intellectual faith that has only affected his head. That kind of faith is just information; it has not changed anything in his life.

The next example which James gives is in vv. 18 and 19.

*"<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder."*

Very interesting! James has chosen demons as an example. What he's saying is that demons also believe. But what do they believe? They are not atheists. They believe that there is God, but they also believe that God is a Judge. When Jesus was healing the demon-possessed, the demons would shout: "Have mercy! Please don't judge us before our time." The demons knew that. So what is the difference? Demons have absolutely no love for the Lord. So it's a demonic faith. In the first case, it was a dead faith of this intellectual person which only affected his head. Here we have a case where it has gone further. These demons shudder; their faith has gone to that extent. At least it stirred those emotions, but it has not resulted in any action. That's demonic faith.

Another example we see is that whenever Jesus was teaching, He always had the Pharisees and the Jews coming to attack Him on anything and everything. Jesus made a very simple diagnosis, and John 6 makes it very clear. The diagnosis was this: "You do not have the love of God." I think that's the warning for us – has our faith affected our heart? Do we really love the Lord? Do I love the Lord today better as compared to the way I loved the Lord yesterday? So, let's take this as a warning. The first was an intellectual faith which has not affected the behavior in any way. Secondly, a faith which has affected the emotions but has not gone beyond that; it has not increased the love for the Lord. So, these are the two kinds of bad examples which James is giving here.

Let's look at the next two examples which are good examples. In fact, they are examples of dynamic faith, a faith that resulted in action. vv. 20-24 which talks about Abraham.

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

*righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.”*

Now v.24 can sometimes confuse us. It says: “You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” Don’t get it wrong. The apostle James is not saying that you will get justified through your works. No, not at all. In fact, Warren Wiersbe has mentioned justification in this way: “Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.”

Importantly, justification is not a process; it’s an act, and it’s act of God. We saw in v.23, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now, when God gave a promise to Abraham, Abraham believed. He trusted God. How do we know that? His life was a proof of that. And the real test of his faith came when God asked him to sacrifice his son on the altar. Very often, when we read that portion, it might seem cruel for God to ask such a thing. But God knew what he was asking, and Abraham knew his God. That’s the best part. Abraham knew his God and he knew that it is God who promised that his descendants will be as many as the stars or the sand on the seashore. He knew his God. Romans 4 says, “Abraham believed that God is able to raise him from the dead.” He knew his God and therefore he did not hesitate. Abraham was not justified because of that action but that showed his faith. That is the point. Abraham was not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works.

So, has our faith resulted in a changed behavior? We can examine our own lives. yes, we were justified just on the basis of what the Lord did on the cross, just purely out of His mercy and grace. Our part was to trust in Him. But that should have changed when God’s Spirit comes into our life and transforms us. It’s good to check our lives whether we see evidence of change. Do we trust the Lord like Abraham trusted? Or are we at the starting point once again; we have not progressed? That’s the thing to do.

v. 22 says very wonderfully about Abraham: “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” That’s the crux of the matter. His faith and his actions were working together. Are our faith and actions working together? Is our faith made complete through what we are doing? That’s the point we need to learn from Abraham’s life.

Let’s come to the last example, an extreme one and I’m surprised that James took that. But I think that’s the crux of the gospel. This is the example of Rahab. Let’s read vv. 25 and 26.

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

Rahab! It is written that she was a prostitute. In the Old Testament, it is written as harlot. Many bibles give the meaning as innkeeper. But most Bible scholars agree that she lived a life of sin. But, as soon as she came to know about the Lord, the very little information that she had, she hung on to it. that completely changed her life. with the very little information she had, she affirmed that she believed in what had said and what God was going to do. That’s what was appreciated. Let me read a few verses from Joshua 2 where a very detailed description is given about Rahab. You know that Joshua had sent two spies to spy out the land and they had come to Jericho, where these two spies took refuge at Rahab’s place. This is what Rahab told these two Jews.

Joshua 2:11 *“When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”*

What she's saying is that "we have heard of all that the Lord has done to the other kings" and she's affirming that "the Lord, your God, is God in heaven above and on the earth below." Here is a lady who is living a sinful life, but the moment she was confronted with this Lord, that's it! she completely hung on to this God, and that completely changed her life. how do we know that?

Joshua 2:12-13 <sup>12</sup>"Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup>that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death."

We sometimes gloss over these verses and we don't understand the consequence of what she is saying. Mind you, in the eyes of the people of Jericho, she's a traitor because she has given refuge to these two spies. On top of that, now she's asking that not just her, but her father, mother, brothers, sisters and an entire family have to be saved. Think about what she had to do. She had to go and convince each and every one of them to come and take refuge. It was very likely that somebody could have reported her to the king. She was risking her own life. That shows her faith and the amount of risk she was willing to take for the Lord.

The spies reply to her: "We will do as you ask, but on one condition. You should not tell what we are doing here, and also, you need to tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you are letting us out, and all the people whom you are talking about should be inside the house. If that's the case, we will take care of you." Do you know what she did? That's the best part. v.21 says: As soon as they left, she tied the scarlet cord in the window. Immediately. That shows her faith. She knew that the spies would take another two or three days to leave the area and the attack would take at least another week. But she showed her faith by tying it immediately.

In these two verses from James, we see that Rahab's faith was an extreme example of a sinner trusting in the Lord and then clinging on to the Lord for the rest of her life. Rahab had a very special place in Jewish history. Only three women are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. One is Tamar, one is Rahab and the other is Ruth. Rahab was the mother of Boaz. So you see, Rahab had a very special place. That shows the kind of God we have.

This is exactly what Jesus was saying. The problem with the Pharisees and the Jews – another reason how they did not love the Lord. Luke 15 says that when the tax collectors and sinners were turning to the Lord, the Jews were not happy. That's the attitude that they had. In response to that, Jesus told those three parables, including the parable of the prodigal son.

Why am I sharing this? Let's check our hearts to see what kind of attitude we have. Here is an example of a God who accepts a sinner. What kind of heart is that! in our society, unfortunately, we have norms – who can be accepted or not. But think about our God. Now think about us. Sometimes we are quick to point fingers. But look at our hearts. We have a God, and the important thing is that we are justified fully on the basis of grace and mercy. None of us deserved anything good and if that's the basis on which we have come to Christ, our life, our faith would result in an action like what Rahab did.

So the conclusion v. 26 says, *"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."*

### **Summary:**

These four examples given in James 2:14-26.

2 bad examples:

- A faith which is just intellectual, just head knowledge, nothing more than that. that is a dead faith.
- A demonic kind of faith – though demons believe, they have no love.

2 good examples:

- Abraham, the friend of God.
- Rahab – an extreme example of a person whose faith resulted in action.

The Lord's table is a reminder of what the Lord has done for us on the Cross fully out of His mercy, and nothing that we deserve. Let's pray, and as we take part in the Lord's table, let us remind ourselves, as we sang, we are redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb. There was nothing good in us, and purely on the basis of mercy and grace, we were redeemed.

Amen.

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