

James 2.14-26

Helium & Trust Falls: Why Talk is Cheap

May 01, 2016

INTRO

PSA – Mothers Day is next Sunday! That announcement was for kids and dads.

Get flowers, get whatever she loves. We usually get balloons at our house for most celebrations. Cause we love them and they are built in fun for the next 2 weeks. The kind of fun you have with the balloon all depends on what you fill it with right. You can either fill it with your stinky Co2 breath....or you can fill it with Helium. And how do you know if a balloon has helium in it? Like if I had two red balloons up here, one had helium. And I let them go at the same time...how would you know which had helium? The one with helium would rise... That's right. You can't see helium...but the rising of the balloon reveals the presence of helium. Basic science. Helium lifts balloons. *And then your kids use them as tackling dummies and pop them and cry.*

That's going to be our focus today. God is going to lay out something really important. He's going to tell us in our passage today...how you know for sure if you are a Christian. He's going to show you what genuine faith is. And he's going to say your faith...which like helium is something you can't see...is revealed by something you can see...just like that balloon rising in the air. So if you want to know if you really are a Christian, you need to evaluate that by this thing he says you can see in your life.

See here's the situation: There are people in James' churches who think they are Christians...and James says they are deceived. They've saddled up with the Christians and speak all the Christian phrases. They come to church. And James is going to show them that just because are a balloon...it doesn't mean they are filled with helium. And so James says there is a test to tell if your faith is real. It's as simple as the test to see whether a balloon has helium.

So here's our outline for today. James has ONE point. And then he gives 3 examples to illustrate the one point. Pretty easy right?

[14] What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

One big point today

Genuine faith in the gospel is revealed in how you love people.

- Here is the first of two times in this passage James is going to say that phrase: faith...without works...is dead. And in fact he's really just paraphrasing what his big brother Jesus said about true faith.
- Matthew records Jesus...talking about who God is going to allow into heaven. And here's what he said... "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' [44] Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' [45] Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
- If you don't feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, you will not receive eternal life but instead will go away into eternal punishment. Pretty harsh!

And it seems like James is just repeating it...

- Show again: [15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [17] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
- They both seem to be saying...unless you practice visible self-less love for others, you are not a Christian. Which flies in the face of what some of you grew up believing. You grew up believing Ephesians 2.8-9:
 - [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
 - So now you are like wait...which is it?? Saved by faith or saved by works? Is the bible contradicting itself? Cause my religion professor keeps talking about how the bible is a big pile of self-contradictions and this seems like another one.
 - Ok: Let's be sure we understand what Jesus and James are NOT saying and then what they ARE saying.
- James is NOT saying - works *earn* salvation.
 - He's not saying that clothing and feeding the poor is *how* you earn your standing before

God. He's not saying belief in the gospel PLUS good deeds will give you salvation. That would be a contradiction to the rest of the bible, especially ole Paul.

- James IS saying – **works reveal salvation. That's our big point idea again.** Verses 14 – 17 he's saying the way you love people who are in need reveals whether or not you are actually a christian. What he's saying is that the real thing...real saving faith in Jesus...it grows. It bears fruit. It DOES NOT stand alone. If it does, it isn't faith.

- Based on what he's saying I can only assume he's writing to the Mediterranean bible belt. Because these people by and large claimed to be bible believing evangelical Christians! He's writing to the people in church! I don't need to do any real translation here for you. Because the people he's writing to are the exact same as us today. They had a problem of saying "I'll pray for you" but not doing anything to solve the need.. **The giant hoax of the bible belt is that you can "accept Jesus into your heart" without accepting him into your lifestyle.** My ethics professor said it this way: **words reveal vocabulary. Actions reveal beliefs.** My translation: **Talk is Cheap.** That's why I was never any good at trash talk. Because my coaches growing up

always said "talk is cheap." Let your game do the talking.

- James is saying the same thing. Talk is Cheap. So if you say you are a Christian...and can talk the talk...but do not seek to love others....you are not actually a Christian. You can say what you want but your game does the talking & Your words will not save you.
- However...and this is so important...When we experience the beauty of the gospel that we are saved by faith alone...that love from God for us begins to transform our hearts. And we start to look at others the way God looks at us. And God didn't just *think* to himself "I have compassion for them" no, God acted! And likewise, true faith will act.

○ I've mentioned the word faith a lot. Faith is a mental & heart posture that says I am leaning the weight of my life, placing my confidence, onto something I can't see. And for Christians, that faith is in the promise that God has saved me from my sin through Christ's death on the cross.. When your life has truly been changed by the gospel, when you have true faith...you sacrifice yourself for others out of an overflowing love in your heart you've experienced from God! The evidence of your faith is your acts of love, your good works, that you do for others.

- Faith won't act because it feels guilty and obligated to help poor people. **Obligatory**

charity comes from guilt, not from the gospel. True faith is rooted in God's love for you, and so it looks for ways to love others...One guy I quote a lot...Charles Spurgeon. Here's what he said...

- “The saints fed the hungry and clothed the naked because it gave them much pleasure to do so. They did it because they could not help doing it, their new nature impelled them to it. They did it because it was their delight to do good...they did good for Christ's sake, because it was the sweetest thing in the world to do anything for Jesus¹
- Think about it this way: when you hear somebody has a need, how do you think that particular need will be met by God? You say...well we will pray for it. GOOD! God tells you to do that. Now...how do you think God will answer those prayers? Scripture says over and over that God provides for his people through the means of other people!!
- Heard a story: “I remember one time a leader of our volunteer team at one church told us through her tears just how much her family was hurting. I remember that someone else, thinking he was doing the right thing, said a lot of encouraging words to her, and then started singing a hymn to himself. He felt comforted. She walked away, feeling uncared for and unsupported.” Wonder what song he was

singing? Amazing Grace how sweet the sound...that left me cold and hungry? I once was lost...and I'm still lost...was blind...and now...I still can't see. Not very inspiring. NO the grace is amazing because of the WORK it did in my life!!! It changed me!

So now James says the sign of a true Christian is one who shares God's heart for those in need. And that heart comes alive when one of his children is hurting. And while yes there are sometimes we should pray for it, a lot of the time the only thing we need to say is “I GOT IT!” “DIBS!”

- Let me say 2 things here:
 - First I'm not telling you that every need you hear about is your responsibility. But if you have the heart of Christ...you will be looking to meet the needs of others. You'll jump at the chance when you can, And when you can't, you won't like that you can't.
 - Second, I'm not saying you should meet every need perfectly. This is about imperfect people trying to love other imperfect people in imperfect ways. The whole goal is to show you an imperfect representation of the one who can love you perfectly.

So listen, let me give you one way you could put this into practice right now. You don't need anymore of this sermon. I'm going to give it to you but really you've heard all you

¹ Charles Spurgeon. “The final separation” 288.

need to hear. Right now in Charlotte there are orphans with no food & no homes. No idea where their meal will come from. James told us a couple of weeks ago true religion is looking after them.

We've partnered up with a couple of organizations already here in Charlotte for this very reason. To make it easy for you to LIVE your faith.

One of those with an easy front door is One 7. **One 7LOGO**

This organization serves the homeless refugee population in Charlotte. A big and growing population in Charlotte. The majority of the children they minister to were homeless and have now been given a home at One7. From their own website: The truth is that we need more help in fighting this battle in the inner city. We need less programs and more volunteers to mentor and walk through life with these kids. Our time and our love are the two greatest gifts we can give to many of these awesome kids.

- Every Thursday night they have an outreach at their apartment complex where they need people to just hang with kids and to help serve food. One of my community group members is likely going to start going there on a weekly basis because this is where she feels she can give away to others the love God has given to her!
- There are many other ways to serve there throughout the week.

For most of you that ministry in east Charlotte is less than 20 minutes drive away. When you hear about the need of the homeless orphans...what happens in your heart? Maybe your heart ache a little? That's good. But What do you DO about it? Sad feelings isn't the Christian faith. Jesus didn't just text a sad face to you when he heard you were dead in your sin. He did something about it! True faith in what he did...creates responses of love and care for those in need.

Bottom line: **Genuine faith in the gospel is revealed in how you love people.**

Then he gives three examples to compare your faith to. He's illustrating his main point and giving you something to compare your own faith to:

[19] You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

FIRST EXAMPLE of FAITH: the demons.

James says...you believe that God is one? Reciting the central OT tenant of faith "The Lord our God is One." You say you believe that? Great! Congratulations. Now your faith is on par with the demons! Good ole positive, encouraging James.

He brings up demons. Which yes, if you are new to church...we believe in the existence of demons. Probably not the cartoon devilish trolls you are thinking of, but supernatural agents of evil...yes.

Demons are great theologians. They know their bible better than I do and are better theologians than I am. Than most any pastor.

But when the demons encounter the true God...they shudder. They have a fearful reaction to the holiness of God and the judgment they face. Their proper idea of God, without saving faith in God, leaves them terrified of God.

And James is saying those who profess belief in God but that faith is not revealed by their lives...they are in the same boat as the demons!

I think this is James' point: **intellectual agreement with correct doctrine IS NOT salvation.**

If it were, even the demons would be Christians. Saving faith in Christ results in a transformed heart that begins to love what God loves.

Used to know a guy who was a member of an old Baptist church. All he did was complain, stir up conflict, and try to get the pastor fired (succeeded on one occasion). Yet taught Sunday school & was a "deacon" because he knew the bible. After reading James, I'm thinking this guy would have had a strong resume not for church deacon but for church demon! And if he lived in WS, he'd be a great demon deacon.

Smart people who know the bible and yet are cold, prideful and power hungry are not Christians. That smartness is dangerous because he deceives himself into thinking he's a Christian because of what he knows. That's not a Christian. Christianity is not about knowledge of God its about a relationship with God.

Is the spirit of God at work in your life? Are you a joyful person? A loving person? Is your heart aligning itself to God's heart? If so, it will show! Some of you call yourself a Christian because you know your bible but you don't volunteer here in your church, you don't give, you are argumentative and quick to judge others and James says...that's much closer to a demon than a Christian.

Listen...your actions always reveal your true beliefs. Works don't save you, they reveal your salvation. Today is about your beliefs. So if the sum total of your actions say your life is about you...then your life is about you. And like the people in James' church you need to stop deceiving yourself, repent, and finally surrender your life to Christ.

[20] Do you want to be shown, you **foolish** person, that **faith apart from works is useless?**

James does not pity the fool...Do you need more examples? Ok here fool...

[21] Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

Example of faith 2: Abraham.

Remember Abraham? Abraham was 100 years old when he finally had a son. Isaac. That's old. Especially for baby making. Yet God delivered on his promise to give Abraham a son. Few years later...God says to Abraham...go sacrifice your son Isaac on an altar to me. Well, this is his only son. That's the biggest ask God can give Abraham. Yet in one of the most intense scenes in OT history, Abraham puts his son on the altar and raises the knife up about to kill his son...and before he does, God tells him to stop.

Now James says...was not Abraham "justified" by lifting that knife and being ready to kill his son? Wasn't this ACT or WORK what justified him in God's eyes? Verse 22 clarifies... [22] You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works

Now remember what we said faith was? – Leaning the weight of your life on God's promises, specifically God's promise that in Christ he's saved you. That's faith. Placing your confidence on something unseen. And you can't see faith. But you can see it's fruit. Abraham's faith in God's promise motivated him to obey God's command. His faith came first, his actions flowed from his faith. It wasn't Abraham's action, but the faith that caused his action, that God loved. That's why verse 23 says...

[23] and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham **believed** God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. [24] You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

The evidence of Abraham's faith was his obedience to God's command. If Abraham would have said "God I trust you" with his mouth, but refused to obey what he told him to do...what would you conclude? That he didn't actually trust him.

STUDENT CAMP TRUST FALL – talked about that last week. I did one called man maker (don't worry guys, we are planning a man maker. Gonna be epic) and we did a trust fall. Guy got 7 feet off the ground & fell backwards into the arms of his bros. If they don't catch you...you die. How does your team know you trust them? You gotta fall. Your FALLING reveals your TRUST. James is saying same thing. The way you know if you are a Christian...is revealed...by the way you love other people.

That's because **words reveal vocabulary, actions reveal beliefs.**

James point with Abraham: **You are saved by faith alone, but true faith never stays alone.**

Your faith is completed...it is proven to exist...by your works. That's what happened. Abraham's faith bore out in

his works. If you say you have faith...but don't live a life of faith...you don't have faith. (Balloon rising or falling tells you what you need to know about what is in it!).

James gives us one last example:

[25] And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

3rd example: Rahab

Rahab story: Short version...Rahab was a prostitute. The opposite of Abraham. I love James puts her in here because her presence here shows us anyone can live out their faith no matter how imperfect it is. Whether you are a patriarch or a prostitute, God can intervene in your life and rewrite your story. And if you are willing he can use you to write a whole new story of his gracious, saving love. You don't need to be Abraham to be used by God to change the world.

Rahab ended up being in the lineage of Jesus. She's a part of our family heritage. And her moment came when she received the spies Jason talked about last week. They were God's people. When her king wanted them dead she pledged allegiance to God and saved the spies by sneaking them out. See true faith gives you courage that empty faith does not. Courage to step out boldly for God's purposes.

Rahab's faith was proven by her works. When James says (show verse 25) her she was justified...he's saying her faith was proven. Using justify like I say...there is helium in this balloon. And you say "how can you justify that?" prove it.

Demons, Abraham, and Rahab reinforce the same main point. The point, is the point James concludes with in verse 26...

[26] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Faith without works...its not faith. He used the demons to tell you it isn't real. He used Abraham to tell you that its broken. It doesn't work. It can't save you. Then he uses Rahab to say it's not just outwardly ineffective, inwardly it's dead. It isn't real faith. It will not save you... because It's dead. It's cannot do anything for you.

So what do we do? Well those of you who have been around here for any length of time know that we make a point all the time to draw your attention not to the things you do for God, but to what God has done for you. Because you hear a sermon like this and you realize...I really don't measure up to God's standards. I don't love people, I think about 3 people mainly: me, myself, and I. And you are right! This is why we try to get you to stop looking at yourself and start looking up to God the father!

Because his love for you, when you really start to see it, will overwhelm you! And if you begin to trust in his love for

you, not only will it fill up your life but it will start to overflow to those around you. If you aren't helpful to those in need, the answer isn't to just start giving to the poor. That would be reactionary guilt. And remember, your works don't make you right with God.

The answer is to abide in the one who met your deepest need. Because giving to the poor doesn't grant you saving faith. Resting in the gospel grants you saving faith and you will be so overwhelmed by God's love that you will start to give! And God's love for you is a well so deep you can always go back to it to draw more. And more will be waiting on you when you do. Struggling to forgive? Meditate & Worship on the forgiveness you have! Don't have compassion on the poor? Maybe you've never understood that YOU were in poverty and God rescued you. The only way forward is deeper into the gospel. Whole time I've been thinking: Gospel isn't just the start of the Christian life. It's what grows the love of God for you!!

- Malala Yousafzai was an 11 year old Pakistani girl who loved school. She went to school like most kids until the Taliban took over her area of Pakistan and banned all girls from receiving an education. Malala still wanted to go to school and at age 11 began blogging anonymously on BBC's website about her persecution and desire for schooling. She and her family were eventually displaced by the war into another country. She quickly received international attention for her advocacy of the right of girls to receive an education. At age 15, with the Taliban presence still there,

she returned to her hometown and continued to go to school and speak out on behalf of young girls. On Oct 9, 2012 Two Taliban men walked onto her school bus, asked for her by name, and then shot her 3 times, once in the head. Miraculously she survived. And after months of recovery, continued her education and continues to this day to advocate for girls to receive education. In 2014 at age 17 she became the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Here's the thing...Malala made it out of Pakistan...got her education...and yet went back. Even though she risked her life to do it, she went back. Because she wanted others to have what she had.

This should be the story of every Christian. We've been rescued. But will we go back and be an advocate for our fellow sinners? Will we seek to bring them into the freedom we have? Will we care for them like the father cares for them? What will your faith bear out?

Homework this week: take a step. Most of us if we evaluate our lives would think...man I fall short. I do. Here's the thing James wants from here. He wants his people to check their hearts and then realign them towards God and his purposes. Then get to the work God has created them for. You need to do the same. Check your heart...do you really believe the gospel? And if so, take a step to love someone else.

One Act of Selfless Love

TAKE A STEP!