

## James 2:20-26

May 10, 2020

No one loves, going to court but everyone loves watching someone else go to court. Or at least that is what it seems, Americans love watching courtroom dramas on TV or at the movies, from Perry Mason, Matlock, 12 Angry Men, To Kill a Mockingbird, Law and Order...the list goes on and on.

We all understand the premise. Evidence is presented. A surprise witness is introduced. A pivotal bit of testimony turns the tide.

The innocent go free.  
The guilty are punished.

At least that is the way it is supposed to go.

You will understand our passage today if you think of it like a courtroom drama. James is putting all of us on trial. Here is the question—Would you be found guilty of being a Christian solely from the evidence of your life?

Could an attorney present a case that you follow Jesus by watching your life? What kind of evidence would he find that you are a Christian?

Does my life prove I follow Jesus?

James has been clear about what is NOT evidence (we saw this last week):

- What you say you believe.
- Words without service/help.
- Theological knowledge.
- Baptisms.
- Raised a hand.
- Walked an aisle.
- Prayed a prayer.

None of those things are admissible in James' court. None of those things are evidence that you are guilty of being a Christian.

What is?

Actions.

PROP: Genuine faith in Christ is proven by works for Christ.

Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus.

“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> 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? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is

dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” James 2:20-26

PRAY

Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus.

James is going to introduce us to two biblical figures who were proven guilty of having genuine faith in Christ during their lifetimes. Though both are from the Old Testament we James reminds us that all genuine faith is rooted in Christ.

Two figures with authentic faith

### 1. Abraham

Abraham is the towering figure of the Old Testament. He is the man who God called to become the father of the nation of Israel. I'll remind you of the story.

God appeared to Abraham who had no children and promised that he would be the father of many nations. Excellent! But his wife, Sarah, was past the age for bearing children. Dang! But no matter, God promised a son.

25 years later—25! The long awaited son, Isaac was born.

When Isaac was still a young boy—the Lord decided to test Abraham. The directed Abraham to take Isaac's life and

offer him as sacrifice on an altar. Abraham obeyed God but God stopped him before he took his son's life.

Abraham proved by his actions that his faith was more than just mere words. Abraham trusted God enough to reckon that God could bring Isaac back from the dead. Here is how James says it,

Vs 22,

**<sup>22</sup>You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup>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.**

In other words, Abraham's faith was proven authentic because he obeyed God. God had previously declared Abraham as righteous for believing his promise—and that proclamation was validated.

Abraham obeyed God at great personal cost, showing his faith to be real.

Then James clarifies what he meant with one of the most confusing statement in all of scripture—

Vs. 24,

**<sup>24</sup>You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

Why is that confusing? It sounds opposite of Paul.

“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” Romans 3:28

They sound like polar opposites. Don't they?

We should not be afraid to ask—what is going on here? Scripture always rewards asking hard questions. It is not an option to just pretend like this is no big deal—no we need to ask—what is going on?

Is James saying something contradicts Paul?

The short answer is no—and here is why.

Remember the point of our passage: Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus. James is telling us what someone's life looks like who has authentic faith. Abraham had authentic faith in God—he was willing to obey at great potential cost.

In other words, James is saying what the saved person's life looks like.

Paul is saying something different: Paul is describing how someone gets saved.

James does not disagree with Paul in the slightest—he knows that faith in Christ alone justifies us before God—

BUT he wants all of us know what genuine faith in Christ looks like. Paul tells us the moment we put genuine faith in Christ we are declared righteous before God. James tells us that you know you have genuine faith if you live a lifestyle of good works for Jesus.

It is like this:

Faith without good works leads to salvation.  
Saving faith also leads to a life of good works.

Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus.

Look at your life. Would you be guilty of following Jesus?  
Make no mistake none of us are going to be called to offer up a child—James is directing us to ask: does my life prove I follow Jesus?

Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus.

Is there evidence that you obey God even when it causes great personal sacrifice?

- Money?
- Reputation?
- Service?
- Evangelism?
- Time?

Abraham was guilty of having genuine faith. James now point us to someone else who was guilty of having genuine faith—

## 2. Rahab

Vs. 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?

Every time Rahab the prostitute.

Not Rahab the bold.

Rahab the lady from Jericho.

Rahab the brave.

But Rahab the prostitute.

She—according to James—is another example of someone who has authentic faith. Let's remind ourselves of her story. If you want to read it for yourself, you can go to Joshua 2. Rahab lived in Jericho with her family. She became convinced that Israel's God was the real God as she heard reports of his deeds.

So when spies came to scout out the walled city, she took them in. She even helped the spies escape and denied knowing about them to the king. In other words, this unlikely woman offered costly service to others. James

says—Rahab like Abraham proved by her actions that she had authentic faith.

Do you realize how different Abraham was from Rahab?

James tells us that they both have authentic faith, but they were wildly different.

Abraham was:

Powerful

Leader

Wealthy

Respected

Rahab was none of those things. She was on the fringes of Gentile society. The Jews wouldn't associate with Gentiles, the Gentiles they wouldn't associate with wouldn't associate with Rahab!

Do you see what this means?

Here we have yet another sighting of grace.

You might think that you could never be a person who has authentic faith. That you are disqualified or have done too many bad things. Not true. Look at Rahab.

Rahab believed in God and acted upon that faith.



All of us fall somewhere on the spectrum between Abraham and Rahab. This is James' way of saying it doesn't matter who you are, you can have authentic faith. Think about it if you are closer to the Rahab side of things.

Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus.

From anyone.

Here again is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the ungodly. That is you and that is me—it is also Rahab. If you are living now like Rahab you can put faith in Jesus and he will save you.

The call then is to trust Jesus wholeheartedly enough to put your faith in action.

That is what Abraham did.

That is what Rahab did.

It is what we must do.

Are you guilty of being a Christian?

Faith in Jesus is proven by works for Jesus.

What story does your life say?

Two categories—

Those with empty faith—not really believers.

Those convicted, but with genuine faith.