

Sermon: James: Inside / Out: True Faith

IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group

1. Have you ever flown 'stand-by'? How did that work out for you?
2. When have you hoped for something to happen?
How did you respond when it did happen?
How did you respond when it did not happen?

UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God

1. How do Ephesians 2:8-10, Titus 3:4-8 and 1 John 5:11-13 clarify how faith begins?
What is important to understand from the instructions of these authors?
Why are these foundational to the life of faith?
2. Read the passage (James 2:14-20). What kinds of faith is James criticizing?
Why? Why are they dangerous?
3. Review Pastor Henry's description of the nature of 'living' faith. (Check the summary) How do the verses (2:14-20) underscore these points?
4. What is noteworthy about the fact that the 'demons believe... and shudder'? (2:19) What do they believe? Why are they terror-struck?
What was James' intent in telling about them?
4. Quickly review the stories of Abraham (Genesis 15:6; 22:14; Heb 11:11-12) and Rahab (Joshua 2:21; 6:22 – 25; Heb 11:31)
What is significant about James' use of these two OT individuals to explain 'real' faith?

OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community

1. When have you seen situations of 'real faith'? Who has been an example to you?
2. What indicators of 'real' faith is God looking for? (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 12:29-31; Gal 5:22, 23)
Which of the aspects of 'real living faith' do you find the most difficult to live out?
Why?
3. Is there a need for which God is nudging you? How can you demonstrate your 'real faith' this week?

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Titus 3:4-8

⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

James 2:14-26

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,"^[a] and he was called God's friend. ²⁴You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. ²⁵In 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? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

1 John 5:11-13

¹¹And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹²Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. ¹³I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Sermon Study Summary

The questions we address today are: what is the nature of true faith in Jesus Christ? What kind of faith saves us? How can we know if our faith is real or counterfeit? What is the difference between true faith and false faith?

Pastor Henry began with a story of taking a group on a pilgrimage to Israel. Some who also worked for the airline got a cheaper rate by going stand-by. They were anxious—pacing and praying—until they got their boarding passes, while those who had pre-arranged tickets were relaxed and secure.

This story illustrates the significant difference between **KNOWING** something is true vs **HOPING** it's true. We don't have to live with the anxiety of wondering if we're going to heaven. 1 John 5:11-13 indicates we **CAN KNOW** we have eternal life. The key to this assurance is putting our faith in Jesus.

James does not ask, "How are we saved?" but "What is true/living faith?" Pastor Henry discussed four distinctions.

- 1. It is more than KNOWING the right things.** (v. 14). We can know all about God without **KNOWING** God. We can know theology, the Bible, and history about faith. But this intellectualization is a head faith. But if this is all, our hearts haven't been changed/translated into loving God and others in practical ways.
- 2. It is more than FEELING the right things.** (v. 15-17). We can be emotionally involved when we hear that someone needs great care, or a ministry needs volunteers. But we may never act on it, instead hoping someone else will do it. We can't meet the needs of everyone, but we should have a heart to help those in dire need of food and clothing when/where we can and seek additional support where necessary. We give; we engage in missions.
- 3. It is more than just BELIEVING in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible.** (v.19). 90% of Canadians believe in God. 80% believe Jesus is the Son of God. But note: 100% of demons believe in God. And they shudder. (No demons are atheists. They know the Bible better than you. They know it's true. Pride led them to where they are—and pride keeps them there.) If you're picking and choosing what to apply to your life, it's a dead faith (Matthew 7:21).
- 4. It is more than DOING the right things.** (v.18). This is substituting a vital relationship with Jesus with good deeds. (Matt 7:22-23). Titus 3:5-8 indicates that good works are not the means of attaining salvation; instead, God saved us because of His mercy. We are not saved **BY** our works, but saved to **DO** good works.

What, then, is true faith? Ephesians 2:8-10 and Romans 1:17 say we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, through Christ alone. All have sinned and fall short of glory of God (Romans 3:23). Christ died in our place, taking our punishment. There is nothing we can do but put our faith in finished work of Christ. We are made righteous in the sight of God and set free to live a life He intends. James is saying that faith in Christ saves us, but our works **SHOW** that our faith is real.

In verses 21-23, James uses two incidents in the life of Abraham to illustrate what true faith looks like. In Genesis 15, God promised that through him and his descendants the whole world would be blessed. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness (Romans 4:20-22). He knew the promise of a son was impossible at such an advanced age for Sarah and himself, but he trusted God. Secondly, God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22), and Abraham was prepared to do it. Here, he demonstrated that his faith was real, genuine.

James says that there is a faith that is alive and there is a faith that is dead. In verse 26, he gives a powerful analogy of a dead body—there's no warmth, breath, movement, colour. But the opposite occurs with life—warmth, breath, movement, colour.

What, then, are evidences of true/alive faith? The Bible is full of principles. Here are two:

- 1. Your life will increasingly reflect the character of Christ through love, joy, peace, etc.** (Galatians 5:22-23)
- 2. You will love God and others, as in the first two commandments** (Mark 12:29-31). You will spend time alone with God, being conscious of Him all day long, asking for His guidance, listening for His promptings, being obedient. (For example, you will follow Him in public baptism) Matthew 28:19-20. All this will take courage. As an example, Rahab had a small understanding of God. Yet she risked her life in obeying (v.25). What God calls us to do will vary from person to person, and from day to day. It's important that we're tuned to His voice, following through on His promptings. You will love others (1 John 3:14,17; 4:20). God is looking for progress, not perfection. He examines our hearts for its direction of loving Himself and others.

In conclusion, it's possible to miss the main thing. If we say, "OK, give me a list of things to do to be a good Christian, so I can get to heaven," this misses the whole point. James doesn't give a list of such requirements. This would be like a groom asking his bride what the minimum requirements of his faithfulness would be to still make her happy. No, Jesus invites us into the closest relationship with Him. Use 1 Corinthians 13 to examine yourself to see if you're in the faith. Do you need to accept Jesus? Are you living a life of partial surrender? Or are you cultivating a true relationship with Jesus? Jump in and take a new step of faith. Trust him with your life. Through Him you'll experience all He has for you.