

## James 2:21-26

In today's text we contrast living faith, compared to dead faith, which was described in vs. 14-20. Vs. 24 has been a stumbling block for some at times. Out of context, by itself, it seems that faith alone isn't good enough for salvation. A faith that doesn't produce works of righteousness is a dead faith, and that's the kind of faith James is referring to. James was not contradicting the doctrine of salvation by faith. He is not dealing with the means of salvation but the outcome.

**N1** - Because fallen man is morally and spiritually bankrupt, with no redeeming merit before God, nothing he can possibly do in himself and by his own power can make him right and acceptable before the Lord. It is for this reason that salvation has only been possible through the gracious grace of our Lord.

**N2** - It is not in the OT men were saved through the law and in the NT saved through faith, it's always been that God requires nothing of them for salvation except faith in him. The covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15:6 defines this *"And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness."* The word accounted has a meaning of *"imputing"* and *"weaving or fabricating."*

**N3** - Vs. 21 *"was not Abraham our father justified by works?"* To some there seems to be a contradiction in the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Dr. R.C. Sproul says it best to me *"Justification by faith pertains to a person's standing before God, justification by works that James speaks of in this verse pertains to a person's standing before other men."*

**N4** - Let's explore the context with other Scriptures. Cf. Galatians 6:6-9; Romans 4:13-24, Abraham was justified by works in reference to his offering of Isaac, Cf. Genesis 22:1-12. James here is teaching that Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac vindicates his faith before men. Thus Ephesians 2:10 expresses this work from a saving faith, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

- The 15th century pastor of the church at Geneva, John Calvin said, *"Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone."*
- Abraham was not a perfect man either. After many years had passed without Sarah having a child, which God had promised, he took matters into his own hands. His wavering trust in the Lord led him to commit adultery. In turn, that led to the creation of the Arab people which have essentially been at war with the Jewish people since.
- He also lied about Sarah being his sister, not once but twice.

**N5** - Works complete the saving faith. Salvation does not require faith plus works, but that works are an outgrowth of faith. Again, let's be reminded of Matthew 7:17-19, *"So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can*

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a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." Abraham's devotion and trust in God to sacrifice his son, which I assume he believed God would raise his son from the dead, expressed his "justified by works" which was an expression of his faith in God. Hebrews 11:13 expresses this faith in the OT saints "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth."

**N6** - Let's look at Rahab the other one mentioned in the text. Let's see the contrast. She was a gentile and a prostitute. Abraham was a moral man, she was an immoral woman. He was a noble Chaldean, she was a degraded Canaanite. He was a great leader, she was a common citizen. He was at the top of the social-economic order, she was at the bottom. Yet, Rahab is listed along with Abraham in the great gallery of the faithful (Hebrews 11) and was even in the human lineage of Jesus, being the great-grandmother of David.

- Her story is in Joshua 2, cf. Joshua 2:9-12
- Rahab not only acknowledged the Lord, but obviously trusted in him
- The Lord accepted her protection of the spies as an act of obedience to him
- Her outward works was a result of her faith of what she had heard
- Like Abraham, she was not perfect. Her profession was despicable
- She had been born and raised in a debauched pagan society that God was about to destroy
- In this society all sorts of gross sin were the norm

When the opportunity to demonstrate her trust in the Lord, she placed her life on the line. If her actions had been discovered she would have been executed. In His boundless grace, God accepted her trust in Him and her service to Him.

**N7** - In the same vortex that James is speaking of here in our text, it reveals deceitful faith or dead faith, reveals itself in the lack of an outward expression of works. This is the concluding point of James' argument in vs. 26 "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."