

# Sermon Notes

## FAITH THAT SAVES

*James 2:21-26*

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### Introduction

- Galatians 5:6—“*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.*”
- Agape: love that does not spring from the attractiveness of the object of love, or from mutual and common interests, but rather from the recognition of the need of the other person for love.
- It is an act of the will which does not come naturally to us.
- It involves effort, personal exertion and sacrifices.

### Three marks of saving faith

1. It is effectual godward (verses 21 to 23).
  - Compare with John 8:39: “*If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did.*”
  - Abraham is a perfect example of one who believed and did what God commanded.
  - Saving faith is like Abraham’s faith.
  - It is effective towards God and our relationship with Him.
  - Romans 4:2-5—“*For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.*”
  - Contradiction with Paul? Salvation is by faith alone, not plus work.
    - i) From context: The main subject of James is about faith that saves, not works because works cannot justify.

- Two different meanings of “justification” (from John Calvin): (1) the gratuitous imputation of righteousness before the tribunal of God (Paul definition); (2) the manifestation of righteousness by the conduct, and that before man (James definition).
  - The *key question*: how do we know when James uses the word “justify,” he is not referring to the “declaration of righteousness” by God due to Abraham’s inherent righteousness or his own good works?
  - Paul quoted from Genesis 15:5-6, “*And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*”
  - Paul refers to Abraham believing God’s word about a promised seed and not from he doing anything that God says.
  - Calvin notes that Abraham had become a follower of God in Genesis 12.
  - But “he did not have sufficient merit of works to acquire righteousness before God” (Calvin).
  - Abraham needed to be a believer: to just believe God’s word about a promised seed.
  - James (obviously familiar with Genesis 15) purposely quotes from Genesis 22:12, “*He [i.e., God] said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’*”
  - The work of Abraham resulted from his justification which came by faith about 30 years earlier (in Gen. 15). Abraham was not being saved or justified again at this time. Rather he was manifesting evidence of his salvation.
  - The purpose of James is not about how God justifies us, but to argue about faith that saves which must be accompanied by works.
  - Hence, the word ‘justify’ used by James here must mean the manifestation of righteousness by the conduct.
- ii) It is also not about the second justification (after works are produced) scheme.
- James concludes, “*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.*”

- The Scripture that was fulfilled is the one quoted by Paul in Genesis 15.
- So, the offering up of Isaac is fulfilling the declaration of righteousness to Abraham made by God 30 years before.
- It is not a new or second justification declaration made by God when Abraham's inherent righteousness was perfected or completed. It is Abraham's faith which was completed after it is attested by his works.

iii) It is not faith *plus* work (see verse 22).

- The Greek word translated "*active along*" in the ESV is "*suneergei*" (compare English word, *synergy* = to work together or to co-operate to produce the combined effect)
- Some commentators put works on the same level as faith and, therefore, conclude that justification is by faith plus work.
- This means that faith and works are independent entities; works are not the fruits of true faith, and faith is mere assent or profession.
- According to James, the mere profession of faith is demon faith.

- *Conclusion:* the works of Abraham are required by God, not as a separate entity from his faith to produce combined effect of Abraham's salvation, but to confirm his faith.
- Why is that necessary?
- As far as God was concerned, Abraham was known to be a righteous man before he ever did anything to demonstrate his righteousness before men (compare with the thief crucified with Jesus).
- But the Bible lets us into the mind of God by portraying God as if he was human so that we may appreciate truly the meaning and significance of a thing.
- So if God were human, he would register Abram's profession of faith declare him righteous (Gen. 15), and then he would wait and ask, will there be results—or to use James' word, works?
- For us who are still living after professing our faith: Are we God's friends? Or does God think we are living thieves?

2. It is effectual manward. It reaches out in costly compassion to God's people at risk (verse 25).
  - Why Rahab in contrast with Abraham? To show that there is no favouritism in God; that the grace of God makes no distinction. No one is good enough to stand before the Lord. Both the good and the evil ones are saved exactly the same way, by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary.
  - There was great danger in what Rahab was doing.
  - If our faith is true, it will be seen in giving and in other more direct exercises in personal involvement, in meeting needs even when it means risking our lives, the same as Rahab.
  
3. It is a living faith (verse 26).
  - Analogy between body and faith.
  - God never created a body without a spirit, so the mere profession of faith cannot be an act of God. It is an act of man and as such it cannot be a saving act.
  - A body must have the life-giving soul to be alive, so a real saving faith in Jesus Christ must produce yearning and ability to perform activity of 'works.'
  - Apostle Peter: *"For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 1:5-8)
  - According to Peter, a living faith is a faith that progresses from virtues to knowledge to self-control to steadfastness to godliness to brotherly affection to love.
  - We, rightly so, are very concerned when we talk about works and performance so as not to divert people's attention from the centrality of Christ to self, but look around us what has become so called people of God?
  - But Peter is not just exhorting us to be rushing ourselves into activity. He exhorts us to strive to become like Christ.
  - Christians who are like Christ will draw people.
  - We read of Christ, *"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him"* (Lk 15:1).

- That is the difference between the effectiveness of the true living faith of a Christian and carnal busy-ness.

## **Conclusion.**

- What kind of works vindicates true salvation?
- Supremely committed to God that we would sacrifice our hopes and dreams and ambitions and risk our own life to be true to our faith.
- Jesus put it this way, “*And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*” (Mat 10:38,39).
- It is certainly hard work and does not come naturally just because we have been justified. But Apostle Paul says, “*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Gal 2:20); the life we live now should not be our struggle alone but Christ’s if we live by faith in Christ.
- How then will our lives, who boast so much of our wonderful Reformed faith and doctrine, end? Will we be known as living thieves or living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God?