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James 2:14-26

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We're going to spend the next few weeks looking at the book of James.

Because of Luther's influence, the book of James has been relegated...

Dropped down to the bottom of the list of important Bible books.

So we're going to reclaim the teaching of James these next few weeks.

As a disclaimer:

We will not be starting from a point of suspicion...

We believe that the book of James is inspired by God just as the book of Romans and Galatians.

We believe that it speaks to us the story of Christ's love and our response to that love.

But this week we will be looking specifically at faith and works...

Let's turn in our Bibles to James 2:14-26.

Page 1,882 in your pew Bibles.

People of God, here now the Word of the Lord.

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If 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? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But 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. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In 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? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

The Word of the Lord (**Thanks be to God**).

For the last 5 weeks we've been talking about the Reformation...

The 5 Solas that came out of the Reformation:

We have salvation by **grace alone** through **faith alone**...

And the object of our faith is **Christ alone**.

This is revealed to us in our ultimate authority: **Scripture alone**.

And all the credit goes to God...

Glory to God alone.

If we were to sum up the last 5 weeks in one statement it would be:

God does it all through Christ.

If you missed any the last 5 sermons there's your recap:

God does it all through Christ.

Martin Luther played a major role in sparking the Reformation.

We recognize the day he nailed the 95 theses to the church doors,

And we celebrate it as Reformation day.

He helped bring the church back to its proper foundation on Christ.

Justification comes by Christ apart from our help...

Justification through faith alone.

In the Reformed tradition we don't venerate certain individuals as saints...

But if we did, St. Martin would be one of them.

We recognize his contributions and hold his work in high esteem.

But, like the rest of us, Martin Luther was not perfect.

He made mistakes.

Some of his influence on the church was not positive.

Because of his personal experience with the book of Romans...

And his intimate relationship with the words of the Apostle Paul...

Luther had a distain for anything that smelled of works-based righteousness.

He opposed anything that took credit away from God in salvation.

As some of us may be familiar, this is *he* saw the book of James...

“The epistle of straw” as he called it.

Here’s his conclusion on the book of James that he wrote in 1522:

“In sum: [James] wished to guard against those who depended on faith without going on to works, but he had neither the spirit nor the thought nor the eloquence equal to the task. He does violence to Scripture, and so contradicts Paul and all Scripture. He tries to accomplish by emphasizing law what the apostles bring about by attracting men to love. I therefore refuse him a place among the writers of the true canon of my Bible, but I would not prevent anyone placing him or raising him where he likes, for the epistle contains many excellent passages.”

One of the verses in question was James 2:24:

“You see that a person is justified by what he does and *not* by faith alone.”

Not by faith alone.

A direct contradiction to what we’ve been saying these past 5 weeks...

Justification *through faith alone*.

Let’s first get over this hurdle...

This apparent contradiction between Paul and James.

Are we justified by grace alone through faith alone as we learned from Paul’s writings?

What we’ve been teaching these last 5 weeks...

Or are we justified by what we do as it apparently says in James 2:24?

Is the Bible telling us 2 different ways to be saved?

The short answer is “No”...

Paul and James are not addressing the same issue.

As with any passage we study, the surrounding context is important.

If we take off our blinders that help us focus on our specific passage,

And look at the broader picture of James...

It helps us to understand what James is saying.

In chapter 1 of James he is laying out a summary of his teaching.

He says in 1:21 to “humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

Receive the implanted word, which has the power to save you.

This is *God's* Word...*God's* work that saves.

So this is James' understanding of salvation as it is Paul's.

Saved by God's implanted word.

James and Paul agree on this point.

And they agree on works.

Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 5:6:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. *The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*”

This is what has value:

“Faith expressing itself through love.”

James is not asking the question, “How is one saved?”

But, “Now that one is saved, how do you act?”

This is what James is getting at in his letter.

“Don't just be listeners of the Word...

Be doers of the Word!”

“You *believe* in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ (2:1) then *act* like it.”

“Let your actions be consistent with your faith.”

We don't know the situation that James was speaking into.

We don't know the specific problems the Christians were facing at the time...

But we can gather that there was a separation between faith and works.

James is making a distinction between 2 kinds of faith.

An authentic faith...

And a useless or empty faith...

The useless faith is the faith that does not express itself in actions of love.

It is a *dead* faith.

It is a faith that passes someone on the street...

Someone shivering and huddled up in the corner outside of a building...

With stained holey pants and a torn jacket...

They have a sign propped up against their frozen body that says "Anything Helps."

This "faith" walks by pretending not to see the cold body slumped in the corner...

Sure there's guilt in that instant you look away and walk by...

But the guilt goes away as quickly as you walk past.

This "faith" knows the right thing to believe and say:

You are very good with your mind and your confession...

You believe that there is one God, the Father Almighty...

Creator of heaven and earth...

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord...

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.

This "faith" knows what to believe.

It's intellectually sound.

But isn't this the faith of demons?

"Even the demons believe this..." James says.

Demons who are opposed to God.

Demons who attack God's people.

Demons who lure God's people away from God.

Even demons know the *Shema*:

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one" (Deut 6:4).

The demons have this kind of faith.

Does this sound like your faith?

Does this describe your useless faith?

Does this sound like the faith given to us by our Lord?

“You foolish person!” (2:20)

“You empty person!”

“Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless?”

“Are we willing to see that faith and deeds go together?”

God joins faith and action...

Faith and work.

The same God who gifted us with faith in Christ...

Is the one who empowers our good works.

In theological jargon we're talking about justification and sanctification.

Justification says, I am made right with God by Christ.

My sins are forgiven...

In God's eyes I have the righteousness of Christ now.

Sanctification says, I am becoming more like Christ.

My life is reflecting someone who is right with God.

We usually think of justification as *God's* work, and sanctification as *our* work—

God does the work of forgiving sins, and now *we* do the work of living good lives.

God's work for us, and then our work for God.

But we need to correct this thought.

God is always the giver.

God is the giver in justification and God is the giver in sanctification.

In justification God declares “you are righteous.”

In sanctification God declares “you are holy.”

God says, “I have set you apart for a specific purpose.”

“In Christ, you have been made holy.”

You *are* holy...so *be* holy.

And this is where we come in...

God justifies us and makes us holy...

And now he calls us to live holy lives.

“We *are* holy; therefore, we are *to be* holy.” (Michael Horton)

James is calling us to live out our identity as God’s holy people.

As we read in our passage, it’s possible to grieve the Holy Spirit’s work of progressive sanctification...

This ongoing work of living out our identity.

It’s a very real possibility for us to separate faith and works.

While we’ve been made holy by God, we daily resist his work.

Because of our sin we resist the Spirit’s work to progressively form us into Christ’s image.

When things get uncomfortable or painful or ask too much of us we tend to bail out.

As God is forming us as clay in his hands, we tend to jump off of the potter’s wheel...

Away from his shaping and forming.

We claim to have faith but our deeds don’t always reflect it.

We separate our faith and our deeds.

In our passage James encourages the deed of hospitality...

He recalls the story of Rahab and the spies.

She is the one who hid the spies of Israel scoping out the Promised Land.

Rahab did not separate faith and works.

She showed her faith through her works.

In Joshua Rahab declares that the “Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.” (Joshua 2:11)

This is her profession of faith.

But it doesn’t end with mere words...

Rahab follows up faith with action.

She hides the spies and misdirects the king looking for the spies.

Rahab puts her words into action by saving the spies and participating in God's plan for Israel.

She offered them hospitality...

She took them in...

And now she is remembered in the words of Holy Scripture as one who had faith (Heb 11) *and* works (James).

This woman is offered as an example of faith and works joined together by God.

As those who are united to Christ in his death and resurrection...

We are called to consistency.

We believe in all that is said about Christ in the Scriptures...

But is this the way we live?

Are our actions consistent with our identity?

As God's beloved we are called to hospitality.

What do you think of when I say hospitality?

I bet some of us think of saying hello to newcomers in church.

Some of us think of inviting people over for dinner.

Searching hospitality on Google images brings up pictures of waiters and waitresses...

Nice hotels and friendly faces...

Maybe this is what we think of when we hear the word hospitality...

These have something to do with hospitality but let's challenge ourselves this morning.

As Christ's followers we are called to Christ-like hospitality.

Listen to what Henri Nouwen (a Dutch, Catholic Priest) says about hospitality...

I think he gets the biblical image of hospitality right.

"In our world full of strangers, estranged from their own past, culture and country, from their neighbors, friends and family, from their deepest self and their God, we witness a painful search for a hospitable place where life can be lived without fear and where community can be found. Although many...strangers in this world become easily the victim of a fearful hostility, it is possible for men and women and **obligatory for Christians** to offer an open and hospitable space where strangers can cast off their strangeness and become our fellow human beings." (Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*)

In a biblical view of hospitality enemies become guests and strangers become friends.

In a world of fear and anxiety...

Where our tendency is to lock our door and be suspicious of people who don't look like us...

We are called to hospitality.

Instead of ambivalence, we are called to reach out to strangers and enemies alike.

This is James' encouragement for us as disciples of Christ.

I don't know if you know this or not but there was a family of Hutterites in our church last month. (PICTURE)

This is Lawrence, Susie, Lana, and Julia...

They're from Standard Colony outside of Calgary.

From a young age Lana has had tumors in her face.

Fifteen years ago Lana started a series of surgeries at Detroit Children's Hospital in MI.

This meant that Lana and her dad Lawrence flew to Detroit a few times a year.

My dad is a construction worker and was on a remodel job of the Children's Hospital.

Hopefully you had a chance to meet him when they were here in October.

To my dad there is no such thing as a stranger.

Growing up it was annoying...

But now I see it as a prime example of hospitality.

He struck up a conversation with Lawrence 15 years ago when Lawrence was in the hospital waiting for Lana in surgery.

My dad, a Roman Catholic construction worker, making conversation with this oddly dressed Hutterite man.

And my dad isn't someone who talks about his faith often.

He lives it.

He and Lawrence became friends.

They shared meals together.

The next time that Lawrence and Lana were in town for surgery my dad offered our place for them to stay.

They took him up on the offer.

This went on for years.

Eventually Lawrence brought Susie, his wife.

They cooked meals together at my home...

On one visit my parents even invited them to share in the family Yahtzee game.

I wasn't there for it but my parents had Susie and Lana up around the table dancing after someone rolled a Yahtzee.

15 years of friendship with this family...

Visits, meals, and phone calls in between.

I can't say that my parents have a lot in common with them...

Hutterites from Calgary—

Different clothes, different culture and customs, different expression of faith—

But they're no longer strangers.

Lawrence, Susie, Lana, and Julia drove up 3.5 hours to see my parents for about 2.5 hours.

They returned the hospitality and welcomed my parents to Alberta.

They welcomed *us* to Alberta.

With Jam, and sweets, and hand-knit slippers...

Such a beautiful model of Christian hospitality.

Our confession says that it is “impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being...”
(Belgic Conf. Art 24)

God is working through his Spirit to produce good deeds through you.

What does that look like in your life?

Where are you being called to join deeds to the faith you've been given?

Where are you being invited to join in God's work in this world?

Join me in prayer.