

Faith and Works

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to spend a bit of time looking primarily at these verses but through this chapter of James and as has already been mentioned as we're looking at this book and chapters such as this we think about the book of James in general James says many things there is lots in the chapters that he writes So we won't cover every verse, but I want to think primarily tonight about The flow of the chapter but kind of turn it back to front so I want to look at a couple of things and One is the if you like the theological assertion that James makes he brings out a particular point about our salvation and that is that faith inevitably produces works That's something that he says very clearly in this chapter Then what I want to do is come back to the first half of the chapter and see how that's evidenced So we see an example of that that James brings out particularly relevant to his own situation in the first half of the chapter

Okay, so that's that's broadly speaking what I want to do tonight Now this whole idea of faith and works is very central to our studies or our series on James Somebody asked me this week. What's the title for the sermon?

I hadn't thought of one so I thought I could be faith and works and then I was reminded well That's actually the title of our whole series faith works. So I thought well, like good at least I'm on the right lines, but that whole link between faith and what it produces is Essential to what James is trying to say So let's just hold that up just for this Starting section and recognize that this is a key component of what James is trying to say and if we're just going to see How this links into the first chapter we're starting chapter 2 today But you can see how at the end of chapter 1 James has already already touched on many different Aspects of what it means to be a Christian, but he says these words at the end of chapter 1 He's addressing what he would term true religion Now we sometimes shy away from the word religion, but James uses it to describe the Christian life

And here's what he says in verse 26 if anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue He but deceives his heart this person's religion is worthless So he touches on the tongue or the speech that comes up time and again in this book Then he goes on to say religion that is pure and undefiled before God The father is this to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself Unstained from the world you see how practical that is The James is already started to touch on some very tangible aspects of what The people he's addressing and what your life should look like if your faith is genuine So when we're following really that train of thought into chapter 2 So if I was to say that the first Point that I want to look at again going into the second half of the chapter is this one of faith and works That if you if you were here last week and if you remember something that Corey picked up on that's been a problem for some people

So Corey last week mentioned the fact that some people and even some Historically high-profile theological people have said well James has got this real emphasis on works I'm not so sure how that fits in that seems to contradict other parts of the New Testament particularly Maybe particularly what the apostle Paul writes because the apostle Paul is obviously so clearly focused on the fact that we are saved by faith in Jesus by grace not by works So to start saying immediately James's focus is on faith and works seems to provoke a degree of tension So let's just let's just work through that just for a few minutes as we're getting into this chapter Just to turn to something that Paul says just for a minute in the book of Ephesians I want to just bring together a couple of lines from Paul and some of what James says here to show that there's no tension and Then actually to give us a right perspective on what James is saying about faith and about works

[4 : 30] So Paul says in the book of Ephesians Let me read a verse from chapter 2 Paul says this for by grace you've been saved through faith. That's pretty clear isn't it?

So your understanding of yourself as a Christian Has to be that it's not of yourself. You didn't engineer your salvation You're not going to go out I hope this week and if you get the opportunity to

share your faith with any of your friends say to them, you know what?

If you try really hard for the rest of your life Then based on that God might admit you into his family That's not what we believe We believe in the salvation of God his grace Praise the Lord for that fact But this is what James says also in Chapter one of James We read in verse 18 and again this was brought out last week or the week before He said James says this speaking about God of his own will He brought us forth by the word of truth. Can you see what James is saying there?

We read that again of his own will he brought us forth. He caused this to happen to us He he called us he chose us. He brought us to faith He's saying the same is what Paul is saying and so there's no tension and so this great truth James also Holds out to us this great assurance that because of the goodness of God and the work of God We have salvation But then just to go back to To go a few verses on rather than James James also says Our salvation is of God, but he brings out this emphasis as I've said on Works and what that means what that looks like in our lives So if I was to go into James chapter 2 a bit further down to verse 21 He speaks about Abraham and the way that Abraham's faith Produced a change in his life. So he says this was not Abraham our father Justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar You see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed by his works It doesn't mean that his faith was in some way deficient But that as he had faith and the result of that was the way that he lived the outworking of his faith With these works these these evidences of his faith what he did Even to the extent of obeying God as he called him To travel as he called him To do what he did with his son. So you see what he's saying there is that this great Faith that Abraham had resulted in a changed life in the way that he lived his life it evidenced itself But if I was to go back to Paul and to that verse that I read just a minute ago in Ephesians We find the same thing So let me go back to Ephesians chapter 2 Paul has just said by grace you've been saved through faith, but then he goes on and says this [7 : 48] It's not your own doing. It's the gift of God not as a result of works so that no one may boast First For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works Which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them So he's absolutely clear that the faith that we have this great gift of God Should result in such a degree of praise to God and thankfulness to God that it changes our lives He has prepared beforehand these good works that we may do which are an evidence of our faith Faith in him saving faith Changes the way that we live It doesn't leave us Unchanged in other words So there should be a difference in our lives from the time where we come to recognize Jesus as Lord and as Savior and as we go on from that point Walking after our Savior Jesus every day seeking to follow him being made more like our Savior Jesus

So it means just to rephrase it again that we can't say well I became a Christian once and it didn't make any difference to me We've been saved by grace and That makes a profound impact on who we are and should evidence itself in the way that we live So this is the point that James is really bringing out here in this second half of the chapter He wants to explain that the evidence of Of God's work in our lives is a change life now Why is that so important?

What why does that matter? Why should that matter to you as you consider your life and the way that you live the way that you interact with other people? Christians in this fellowship and all your friends who aren't Christians and your colleagues and everybody else Why does it make a difference that the way that you live should?

evidence a Changed heart well look at what James says At the start of the second half of the chapter, so I'm gonna go now to verse 14 James chapter 2 verse 14 Look how he introduces this section. He says what good is it my brothers if someone says he has faith But doesn't have works see that phrase what good is it?

What he's trying to say is well he's speaking to people who maybe say well, I'm a believer and it makes absolutely no difference There's absolutely no evidence That God is it working their lives at all in other words. There's a distinct coldness about them and People who see them going about their daily business in the marketplace if you like would never have known They would never have known they would never have put that person alongside that beautiful savior Jesus He's saying what what good is it?

[10 : 40] That you just say you have all this this faith. Maybe they claim also great understanding comprehension intellectually But it doesn't make one bit of difference to their lives. What good is it you see?

Good should result from the change in our hearts as a result of this change. We're saved wonderfully into the family of God and saved so that we may Bring the light of Christ so that we may

be his body amongst the darkness of the world Evidence in his light being a blessing Particularly to those as we'll come on and see in just a minute Who are needy who are alienated?

James wants the people he's writing to to have a very clear sense that they are to make a difference That they are to be a blessing to those amongst who They live think think about it this way when Jesus walked the earth Things were different amongst those whom he mixed So Jesus came as the light of the world came Jesus came as the one and the one only who was perfect Jesus came as the great sacrifice, but Jesus came also an Evidence to his power and his glory by doing good by caring for those who were needy for Caring for the sick for being alongside those who had nobody and who everybody else ignored Jesus was light He is the light and he was the light in a very dark place So therefore if we are those who bear his name Shouldn't we also be those

Who reflect him and who live to be a blessing to others So just that point just to bring that out This is the kind of this is the theological point that James is making But I hope you see immediately that what it does is it has very practical implications and this then I want to take back to the first half of the chapter and See how he works it out in their own particular local context the book of James is hugely practical in many different ways So if you like these kinds of issues come up time and again He's often talking about how people should live how they should evidence their faith But in this particular chapter, let's just see what he says so Haven't seen this particular distinction Second second main division of the chapter the second point is the outworking of that Come with me back to the start of chapter one then And the outworking that he wants to talk about the evidence of this faith the works that he specifically wants to draw people's attention to in this chapter

Is what he calls partiality? favoritism favoritism It was relevant then and it's relevant now, so what does he have to say about it? Well First one my brother's shown no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory So he then goes on to describe what he's talking about He's describes a meeting now. We don't get a lot of information about exactly what type of meeting he's describing He doesn't necessarily tell us whether or not the people the two people who he describes here are believers or visitors Whether they're familiar or unfamiliar with the setup But there's a meeting in church circles The church family are present and two men come in so he says if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes in And a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in And as he puts it you pay attention to the one and you ignore the other

[14 : 31] He says you're showing partiality You've immediately identified a couple of people who just walked into the room and you said that person I like the look of that person. I Don't like the look of that person or I never even noticed them Because I was so attracted to this person He says you're showing favoritism and what he wants to do in the next few verses is say That's that's almost anomalous. I just there's no place for that in the church One evidence of a changed heart is that that shouldn't happen Rather there should be a regard for both equally in their need so Few things to say about this First is to think immediately James is describing a particular situation. You obviously wanted to highlight in the people in his who he was writing to but please don't think this Doesn't apply you may think oh well, that's a really obvious example We know that if somebody comes in maybe off the street and we would describe it

Well, we kind of know nowadays that we should welcome them. We should make sure they have a seat We wouldn't be so crass as to not give them a seat Well, that's the example James uses but just think for a minute about how favoritism works How does it how does it manifest itself in your thinking in my thinking?

What happens when we view different groups of people here? And in your work, whatever It's it's much it has the potential to be much more subtle than that doesn't it all kinds of things go on in the dynamics between human beings for good and for bad Favoritism can be a really subtle one so think about preference think about the people say that you know in St.

Columbus here. Maybe you're just getting to know people Maybe you find yourself always or Often making value judgments about different people because you're new or maybe you've been here for ten years and you find yourself Assessing new people maybe you find that's happening in your workplace You're ranking yourself according to how well you're performing Or how well other people aren't performing and in these kinds of situations When we add in our character and the way we're made as opposed to the way other people are made All kinds of dynamics happen and there's all kinds of space for damaging Thoughts to come in Do you consider less people who come into this fellowship who have less charisma than you would like?

Maybe there's somebody in your particular friendship group who has loads of charisma Do they get all your attention? Maybe there is just something about somebody's popularity Maybe you know some people whose theology as far as you're concerned isn't quite up to scratch You much rather talk to the people who've got all the answers There's all kinds of ways in which favoritism can be at work in our hearts all the time So we have to consider this and see how it can be relevant to us Just to bring out a few things that James says in this passage first is this We should consider this issue as relevant but we should also consider it as very relevant because it matters very much to God In this first section, let me just go down to verse 9 come with me down to verse 9 Where James says this if you show partiality You are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors [18 : 05] So those are very clear words, aren't they if you show partiality you're committing sin Now look at what he goes on to say and just for just a verse or two after this In verse 10 he says whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it For he who said don't commit adultery also said don't murder If you don't commit adultery but do murder you've become a transgressor of the law Why does he say this?

Why does he go from talking about partiality to kind of expanding it and bringing out these big sins these serious sins and explaining it to the people who are in the process of committing sin serious sins and explaining that you have to make sure that Even in one part of the law if you've not been able to fulfill that well What he's doing is he's saying don't just think there's something like partiality or favoritism is just a kind of a character flaw It's not really that It's not really that important or God doesn't see it as that important He wants you to see it as very significant actually and And think again about the dynamics of what we're talking about. He's describing this is happening Within a group of people who call themselves the family of God He's saying partiality is an ugly thing and it's a sin And he's saying don't think of it as something that's just a little bit bad a bit unpleasant about yourself

Or make sure that you don't just over overlook it completely sometimes. We don't even think about things like this He highlights it very strongly actually he says it really matters to God The reason for this is rooted in a couple of verses before if we go back to verse 5 Look at what he says about the way that God deals with people Partiality is all about humans ranking other humans What does he say in verse 5 less than my beloved brothers has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in the faith and heirs of the kingdom so the poor are Heirs of the kingdom this this wonderful kingdom of God the kingdom of heaven which is God's people Because of his grace With all these undeserving people equally undeserving How anomalous that it should have some people who think they're better than others or folk who ignore other people or who just look down On other people just shouldn't be the case So he's very clear that this matters very much to God because it's rooted in the way that he deals with people It's rooted in the way that he deals with people if you like God's kingdom turns things upside down The kingdoms that we are a part of our social circles our work circles Maybe sometimes the kingdoms that we would build for ourselves Are full of injustices they're full of our biases and our preferences and the nasty ways in which we can think about and treat people But God's kingdom is rooted in mercy and he chooses the poor and the insignificant and this is said in many different ways and Parts of the Bible he chooses those who would seem to be nobody's and he exalts them as his sons and daughters You can start to see how anomalous it should be how it just doesn't make sense for there to be favoritism a partiality in the church

If Christ is at work in our hearts if we have begun to see something of the way in which he has Because of his great grace Worked in us to cause us to see him as Lord to call out for salvation and to know his goodness Then how can we possibly ignore the person who comes in who's not so impressive looking?

[21 : 55] Just doesn't make sense So this is something that James highlights very clearly and consider Just by extension again Jesus himself in the way that he lived think about the way that he treated people as he walked the earth as He went amongst all kinds of different groups of people Think about the way at particular times his disciples said to him or said to those around take take the children away for a minute They're at this point in time. They're just being a bit noisy. Can we just take thank you parents and Jesus says no no no Bring them here These are hugely significant to me so Literally the little people who were being viewed as little people and to be kept out of the way Jesus Jesus brings for that time center stage and he says I want them here I want them to be seen as very significant think about the kinds of people the kinds of adults that Jesus mixed with He

provoked Great consternation amongst some of the religious community because he mixed with undesirables mixed with all kinds of people

And yet Jesus said these are the kinds of people that I've come for these are the desperately needy people that I love And that I want I want them to know me He didn't show partiality to them many different ways Jesus practically evidenced this he taught this And he evidenced it. He ate with sinners He ate with people the Jewish community hated he ate with all kinds of people And so he evidenced this And of course he evidenced his love His regard for the marginalized Most clearly when he died on the cross because think about it this way for a minute What person ever deserved to have the favor of God?

Every single person that Christ came and walked amongst and spoke to through the ages until now where we consider ourselves all of us you and me We are where the outsiders if you like at his table If you consider the the the god of glory, which of us could ever have just entered into his presence and said here I am Thanks very much. I'll take a seat We are we are utter outsiders Created by him but so far away from him Following our own paths And yet in his mercy He came down low Became the savior again so that he could lift us up and so that he could say to us I want you At the great wedding supper That I will host one day when I come again when I bring all my people To be with me. I'm gonna have a great feast

And I want these people who were outsiders who were outside my kingdom I want to bring them in and I want to seat them and I want them to enjoy this feast with me So consider that that great act that Jesus did that great mercy That great love that Jesus showed to those who Were not deserving and when we consider that It makes it impossible for us to look down on the undesirable It should make it impossible for us to overlook somebody It should make it impossible for us to consciously kind of just negate somebody In whatever circles we mix in because they're just not so interesting to us or because they trouble us This faith that we have which is the great gift of God which is his love Should be at work in us producing a change in us so that because of his great love for us we are we are ready and able

To show love to others So one writer I read just thinking about these passages says the church is a family not a club Sometimes we think about the world even the church in terms of a club. It's the people that we like It's the people that we think should get in But it's not it's a family and in fact it's God's God's family God's people together There's absolutely no way we can get to decide who to ignore or not So James is very practical in he brings out this problem, which was maybe in evidence Then and always has the potential to read its head every day in my heart is the potential for favoritism And for making value judgments about other people based on how I feel About them how I deceived I decide they should be treated And so James challenges me to the core Calls me again and again to remember the gospel how I have been treated by God Just to say one more thing about this before we finish Pick out one more verse from what James speaks about just to again elevate the priority of this

[27 : 06] Verse 8 says this Verse 8 if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture you shall love your neighbor as yourself If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture you shall love your neighbor as yourself just to pick out the idea of the royal law What's he talking about there?

Well Think about Christ as the as the king the great king the one that we the we so need the one who leads us so perfectly What law does he institute but the law the law of Christ is the law of love This great king who came so low and who laid down his life for us think about the way that he Considered us and the way that he acted towards us and this is the outworking of it of course isn't this great Maybe familiar phrase to you love your neighbor as yourself This is great evidence of of how again it should be that we treat others And of course we think about our neighbor as the one whom whom we come into contact with Not the one we prefer the one in whom we come into contact with you should love your neighbor as yourself And that's that's the standard that our king Practiced and that's the way in which he wants us to live I'm reading a Novel at the moment it's a kind of It's a kind of historical novel but a detective bit of intrigue

Helps me to get to know the people who are in the family He helps me go to sleep at night It's quite enjoyable, but there's a there's a main character in it who's got a kind of physical deformity He's stooped. He has a problem with his back And this character has to come into contact with the king So he's been sent by a delegation And he has to meet I think it's it's Henry the eighth so he has to come into contact with Henry the eighth Very nervous. He's never met the king before He's got an

important job to do and there's loads of people going to be surrounding them when they meet All these different people who are gathered all the great lords and all the people from the city who are coming out to evidence this great coming procession of the king And as this character comes before the king The king receives the petitions that this character has to give him and then the king Levels him completely mocks him He identifies the fact that this guy has a has a deformity that he's a he's a bit of an outcast people in this in that particular society

They kind of they have superstitions about him. They don't like him because of his deformity They worry about him and so he's marginalized a bit And the king because he's a fearsome king because he's an Unkind king because he's seeking to claw power to himself He he puts down this marginalized man He calls him crook back and everybody in the circle laughs And this man who has this deformity is further ostracized. He's put further outside the camp And he has to deal with the shame that follows him around all his life But our king doesn't act like that our king Jesus Doesn't need to claw power to himself because he is the almighty he is good And he sees those Again, just to say he sees those Who are so desperately needy and he meets them exactly at their point of need and he provides mercy because of his sacrifice

And then he says Now go out to all those other ones who are marginalized All those other people who feel alone All those other ones who come to church and who feel really awkward Or who've not come to church for five years because they had a bad experience And they're terrified to ever come back. Well, there's people in your work Who actually nobody does like all of those ones who are marginalized And and show them love and show them mercy and draw them call them To the great king who is all mercy and love and who's gospel We so desperately need to remember And and all those who are marginalized need to know That it is for them Amen, let me pray We thank you lord for the way that you treat us that you don't treat us as our sins deserve

[31 : 47] We thank you for your grace towards us And we thank you lord Jesus that you are You are the light you are the truth. You are the one who gave yourself We thank you that you're merciful that you're kind You know us and you identify with us in our weakness And yet you call us Sons and daughters if we trust in you So help us to do that And please help us to see then how you call us to live a changed life But enable us to do this by your spirit by revealing to us again and again your great love Evidence to us at the cross And help us to love the unlovely Help us to love the unloved Help us not to show favoritism And may we be a church that goes out of its way To care for the needy and the lost and the marginalized

And may we be a church that welcomes truly welcomes all kinds of people And that doesn't allow favoritism or division Or judgments To cloud or to spoil or to mar the fellowship because we are your people If we are Christians we are called by your name Help us then to see you and to follow you Amen