

Saving Faith Can Be Seen

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Preacher: William Philip

[0:00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Willie Philip, our senior minister, will be continuing his series in the letter of James. And this morning he'll be preaching to us from James 2, 14 to 26.

But for our reading now, we'll be reading from verse 12 to 26. We do have visitor Bibles available, so if you need one, please don't be shy.

They're located at the sides and at the front. And if you're using one of our visitor Bibles, the reading can be found on page 1012. James 2.

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

[1:21] So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

You believe that God is one. You do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

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.

And 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. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

And in the same way, was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

[2:36] Well, amen. May God bless to us his words. Amen. Well, do you open your Bibles and turn with me to the passage that we read together there in James chapter 2, the second half.

We're looking at the section beginning really at verse 14. Now, the churches that James is writing to are facing many trials. But instead of bringing out the best in them, it seems to be bringing out the worst.

They're all manners of wrong behaviors, relational sin in evidence. So much so that James warns them that they may actually be self-deceived about their, I suppose you could call it their evangelical status.

It's possible, he says in chapter 1, verse 26, to be so deceived in heart that your religion is actually worthless before God. And what he sees in their behavior worries him that that might be the case for many of them.

Far from being unstained by the world, they seem to rather ape the world's attitudes, the world's treatment of people. Judging by the same standards as the world.

- [3 : 54] But as James says later on, very bluntly in chapter 4 of his letter, friendship with the world makes you enemies of God. And their behavior towards others seems to suggest that sad reality.

They're opposed to God's choice of who he has called to belong to his family. Chapter 2, verse 5, the poor in this world's eyes. Last Sunday evening we saw in verses 8 to 13 of chapter 2 that they're also at odds with God's command, God's code for the behavior in his family.

That is the royal law of indiscriminate love. So the question is, how will God, who James says in chapter 4 is the only lawgiver, the only judge, how will he judge them when it comes to the great day that will decide eternal destinies?

That's where the last paragraph that we looked at last week ends in verses 12 and 13. Have a look at them. Will they be judged by the law of liberty where mercy triumphs over judgment to redeem God's true people of faith?

Or will it be judgment without mercy? To those who have shown no mercy, who have exhibited none of the father's true love, the true family likeness of their father.

- [5 : 15] Well, it's a consistent New Testament theme that God deals with reality. That he judges by measurable reality, not by manufactured reputations.

Judgment, according to the Bible, is by works. The apostle Paul is famous, as you know, for his vigorous defense of salvation by God's grace alone, through faith alone.

But in Romans chapter 2, he is perfectly clear on this matter. He speaks of the judgment of God as the ultimate public justification. And he says, it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified on that last day.

They show, he says, that the work of the law is written on their heart on that day, when according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

They show that their faith is true and real. And it will be visible to God and to everyone on the day of judgment, in the witness of their lives of love and loyalty to God and his people to the very end.

- [6 : 31] Real saving faith, says Paul, can be seen. And as John the apostle says, we quoted last week, love to God is seen and evident, invisible love to the brothers and sisters in Christ whom we can see.

We can't see God, but we can see them. As you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, says Jesus, you did it to me. And that's what Jesus says he will say on judgment day to those who have loved him in life.

And they are the ones who will hear those wonderful words. Come, you beloved of my father, enter the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Well, James says here in verse 12, we must live as those who are to be judged.

In fact, the verb, as I said, means about to be judged. The judge is standing at the door, says James in chapter 4. So what is he seeing in us?

Is he seeing true faith, working through love, which Paul says to the Galatians is the only thing that counts for anything? Or does he see just an empty profession, deceived hearts?

- [7 : 48] Will it be so obvious that we are known as those who are transformed by the transforming mercy of God?

The mercy that triumphs over judgment? Or will our lack of mercy, our emptiness of the love towards others that is the hallmark of our true heavenly father, could it be that that would actually testify that we're not, in fact, those who belong to his royal household?

That's James' challenge, and it's very pointed. And it's aimed at those who are professing evangelical Christians. To those who hold to the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what he says in verse 1. And again, look in verse 14 here, he addresses them as brothers. Those who profess the same faith. Those who say they're engrafted into the tree of life that is Jesus.

Branches of the true vine that Jesus talks about in John 15. But are you really? That's James' question. Because to keep with the Lord's picture there from John 15, he says it's those who bear fruit, who prove to be my disciples.

[9:12] Not otherwise. And Jesus constantly talked that way, didn't he? It's not saying, Lord, Lord, on judgment day that counts for anything. It's having done the will of God.

It's having heard Jesus' words, he says, and done them. And each tree, says Jesus, is known by its own fruit. That's the judgment that counts, according to Jesus.

And so James is just echoing his Lord here. You claim to be oaks of righteousness. Well, let's see what kind of acorns there are.

I don't know about you, I'm not very good at telling trees apart. Some people can tell trees wonderfully. Edward Lobb seems to know every single tree in the world, and he can tell you. And every bird in the world as well.

But even I, with my eyes shut, if somebody handed me a peach, and I was to bite into it and taste it, and they were to point and say, this came from that tree, even I could tell you, well, that must be a peach tree.

[10:15] And I'm pretty sure that if you told me that a tree there was a sweet cherry tree, but you gave me something that smelled and tasted like a very bitter olive, I think I could tell that is not a cherry tree. And James is saying, the fruit that I'm tasting in your lives is not the sweet fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of real faith.

It's not love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and so on, as Paul talks about in Galatians. Or as James puts it in chapter 3, verse 17, it's not gentleness and impartiality and sincerity, full of mercy and good fruits.

That's not what I'm seeing and tasting. And I'm very worried about you, he's saying. I'm worried about your hearts. I'm worried that you're not taking the regular heart medicine that you need, which alone can save you.

And save your hearts from the bitter fruits of your old sinful nature. I'm worried that you don't seem to be receiving with meekness the implanted word, which he says in chapter 1, verse 21, is the thing that is able to save your souls.

I can't see that fruit, that you are really doing the word, that you really are bowing to Christ and walking in his ways and doing his works.

[11:39] I think, says James, that to a very great extent you may be deceiving yourselves. And that's why here in verses 14 to 26, he presses his examination home.

He's getting the patient up on the couch. And he's saying, well, we need to probe a bit more deeply here. And this may hurt, but it's vital. And so what he does here is he holds up before them the fearfulness of dead faith that comes from that divided heart over against the real fruitfulness of living faith that comes from undivided, wholehearted love and loyalty to Christ.

And he does it here via two negative and then two positive examples to help ram home his main point, which is raised in the question of verse 14 and then is answered emphatically, you see, in verse 26.

If someone says he has faith but does not have works, can that faith save him? And James says, don't be so deluded. Whatever that so-called faith is, it is not true faith in Jesus Christ at all.

It's dead, verse 17. Verse 21, it's useless. And verse 26, because as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

- [13:06] So what does real saving faith look like then? That's the question. And James says, well, it is the very opposite of dead.

It is alive. And its living nature can be seen. And it can be seen in lives which are alive with the love and the mercy of God. And it can be seen in life. Alive with undivided love to God and therefore love to God's people.

So let's look at what James is giving us here by way of contrasting examples. First of all, negatively, he focuses on the fearful deadness of a professed faith from a divided heart.

The twisted faith that actually is unloving to God and to his people. Look at the first example in verses 15 and 16.

This displays to us the dividedness of empty piety. The worthless religion of a very spiritual and pious corpse. Verse 15.

- [14:08] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

It's a great example of what my grandmother would have called a lot of wind, but nothing wagging. Lots of pious and spiritual words there, but absolutely no substance.

Glib pronouncements of faith, but no generous provision of love, do you see? Lots of talk of care, but no actually taking care. Verse 16 is the very manifestation, isn't it, of the divided heart that James warns about in chapter 1, verse 22, that doesn't do the word, that just hears it and is deceiving itself.

And this is inside the church he's speaking about. It's your brother or your sister, your nearest neighbor, who the royal law code says you're to love as yourself, do you remember?

But there's no real mercy here, no merciful treatment, just pious platitudes. Go in peace. Be blessed. Well, what good is that, says James?

- [15:23] It's clearly no good at all, is it, to the needy brother or sister, but actually James is saying more than that, isn't he? Because the question in verse 14 is really, what good is it to the so-called believer to show this kind of faith?

And the answer is, verse 17, well, it's no good at all to him. It's dead. It's worthless religion. All the pious words, all the spiritual pronouncements, can't hide the truth that it is just a corpse.

It's not real living faith at all. It's dead. It's cold. It's lifeless. It's stiff. Unpleasant. And it becomes more and more of a stink to others, and even more importantly to God.

Verse 14, it will not save you. It's worthless religion. Because the faith that is pure and undefiled to God, remember chapter 1, verse 26, is, well, to visit, to help orphans and widows in their affliction, to do the word of God, to actually love your neighbor, especially those who are right under your very nose in the church of Jesus Christ.

Not despite good pronouncements, but to actually show the generous provision of real love. Now notice, James and his hearers here are clearly all those who do understand that salvation is by faith.

- [16:50] No one's in any doubt about that. Verse 14 makes it clear, doesn't it? They profess faith. They're evangelical people. But the issue isn't knowing that the doctrine of justification by faith is right.

The question is, what that real faith that justifies you is. What it looks like. And James, just like Paul and just like Jesus, is utterly clear.

It's not just a mantra of faith. It's not just a hollow profession of faith. It's a confession with real substance. If you believe in your heart, says Paul in Romans chapter 10, and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved.

But to confess Jesus' Lordship in life is to bow your will to Him in obedience. And in that very chapter, Paul says, the problem is many have heard, but they haven't obeyed.

And they don't have real faith. And so James says here, you see, real faith. Look at verse 17. Real faith has works. It has substance. It has reality.

[17:57] It can be seen and heard and felt. It can be eaten and put on by the people who experience the fruit of that faith in real love. Now, the example he focuses on here is one of bodily needs, and that's sometimes very real.

But it may not be just food or clothing that your brother or sister may need. It may be just friendship. It may be companionship. It may be time from you.

It may be interest. It may be help. Help to do something they struggle with, perhaps, for an older brother. Or including someone in your family life and in your children's life, perhaps, if it's a single sister in the church.

And multiple other things that you can think about. And the question is, well, is my faith real like that? Is our church's faith real like that? Or could it be just that kind of hollow piety?

Now, that was the picture of the early church, just a little more than a decade before James was writing. Read Acts chapter 2 or Acts chapter 4.

[19:00] And that common life was so active. It wasn't communism, as some silly people have thought. Nothing to do with that. Everyone had their own private property and so on. But what it was was real faith working through love.

Showing love through an unwillingness to let anyone be suffering. Suffering want. Well, of course. John, the Apostle's first letter, he says, If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, and yet closes his heart against them, how can God's love possibly abide in him?

And he goes right on. Little children, let us love not in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him.

Well, we need to ask ourselves, don't we? Do we have that assurance that our faith is alive and not dead? Not unloving. As evidenced by a lack of care towards fellow children of our Heavenly Father.

That's James' question to all those he's writing to. Now, be careful. Don't misapply what James means. He is not writing to crush the Christian with an oversensitive conscience.

[20:20] The sort of person who feels an incredible burden for every single beggar in the city. Or the sort of person who feels just overwhelmed by their inability to meet all the needs of all the problems of every situation that they hear about.

Now, if that's you, then you are not in his cross here. It's because your heart's already full of tender love and compassion. Now, it's the pious fraud that he's challenging here.

He's challenging the keen evangelical with all the verbiage of pronouncing blessings, but never actually doing anything to help somebody right in front of them.

Somebody in their life who clearly needs help that they can give and isn't doing it. That's the issue. And nor, by the way, is he endorsing any kind of naïve welfarism for the lazy, for the indigent.

James would certainly echo Paul's words to the Thessalonians when he says, well, those who won't do work should get nothing. They shouldn't eat. His whole argument here is that faith shouldn't be indigent and lazy.

[21 : 29] It should be at work. That kind of naivety in the church will just produce the same kind of corrosive disaster that state-sponsored indigence has produced in so many Western countries like our own.

So don't misunderstand James' words. But don't avoid his challenge either. It's easy, isn't it, to deceive ourselves with a cloak of piety where glib pronouncements can so easily substitute for generous giving to our brothers and sisters in need.

Giving of our time. Giving of our talents. Things we can help them with. Giving of our money as well. It's so easy, isn't it, to say blessings. Every blessing.

Or even worse, be blessed. You see those sort of things at the end of emails and letters. Even Christians' emails sign off sometimes are full of these pious platitudes, aren't they?

I'm really allergic to them, so please don't write emails to me and sign it off with, be blessed. You know, yours sincerely is perfectly adequate. But seriously, we do need to challenge ourselves, don't we?

[22 : 34] How many times has our answer to somebody sharing a need or a problem with us been simply, so I'll be praying for you? What might actually help them is if we say, well, I'll be paying for you.

How often have we signed a message to somebody with, oh, lots of love, XXX, when it's not our kisses that they need, but maybe it's our cash that would actually help.

Well, says James, beware of the dividedness of hollow piety. Professions of faith can sound very spiritual, can't they? Very pious.

But actually, says James, they can be dead. And then in verses 18 and 19, likewise, he says, beware the dividedness of deadly orthodoxy, the worthless religion of a very sound but orthodox corpse.

Someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one?

[23 : 43] Well, you do well. But even the demons believe and shudder. Now, James' objector here in verse 18, you see, implies that faith and works are separable.

Someone says, oh, you're into all that doctrine. You're a faith person. I'm a much more practical do-it-for-thing, do-it-for-people sort of person. Works. Somebody else might say the opposite.

But James' point is, no, no, no, that is impossible. How can faith possibly manifest itself without any evidence? If it's real, then it will be manifest.

It will be shown in what you are. And what you are will be seen in what you say and what you do. We, who we are, are not divorced from our actions, are we?

And somebody sometimes is accused of saying something or doing something, and somebody will often answer, oh, that's not me. That's not the person I am. Well, just so. If I am a child of God through faith in Christ, then my faith is going to be shown, isn't it, by what I say and by what I do, by my works.

[24 : 54] It's indivisible, just as God is indivisible. God shows us who he is by his words and by his works. That's how we know him. Well, verse 19, you see, you claim to be sound and orthodox.

You believe that God is one. That's wonderful. That's the great affirmation of covenant faith, isn't it, that goes all the way back to Moses. But how does Moses go right on from saying those words? What does it mean to profess that?

The Lord is one, he says. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.

And he goes on from there, doesn't he, in Deuteronomy chapter 6 to expand the whole of God's instruction for his people, his law. The law that Jesus summed up as, oh, what James calls the royal law in verse 8.

To love your neighbor as yourself. So to profess your faith in the one true God is shown in your practice of love that God's word teaches.

[26:02] It's not empty doctrine that constitutes true faith. It's emphatic doing of the word that shows that that faith is real, says James. Otherwise, look at verse 19.

Demons would be Christian believers. They believe what you believe, says James, about God. And look where it's got them. They're in hell, shuddering at the very thought of God.

Do you think that's saving faith? See, the implication is that they're already in hell, these believing demons. So that kind of very orthodox belief is utterly deadly, he says.

And it likewise belongs in hell and it's heading to hell. You see, an orthodox corpse is just as dead, isn't it, as a heterodox, as a heretical corpse.

Both of them stink. Both of them stink. But in fact, the orthodox corpse stinks a whole lot worse because it has the added stench of hypocrisy. Read the Gospels.

[27:07] What do you see? Jesus' very harshest words were spoken to those who thought themselves most doctrinally pure. The scribes and the Pharisees.

Matthew chapter 23, I think, is one of the most terrifying chapters of the Bible for anybody who prides themselves in their orthodox doctrine. But in fact, who show that their hearts are nowhere near true love for their Savior and his people.

Woe to you, says Jesus, hypocrites. For you build the tombs of the prophets and you decorate the monuments of the righteous. They venerate the great divines of the past.

But they persecute and murder those who show the same ministry of God's true grace to his people today. And Jesus says, you serpents, you brood of vipers.

How are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Because you're not saved by learned doctrines. Even though they be doctrines of grace.

[28:10] But you're saved by loving doing of the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Anything else, says James, and Jesus, is not showing heaven is in your heart, but rather that your heart belongs in hell.

It's showing the dividedness of deadly orthodoxy. Friends, that's a real danger, isn't it? It's a scourge that goes all the way back to the New Testament.

And all the different false movements of elitist teachers. But it's still a scourge today. And especially, I'm afraid I have to say, it's a scourge in our tradition, in Reformed churches.

Who profess the great faith in these orthodox evangelical doctrines. But sad to say, some of those that I've known, who have been most vocal about defending the doctrines of grace, have been some of the most graceless people I've ever met in the manner and their treatment of other people.

And James says, don't tell me about your doctrines of grace. Demonstrate it. Show it. When the grace of God was made incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ, John the Apostle says, we saw His glory full of grace and truth.

[29:34] We saw it in the flesh. And the doctrine of His lips was adorned by the demonstration in His life, in the mercy, in the loving kindness of the one who came to lay down His life for His brothers.

Loving them, even to the cross. How different that is from the deadly orthodoxy of some of the modern day venerators of the great divines of the past.

Great ones like the Reformers, the Puritans and so on. Instead of being led by them to be contemporary lovers and doers of God's Word in their own lives, as these great people were, they sought to read God's Word through their eyes, as though somehow they were living hundreds of years ago in a time warp.

Becoming cold and disdainful. Detached from the present day. Looking down on present day Christians who don't share their superior grasp of the faith. William still talks about such people in his little book, *The Work of the Pastor*.

People, he says, who see the Word of God as solid chunks of the rock of truth to be quarried and laid heavily upon one another. To form massive structures. Edifices of truth.

[30:52] Or even to form bricks to throw at others. Whereas, he says, the truth is not the truth, however sound it be, if it's not made molten, fluid fire flowing into hearts by the living present Spirit of grace.

See, without that, without the living Spirit of love at work from the heart, says James, here in verse 20, your so-called faith, however sound it is, is useless.

It's barren. It's worthless religion. The religion of the soundly orthodox corpse. It doesn't save. It can't save. And sadly, in my experience, those kinds of people not only embrace something that cannot save them, but they have no interest whatsoever in saving other people either.

They have very little interest in saving people from death to life in Jesus. Much more interested in converting Christians into their own little sects of superior theology.

More pure worship. More perfect church polity. Or whatever it is. Friends, if people like that try to convert you, ply you with books, or YouTube videos, or whatever it is, purporting to show you a more orthodox, a more assigned way, James would say, run a mile.

[32:19] Run away. That is a loveless orthodoxy that belongs only in hell. Having exposed dead, empty piety, empty of love for God's people, and dead orthodoxy that knows no peace of God, just demonic shuddering, James says in verse 20, let me show you the opposite.

Let me show you now real faith that does work, that isn't barren, that isn't dead, but it's manifest in true friendship with God, and therefore, in true fellowship with God's people.

And you see in verses 21 to 25, he shows us the fruitful demonstration of a proven faith from undivided hearts. The true faith that is full of love for God and love for God's people.

And it's the enduring, loving loyalty to God that we see par excellence demonstrated in Abraham in verses 21 to 24, because in his life, what we see is that real faith means a life of undivided, costly consecration to God.

It's important not to rest James' word out of context in his argument here, which is not at all about justification by faith, but the question is what that real faith is.

[33:46] He's not for a moment suggesting that something else other than faith or added to faith is needed for our salvation. He's not for a minute saying, oh, you need works as well as faith. Some people have wrongly thought that he's contradicting Paul here, but that's not true at all.

James doesn't disagree with Paul that Abraham was saved by faith. He's just asking the question, yes, but what constitutes that real faith that did save Abraham? And he's spelling out exactly what Paul describes in Romans.

He's spelling out what the obedience of faith, as Paul calls it, actually is. He's telling us about the faith that Paul tells Titus makes us zealous for good works and devoted to them.

The faith that Paul tells the Ephesians is God's true purpose for everyone that he calls to be his by grace. In fact, Martin Luther, the great reformer who's often said to be very critical of James versus Paul, he could hardly express James' point better in Martin Luther's introduction to his own commentary on Romans.

He says this, oh, it's a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It's impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It doesn't ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it's already done this and is constantly doing them.

[35 : 09] Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. Well, thank you, Martin Luther says James. I absolutely agree. And that was Abraham's faith.

It was undivided, costly obedience to God. It was steadfast through testing. It was proven true. It was demonstrated to be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

To use James' words in chapter 1, verse 4. And that's what verse 22 here is describing. His faith was active. It was alive. It was working through many trials.

And it was made complete. The word perfect, the same word James uses in chapter 1, verse 4. Turn back for a moment a few pages to Hebrews chapter 11 because it gives us a story of that faith of Abraham traced out.

If you look at Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 8, we're told what Abraham's faith looked like. Verse 8, By faith Abraham obeyed when called to go out.

[36 : 15] And verse 9, by faith he went to live in the land of promise because, well, as you read it in Genesis 15, verse 6, he believed God. That was the beginning of his faith.

He trusted God's promise of a great future and progeny. And so he obeyed God's command through decades of waiting, decades of testing until the ultimate test.

Look down to Hebrews 11, verse 17. When he was tested by faith, he offered up Isaac. Obedient faith, working faith, demonstrating his love, his loyalty to God, even to trust in God's promise so surely that he knew that he must raise Isaac up from the dead again to fulfill all that he'd promised to him.

Do you see? Now turn back to James 2 and verse 23. And so he says the scripture was fulfilled that says Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

His faith was tested. It was made steadfast through all these trials in life, many of them. And when you read Genesis, you see Abraham did wobble at times, but his faith was proved real, living, complete in his utter submission to God.

[37 : 40] And above all there at Mount Moriah where if you read in Genesis chapter 22, God said, Now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

God saw Abraham's faith because he saw in him, didn't he, a profound reflection of his own heart, the heart of the God who gave up his son, his only son, for his kingdom of glory and for the saving of his people.

And James is saying that's real faith. That's faith that saves. God's verdict on Abraham's life, God's ultimate judgment was judgment on a faith that was loyal in love to him to the utmost and to the very end.

It's the antithesis of that dead orthodoxy. The demons believe and they shudder in estrangement from God in hell. But Abraham believed and he was called a friend of God.

Undivided heart of real consecration to God. Abraham, the man of enduring faith who stood firmly on God's promise at all cost.

[38 : 55] And likewise, you see verse 25, a very different person but the very same faith. In Rahab, we see a woman of evident faith who stood firmly with God's people at great cost.

Because you see, real faith also means a life of undivided and costly commitment to the people of God. You'd have hardly had a greater contrast, could you? The Abraham, the faithful patriarch, and Rahab, the fornicating prostitute.

Except that the contrast that really matters is not between these two who both, both are justified in God's sight and will certainly be saved. But the real contrast is between those with real faith, like them, and the pious frauds in the dead orthodoxy that James says may be sitting in your very pews.

The sobering fact, though, isn't it, when you read the Gospels again that you see that Jesus had far more time for the prostitutes and the publican sinners, far more time for them than he did for the evangelical churchmen of his day.

Well, there's a sobering thing, isn't it, for pastors. How would Rahab get on, do you think, in a Release the Word Bible study or in your growth group?

[40 : 16] Would she always get the text right, do you think? Could she recite to you the catechism flawlessly? Could she dot the I's and cross the T's of our church's confession of faith? I doubt it.

When you read about her in Joshua chapter 2, you don't find her able to recite the Law of Moses, but she does know one thing. She says, the Lord your God, He's God in heaven and earth.

And she says, we've heard how the Lord rescued you from Egypt. And on what she heard, she acted on.

She threw her whole future on siding with the people of God at great cost, a great risk to her life, to her family's life. And Hebrews 11, verse 31 says, by faith, she did not perish with those who are disobedient.

because she gave a friendly welcome to the spies. Justified by her faith that was at work, verse 25 here, in her costly commitment to the people of God.

[41 : 23] You see? That's faith with substance, isn't it? That's faith that can be seen in loving giving to the people of God, in loving giving for the people of God, without partiality, whatever the cost.

Reminds me of the scorn of the Pharisees. Remember at Jesus' reception of the sinful woman, very likely a prostitute, anointing him with oil, kissing his feet, giving her loyalty to Christ and his people, however inappropriate and crude it seemed to be to other people.

that she was the one, wasn't she, who heard those wonderful words? Her sins, which are many, are forgiven. Not the Pharisee host, but the prostitute.

You see, Rahab risked her neck, didn't she? Literally, for the people of God, for the cause of the kingdom of God. And for as much as you did it to the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.

It's what Christ's word will be, he says, on the last day, the day of judgment. Your faith, which I have seen, has saved you. Well, what about us?

[42 : 47] I've heard, you know, I've heard evangelical Christians speak very scornfully about Christians being slaughtered in places like Syria today in recent times, which has happened a very, very great deal.

You don't hear any of that on your news. Doesn't seem to involve Israel, so it doesn't matter if you're being slaughtered. I've heard people say things like, well, they're not real Christians.

They're not evangelicals. Well, friends, when the gun is pointed at your head and you're told, confess Allah and Muhammad as his prophet and renounce Jesus Christ or die.

And one of these not proper Christians who may never have heard the word evangelical, never heard an expository sermon, never read an evangelical book, when they say, no, I am a Christian, do you think that's saving faith?

You may think they're not real Christians, but Jesus said, didn't he, in the very context of those seeking to kill his followers, Jesus said, fear not, everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.

[44 : 10] But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. And which side of that do you think soft and pampered Western Christians will be when that day comes?

Jesus rather seems to agree with James, doesn't he? That there is a kind of faith that is dead, that's useless, that won't save on the day of judgment.

4, verse 26, as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. It's the undivided heart of love for God and for his people when the crunch comes, when the chips are down, when it really costs, it's that that makes faith real living faith, real faith, manifest and costly obedience to the word and will of God, faith that will put everything on the line for the sake of God and for the sake of God's precious people, Christ's brothers, our brothers, and our sisters.

If James were in the Cornhill sermon class, I might ask him at the end, can you give me in just one sentence the aim of your message?

I think James might say this, yes, I'll summarize it in a verse from Brother Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church, 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5, here's my aim sentence, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith, test yourselves.

[46 : 06] Let me end with this from Alec Matir, the life of faith is more than a private long past transaction of the heart with God, it's the life of active consecration seen in the obedience which holds nothing back from God and the concern which holds nothing back from the human need of his people.

Saving faith can be seen. So can people see yours and mine? And even more importantly, can God see it? Amen.

Let's pray. O Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of thy name.

Increase us in true faith. Nourish us with all goodness and of thy great mercy, keep us in the same through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.