Faith Without Works is Dead

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Preacher: Joey Snodgrass

[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us.!

And it's your Spirit who is with us now. I pray that he would aid us in our understanding. Pray for Michael and Marcy, that they would make full recovery and heal up. And we know they want to be here this morning, but could not.
I pray for myself, that the words I speak would be helpful and edifying and true and biblical. And it's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. In the medical field, there are things that are known as silent killers.
And they're referred to by this name because while they're going on, they do sometimes irreparable damage to the body. And yet there are very few, maybe no, signs or symptoms of the issues that are taking place.
Most commonly, this is used to refer to high blood pressure. It can also be used to refer to things like high cholesterol or even certain kinds of cancer that in the initial stages do not have many, if any, signs or symptoms.
[1:28] And by the time you know, it's sometimes too late. And similarly, in the church today, there is a silent killer.

And if I were to ask you what you think that would be, I think we might start listing off some popular sins. Maybe some sins that we think are respectable or not as bad as others.
But I'm not talking about any sin in particular. I think a silent killer in the church today is dead faith. Dead faith. It can do damage to the body of Christ because at times it's very difficult to recognize. On the surface level, everything seems to be fine. The words people with dead faith say that they believe are true. They are right. And yet they're coming from a heart where there is no life.
[2:32] Dead faith is a silent killer. It passes the doctrinal test. It knows the answers, but it does not love the Lord.

And so it's easy for it to go undetected. Open with me to James chapter 2. This morning we'll be studying James 2 verses 14 through 26.
And if you're familiar with the book of James, it's very practical, very earthy. And very convicting. James is very in your face. He doesn't leave you much room to breathe with the way he talks about sin.
And in this passage, James 2, 14 through 16, James is confronting people who claim that they have faith, but they don't have any good works.
He's confronting people who say they believe in Christ, but never show it with their lives. They claim to follow Christ, but other than that lip service, they don't do anything to evidence that they belong to him.
[3:47] Other than that lip service that they pay him, they don't live their lives any differently from the unbelievers around them. And in our passage this morning, James is driving home one main point.

Faith without works is dead. Faith without works is dead. It doesn't save. It's useless.
It's lifeless in a spiritual sense. So how can you know if someone has saving faith? Or how can you know that someone has dead faith?
How can you know if your faith is alive or dead? According to James and the rest of the New Testament, the way you evaluate someone's faith is by their actions.
Because how we live shows who we are. There are some signs and symptoms, and if someone makes shipwreck of their faith, you can sometimes look backwards and connect some dots, but these symptoms are very hard to detect initially because everything in this person's life can be

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doctrinally accurate, just coming from a heart that does not love the Lord.
[5:08] So let me read our passage for us this morning. James 2, beginning in verse 14. 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 or what benefit is that?
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?
[6:20] 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. This is our passage for this morning.
We'll cover it in two main headings. The first one is dead faith. The second one will be living faith. But firstly, we have dead faith in verses 14 through 19.
And there are two ways that James describes this kind of faith. He says faith without works is dead. And then verse 18 and 19, he says that faith without works is demonic.
[7:29] And so he begins with a rhetorical question that kind of frames up this section. And what good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

And it's a rhetorical question because the answer is implied. It is no good at all. It doesn't do anything. It's not worth anything.
And what James continually emphasizes through this passage as a hallmark of dead faith is words without actions.
They will say the right things, but they will not do the right things. And James' question at the end of verse 14 is, can that faith save him?
Can that kind of faith lead to salvation? The kind of faith that has no works? And James' clear answer is, that faith does not save.
[8:31] That kind of dead, lifeless faith does not save. We'll get into this more later in the sermon, but James is not saying that salvation is not by faith.

He's not denying what Paul teaches. His point here is that this kind of dead faith does not save anyone. This kind of lifeless faith does not lead to salvation.
And so here's something that James emphasizes all throughout his letter. How we live reveals more about our religion than what we say.
How we live reveals more about our religion than what we say. Because how we live reveals what we believe, what we stake our life upon. And so he says at the end of chapter one, true 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.
That kind of selfless, sacrificial lifestyle gives evidence that someone has faith in Christ and has been changed by that grace.
[9:55] I'll always remember probably about 10 years ago now, I was in Fort Worth leading a mission trip with some of our middle school students and we were doing a VBS among this apartment complex that had a lot of refugee children.

So children from other parts of the world seeking asylum in our country. Some of them were Christians fleeing from persecution. Others of them were just from war-torn countries and needing safety.
And so they were allowed into our country. But as we were teaching the word to them, as we were sharing Bible stories with them, this drunk guy comes up and stands right by me. And he says, I believe in Jesus too.

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But does that faith mean anything? That kind of faith, that kind of lifestyle does damage to the witness of the gospel. And that's what James is attacking here.
And in verses 15 and 16, he gives us a word picture for what faith without works looks like. It looks like compassionate words without compassionate actions.
[10:57] Verse 15, if a brother or sister is poorly clothed, this is a Christian, male or female Christian in their community who's poorly clothed and lacking in daily food.

They don't have a winter coat, don't have enough food to get through the day. 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?
Again, that's no good. That's no benefit to them. The words themselves are correct. There are kind words being spoken to them, but they don't do anything to meet the need that's in front of them.
It doesn't do anything. Mere words, even if they're well intended, don't provide for physical needs.
Verse 17 says, so also in a similar way, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
And the little phrase, if it does not have works, is important because that's the way James is thinking about faith by itself in this passage. So when he says faith that's by itself or faith alone, he's thinking about this kind of faith that does not have works.
[12:19] And James says, this kind of faith is dead. True faith, living faith, always produces works.
And I think a marriage ceremony is a helpful analogy in our culture.

If you go to support a couple getting married, to be present for their ceremony, what is it that makes the marriage legally binding?
Ultimately, it's just words, right? They're promising themselves to each other. They're signing a document. Ultimately, what makes that marriage legally binding in the moment are just words.
The evidence of the love that they are pledging themselves to will come out 25 years down the road if they're still loving each other and they're still committed to each other and giving their lives to serve one another.
And so faith without works is like a husband saying, I will be faithful to you until death do us part.
And then three years in, committing an affair and walking away. It's useless.
[13:26] His words were empty. So it is with someone who has faith but not works. And the second thing James says about dead faith is that it's demonic.

And he says in verse 18, but someone will say, and so James is anticipating an objection here. He's anticipating someone arguing back with him from this church that he's writing to.
And what comes next in the ESV is a short quote, you have faith and I have works. If you're reading from a New American Standard or a Legacy Standard, the quotation is likely longer.
And so there's great debate on what exactly is the quote that this someone is saying. The shortest in all the English translations is the ESV, which just says, you have faith and I have works.
Some of those quotations go all the way through verse 18. Some translations have the quote going all the way through verse 19. And so what exactly is this person saying? I think it's best and most helpful to ignore the quotation marks completely.
[14:32] Quotation marks were not a part of the original text and I want to explain to you why I think that is. I don't think James is giving a direct quote of anyone here.

I think what he's saying is that someone among you will say that you guys have faith and I, James, have works.
That's what James is driving at. He's saying you guys have faith but without works. That is dead.
And so he's imagining an objection coming from this congregation saying, yeah, James, you have faith or you have works.
We have faith. They're separating faith and works as though they're just individual spiritual gifts. Some of us have faith. Some of us have faith and works.
And James puts a challenge to this objector in the middle of verse 18. He says, show me your faith apart from your works and I will show you my faith by my works.
[15:43] And so his challenge to this hypothetical argument is demonstrate your faith to me without works. That is impossible. All they could do is talk.

All they could do is say things that they believe. James says, prove it to me. Show me that you believe this. And the way I'll show you is through my life.
Through the way that I live my life. Through my obedience. Faith and works are inseparable. Works are a demonstration of faith.

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faith. And James begins to talk about their faith, the content of it. Verse 19, you believe that God is one. You do well.
This phrase, God is one, comes from Deuteronomy 6, verse 4. It was one of the most foundational teachings in Jewish theology and even in Christian theology that we have one God.
[16:43] It's a basic tenet of monotheism, basic tenet of the Old Testament itself. Every Jewish boy and girl would have been able to quote this verse.

And James says, you believe that God is one. Great job. You guys are killing it. He's being sarcastic here. And it's kind of like, so my daughter just began to be able to read and my wife sent me a video the other day of her reading a really simple book.
And I was so proud of her. And when I got home, I said, Amelia, I am so proud of you. You did great reading that book. Now, if Jeremy read the same book and I walked up to him and I said, Jeremy, great job, buddy.
You did it. That would obviously be sarcastic. That's the way that James is speaking here. He's like, great job, everyone. You got it. Even the demons believe and they tremble.
This faith isn't any different than what the demons believe. And interestingly enough, demons have perfect theology. When you read about them in the gospels, they always know exactly who Christ is.
[17:55] The disciples are kind of fumbling all over the place trying to figure out who Christ is. And the demons know exactly who he is. They recognize there is a God. They recognize the deity of Christ.

They recognize the reality of judgment in hell and they recognize that judgment is for them. Their theology is perfect and they hate God. And if you have a faith that believes the right things but does not love the Lord and does not obey him, you have more in common with a demon than with a disciple.
That dead faith is demonic. That's no greater than what the demons themselves believe.
We need to love God and loving God, we will obey him. And that's exactly what demons lack. Obedience. I'm afraid that there are a lot of people who think they have faith because they know about Christ or because they claim they believe in Christ.
But if that faith doesn't lead to obedience, it's no different at all than the demons recognizing who Jesus is and being afraid of him. That's what James' point is.
[19:19] You prove your faith not by what you believe but by how you behave. Faith obeys the word. And pure doctrine is absolutely important.

James is not discounting that. I am not treating that lightly. We need to believe what the Bible says. We need to have right beliefs and right doctrine. But we also need to love the truth and love the Lord of the truth and obey him.
And our second main point is living faith. So he's covered dead faith. Now he turns to living faith. In verse 20 he says, Do you want to be shown you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless?
And he's going to give us two examples of living faith. And we can summarize these examples just simply by saying that faith obeys. Faith obeys.
And the first example he gives us is the example of Abraham in verses 21 through 24. It says in verse 21, Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?
[20:32] Now we believe what Paul believed and what was read earlier in our service that justification is by faith apart from works. And so when we read James saying that we are justified by works that seems to be problematic for us initially.

And in fact in this very passage verse 24 James says a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. So what do we make of this?
Well a few things we need to note. Number one, we need to know what justification means. What does that word mean? Everywhere it appears in the Greek New Testament it means to be declared or considered righteous.
Declared or considered righteous. And so this is a legal term. That's how it's used in the New Testament.
Being justified justified is not the same thing as actually being righteous but it means to be declared or treated as righteous.

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[21:47] And so it is a legal forensic term and as the New Testament uses it justification is the opposite of condemnation. Condemnation is saying you are guilty justification is saying you are not guilty.

guilty. And our legal system is a good illustration of that. There will be a verdict in the courtroom guilty or not guilty. Whatever that verdict is determines how that person will be regarded.
How that person will be treated in terms of his or her standing before the law. Now that verdict guilty or not guilty does not make the defendant actually guilty or not guilty.
It is just a declaration about their standing before the law. Someone could be declared guilty who did not actually do the crime or vice versa.
And so this declaration doesn't change the nature of the person it is just a legal proclamation about how they are to be regarded. And this is how Paul consistently uses the term.
[22:55] We just saw it this morning in Romans 3. He says we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. And so in Paul's usage justification is a one time declarative act of God.

It begins our Christian life and works are not the foundation by which we receive justification. Faith is.
So that's what it means. Another thing we need to answer is how does James use it here? How does James use it? And we need to pay careful attention to the kinds of words that James is using throughout this passage because the context will help us understand his meaning.
James is concerned in this passage with how we can know someone has true faith. How can we know that someone is truly having saving faith?
What's the proof of faith? faith? And if you just track through this passage he uses the word show twice.
[24:02] Show me and I will show you. And he asks do you need to be shown or do you want to be shown? Verse 20 and he uses the word see twice throughout the rest of this passage.

Verse 22 you see that faith was active along with his works. Verse 24 you see that a person is justified by faith or by works and not by faith alone.
And so James' treatment of faith here is clarifying the distinction between true faith and dead faith. True faith is justifying dead faith is condemning.
And what's the difference we can see between the two of them? True faith has works dead faith does not. Dead faith does not lead to salvation dead faith does not justify we're justified by true faith which will produce works of obedience.
And so the way James is using justification here is in terms of demonstrating or proving that someone has true saving faith.
[25:17] Now lastly do James and Paul disagree? They seem to be saying contradictory things and even on the surface they are saying contradictory things if you're not mindful of the context but a clarifying question for resolving this alleged conflict is who were they arguing against?

Who were they arguing against? Paul was in opposition to people who were saying we need works in order to be accepted before God.
We need to have works in order to be accepted before God. James is arguing against people who say we don't need any works in the Christian life. I think it's right there we can see the difference. Paul is arguing against someone who is saying we are accepted before God by works. James is arguing against people who say we don't need any works in the Christian life. It's a difference between how we're accepted before God and how we live the Christian life.
And so Paul and James are not fighting each other they're standing back to back fighting different enemies. They're defending the same truth but it's being attacked from different sides. And so would Paul say that Christians don't need to obey?
[26:34] No he wouldn't say that. Would James say that obedience is what causes us to be forgiven? No he would not say that. And so we can summarize their arguments this way.

Paul is describing justification before God. James is describing justification before men. Paul is talking about how we stand before God.
James is talking about how we can demonstrate our true faith to the eyes of those who are watching us. It's only faith that unites us to Christ and the faith that unites us to Christ will produce obedience which is exactly his point in bringing up Abraham.
Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?! Genesis 15 Abraham is declared righteous by his faith.

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He's justified. Genesis 15 6. In Genesis 22 he's tested and asked to offer up Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice. What exactly in Genesis 22 is being tested?
[27:44] His faith. Does he have a dead faith? Or does he have a saving faith? And he passes the test. He shows to have true saving faith and that's what he says in 22 you see that faith was active along with his works and faith was completed or fulfilled by his works.

And in verse 23 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.
God counted him as righteous by his faith and that faith was fulfilled that faith was demonstrated that faith was proved when he was willing to lay his only son of promise on the altar and end his life.
And what does the angel say to Abraham when he stops him? Now I know that you fear God. You've passed the test of your faith. And he was called a friend of God.
No more hostility, no more estrangement from God. He was brought near to him through faith.
Verse 24, you see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone or not by faith that is alone, a faith that doesn't have any works.
[29:07] And he gives another example, the example of Rahab, verse 25, 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.

Now, this example shocks us a little bit. Rahab the prostitute gave refuge to Israeli spies and provide a cover for them to get back safely. It makes sense for James to refer to Abraham.
He's writing to Jewish Christians. Abraham is the patriarch. He's the first Jew. He was rich. He was influential. God spoke to him directly on numerous occasions.
But Rahab? She was a Gentile. She was a woman. She was a prostitute. She didn't receive any direct revelation from the Lord that's recorded in Scripture.
And what James is doing here is showing Jew or Gentile justification is by God's mercy. And even Rahab in her good work of providing safety for the spies lies.
[30:14] And so even in what she's doing she's committing something the Lord says should not be done. And so these two examples put side by side to demonstrate what true faith looks like.

Both the patriarch and the prostitute have a living faith in God. Both of them are willing to risk their lives and their futures for the sake of obeying the Lord.
In the case of Rahab, if the king of Jericho found out what she was doing, she would have been put to death for treason. And she considered dying for the Lord better than sin.
That's what true faith looks like. Would you be willing to give up your life to be obedient to the Lord? That's a test of faith. Would you be willing to risk your entire future in order to be obedient to what the Lord calls us to?
And James in verse 26 concludes, for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead. Without a soul, a body is just a corpse.
[31:41] And faith without works is no more useful than a corpse. A confession of faith, even a doctrinally accurate confession of faith without obedience is just a dead body in the church.

There's no benefit to that. That's a dead faith. And so the question that confronts us and really assaults us as we read this passage is do I have true faith?
Faith is not just simply acknowledging the facts about who Christ is, simply knowing the gospel story. Faith demonstrates itself through this risk taking, sacrifice making obedience.
Abraham believed God and was ready to sacrifice his entire future to be faithful to him. Rahab believed God and risked her life to serve him. Their faith was demonstrated by their actions.
faith. But not everyone who claims to have faith has true and living faith like this.
[32:48] Not everyone who says they follow Christ actually follows him. What about you? Is your faith dead?

Or is it alive? Does your faith in Christ lead you to obey him? or does your faith have no works? The demons know who God is and it causes them to tremble, produces an emotional response even.
They recognize that judgment is coming and we too will stand before Christ and be judged. Jesus who knows everything, sees everything, has made everything, will judge our lives.
And do you know what he'll judge us by? Our works. What we've done, what we've thought, what we've said, and nothing will escape him.
And Jesus in Matthew 7 says that it's actually a common occurrence for someone to live their life proclaiming their faith in Christ, die, stand before Christ, and in that moment, find out that their faith

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was dead.
[34:10] What do you do in that situation? It's too late. I don't want that to happen to you.

I do not want you to find out your faith was dead when you're standing before the risen and living Christ. And so how can we spot this? how can we know? Well, I have eight symptoms of dead faith. This isn't an exhaustive list by any means, but hopefully will help us evaluate ourselves. number one, you don't love the Lord above everything else.
You don't love the Lord above everything else. And that final phrase is critically important, above everything else. People with dead faith would say they love the Lord, but he just fits in where there's space.
they would say they love the Lord, but don't give priority to him in their lives. Second, God isn't your greatest fear.
[35:27] God isn't your greatest fear. That's one thing that marked both Abraham and Rahab. They feared disobedience more than they feared dying.

is the Lord your greatest fear? And if we were to talk about phobias and what kept us up at night, maybe losing a job or losing a spouse or losing a child or whatever other horrible thing could happen to us, would disobedience be on that list?
Do you fear the Lord above everything else? God's love. Number three, you only do things if you're likely to get credit for them. You only do things if you're likely to get credit for them.
There's an opportunity for a ministry that no one will ever find out about. Is your heart in it? And that's James' point in bringing up widows and orphans.
They won't be able to repay you. They won't be able to proclaim your name in the streets. It will go unnoticed. And so, there's no mixed motive when you're serving someone who cannot pay you back.
[36:46] And so, you only do things if you're likely to get credit for them. That's what dead faith does. Number four, symptom of dead faith, you don't meet the needs around you.

You don't meet the needs around you. Obviously, these would be needs that we know about. But what is your response when someone needs something in your life?
I'm not asking you to be taken advantage of. That's not what God is asking of you either. But one of the illustrations James brings up is you have a brother or sister in Christ. You know what their needs are.
And you just say, hey, I'm praying for you. Do you meet needs around you? Number five, sin doesn't bother you. Sin doesn't bother you unless it negatively impacts you.
Your own sin doesn't bother you. It doesn't convict you unless you get caught. The sin of others doesn't bother you unless it starts to rob you or impact you in some way. True faith in the living God is bothered by sin when it's exposed in our lives or someone else's.
[38:03] Not primarily because it impacts us but because it's against God. Number six, you constantly grumble.

You constantly grumble. people. And it's really easy to slip into this without knowing it. Just here recently I was like, oh, it's so warm. It doesn't feel like Christmas.
And I'm like, oh, it's so cold. What's going on? We're so wishy-washy. And so, does that mark you? Number seven, you're proud. You're proud.
And our initial defense is like, well, I'm not proud. That's exactly what a proud person would say. But do you know the signs of pride? There are many signs of pride. I'll give you a couple.
How often do you pray? We don't pray, we're proud. Prayer is an expression of dependence on the Lord. If we don't pray, we think we have sufficient resources in ourselves to deal with our lives.
[39:09] And another one, how often do you apologize or repent? And then when you do it, are you specific? True faith repents of sin specifically.

True faith apologizes specifically. And lastly, number eight, you don't read your Bible. You don't read your Bible. If you don't consume the spiritual food of God's word, your soul will atrophy.
If these things describe you, you might have dead faith. And certainly the seeds of all of those sins are in all of our hearts, but when they're known, when they're made known in our lives, how do you respond?
How do I respond? Do we repent or do we double down? do we have dead faith if those things describe you in an ongoing way? We will all be judged by our works, and what is our only hope of surviving that judgment?

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Our only hope is that Christ is not just the judge, he's the one who's been judged. He's not just the wrath bringer, he's the wrath bearer. He has paid for our sins in full for all the bad works of his people, and he delights to show us mercy.
[40:29] He delights to show love. My hope is that all of us in our church would have true and living faith, and not this dead faith that James is attacking and describing here.

If you don't have this true faith in Christ, turn from your sins, cry out to him, beg him for mercy. Faith without works is dead, but true faith obeys.
Which one describes us? Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the mercy you've shown us in Christ. We cannot move on from the incalculable gift you've given us of being freely justified by faith in your Son.
I pray for all of us here that we would examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith and repent of our sins when they're made known to us through your word and through the gift of your people.
We pray that we glorify and honor you in everything we do. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen.
Amen. Thank you.

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