

Back to the Basics

Authentic Faith

John 3:3 (NIV)

³In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

Prayer

Let's read together from John chapter 3 verses 19-21.

John 3:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

Perhaps the most important and at the same time one of the most frightening truths in all of the Scripture, is that there is a faith in God, there is a faith in Christ, there is a belief of Scripture, there is a belief of the gospel that does not save from hell. **Do you think this is possible from reading John 3:16-21?**

One of the most beautiful verses in the Scriptures is that God loves us, as clearly shown in verse 16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It's absolutely true that God loves us with a great love. After all, He gave us His one and only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He loves us, without a doubt. The question is if we choose to not only accept His love but also love Him in return. If we truly accept His love, we will obey Him, no matter what the cost. We are committed to obeying His commandments. This doesn't mean we will be sinless while we are in this world. The Bible **never** says that we will be sinless while we are yet here. And even though we will never be sinless in this life, the idea is that we will sin **less**, and **less**, and **less**, as time goes on.

Verses 19 and 20 speaks of people who know about Jesus but refuse to put their lives on the line for Him. They would rather live in their darkness that truly come to the Light and trust in

Him. Their lack of true faith is evidenced by what they do, not by what they say. Verse 21 speaks of one who is truly saved and their life is also evidenced by what they say **and** by what they do. Let's discover more by reading James 2:14-26.

James 2:14-26 (NIV)

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by **action**, is dead. ¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰You foolish man, do you want evidence that **faith without deeds is useless**? ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. ²⁵In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without deeds is dead**.

One of the most difficult Christian doctrines to understand, is that regarding faith in Christ and good works. Every religion in the world, other than Christianity, is based on some form of works that we need to do good works to obtain favor with God. There are even churches that call themselves Christian, basing eternal life with doing good works. True Christian doctrine has us understand that we are transformed on the **inside and** our lives will be transformed on the **outside**.

As we've mentioned before, it is possible to believe in God, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to even believe that what Christ did He actually did, to affirm the cross and the resurrection and never be delivered from sin and never be given eternal life. This is what James would call "dead faith." He mentions a dead faith in verses 17, 20 and verse 26, "**faith without works is dead**."

James' desire is to warn people about the reality of non-saving faith. Spiritual life produces obedience to Scripture, "**Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves**." In other words, don't be under the illusion that because you hear truth and your mind affirms truth that that is enough. James says that faith is not real without a corresponding change of life, without a transformation, without a demonstration that has evidence. The point then that he's making is very clear. Non-saving dead lifeless faith is known by the absence of righteous deeds.

Do you know of any "Christians" who are deceived and have a dead faith?

In an effort to reach others for Christ, there has become a doctrine in many good, contemporary churches today that all you have to do is to earnestly pray and ask Jesus into your heart and you will be born again. All you have to do is repent of your sins and you will be saved. And then, all you have to do is to then go to church and learn about the Bible and you will know you are saved. While it is correct that true Christians ask Jesus to save them from their sins, they repent of their sins, go to church and learn about the Bible. Although this is the pattern of saved Christians, God's Word is clear that this pattern alone does not mean that your sins are forgiven. Because of this contemporary doctrine, churches are literally filled with people who are under the delusion that they have saving faith and are looking forward to heaven when the fact is there has never been a transformed life and therefore there's never been a justifying change in their inner most being. Today's church is full of problems because it is filled with unbelievers, in leadership positions, people thinking and saying they are Christians but not born again ... very sad.

This is exactly what James is after in this text. The first thing he does in verse 14 to 20 is to describe dead faith. He says that **dead faith has three characteristics. Number one, an empty confession:**

James 2:14 (NIV)

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man **claims to have faith** but has **no deeds**? Can such faith save him?

And of course the answer is no. That kind of faith can't save him. Dead faith is an empty confession. It is a man who simply says he is a Christian and never has the corresponding life change. There is no patient endurance in trials. There is no true holiness, purity, humility and open reception of God's truth. There is no obedience and submission to the Word. There is no control of the tongue. There is no godly compassion. There is no brotherly love. There is no abstinence from worldly things. There is no impartiality.

The saving work of God will always provide repentance, love for God, love for Christ, hunger for righteousness, desire to know the Word, hatred of sin, obedience to God and submissiveness to His will. In fact, if you look at Hebrews chapter 11, you'll meet all the heroes of faith and you will find that all the heroes of faith were known by their works. Every one of them is characterized by what he or she did because that's the only way faith can be demonstrated.

The **second** thing James says is that false or a dead faith is indicated by **a false compassion.**

James 2:15-16 (NIV)

¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

He's saying warm yourself and fill yourself, don't bother me with your problems. He's saying I hope you can be warmed and I hope you can be filled by somebody else, certainly not me. And he goes on his way. What does that profit, he asks at the end of verse 16? What good is that kind of faith that knows no compassion? What good is that kind of faith that knows no brotherly love? So then, a false compassion can be added to empty confession.

The **third** element of non-saving false dead faith is **a shallow conviction**. It's brought out in verse 19.

James 2:19 (NIV)

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

In other words, at best your faith is demon faith. Don't pat yourself on the back because you believe in God. The demons know all about God.

In dead faith there's no spiritual triumph in trouble. There's no living faith that evidences itself with endurance, with joy and difficulty. There's no eager readiness to respond to the Word. There's no hunger and longing for purity. There's no close self-examination to see sin. There's no continual driving internal desire to be exposed to the cleansing of the Word. There's no control of your tongue. You talk just like the unbelievers do. There's no difference in the way you talk either before or after you claimed Christ as your Savior. There's no true compassion, love and generosity to those in serious distress. And there's no broken, humble, meek spirit. There is a lack of real transformation.

Do you know of any “Christians” who made an empty confession, have a false compassion and lack a true conviction?

Now James had three elements or characteristics of dead faith, he also has **three illustrations of living faith. Number one is Abraham**. And this goes from verse 21 to 24, let's begin at verse 21.

James 2:21-26 (NIV)

²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete **by what he did**. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God's friend. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

Now this verse has really caused fits for many people. Was Abraham justified by his works? We need to understand what James is saying. “Was not Abraham our father?” Now there is a sense in which Abraham is the father of all Jews racially, but James has in mind that Abraham is the father of all people who believe in God unto salvation, whether they are Jew or Gentile. He is in a sense the father of all the faithful, of all those who believe. There is a spiritual sense

in which all who believe are somehow connected to Abraham. He is the model of faith and we sort of follow that model. He is the classic illustration of saving faith. In that sense, he is the father of the faithful.

But when did this transformation occur in his life? That takes us all the way back to the beginning when God called him in Ur of the Chaldees and said,

Genesis 12:1 (NIV)

¹The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.

He was probably about 75 years old at the time of his calling. And he believed God. He picked up everything, left a pagan land and followed his faith in the true God. We don’t know how much revelation he had, probably a very little bit. But God had sovereignly worked on his heart and there was a response of faith. **He started the walk of faith, the life of faith.** And at that instant, he was granted righteousness.

You say, “Well, then what does James mean when it says here in James, ‘**Was not Abraham our father justified by works?**’” Please understand, Abraham was justified **by faith before God** but he was justified **by works before men**. Do you see the difference? That’s the whole point James is making. Works are the only way his faith can be seen and verified as real saving faith by **himself** or any other man. The only way **you** can know that you are genuinely redeemed is to see the pattern of godliness in your life. The **only** way you can know it is to see **your life**.

Now notice what James says, he identifies very specifically **when** Abraham was justified by works. He says it was when he offered Isaac his son on the altar. That’s when the whole world could see the reality of his faith and he having been justified before God already was now justified before men.

Genesis 22:1-2 (NIV)

¹Some time later God **tested** Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied.

²Then God said, “Take your son, your **only** son, Isaac, whom you **love**, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”

This is very important. This is a test of what? It’s a test of Abraham’s faith in order to demonstrate its reality, its genuineness. When you first come to Christ, **you will be tested also**.

Absolutely unbelievable. Abraham knows this. He knows that God has made him a promise. And God made him a promise years ago. By this time Isaac is maybe ten to fifteen years old. This is nearly fifty years after he first believed God. And he’s been walking in this promise all these years, somewhere between forty and fifty years. And God’s been saying your seed will be as the sands of the sea and as the stars of heaven and I’ll make out of your loins a great nation, whoever blesses them will be blessed and whoever curses them will be cursed. And

Abraham has believed this for years, even though he has no daughter, he has no son, he has no child and he's married to an old lady who's barren. Finally God gives him a child when he's a hundred years old. Now ten years later, or fifteen, when he's between 110 and 115 and all he has to look at regarding this promise of a seed as wide as the sand of the sea is one measly kid. And now God comes to him and says take that kid to Mount Moriah and kill him. And everything he knows about the covenant keeping character of God is violated in his mind. And everything he knows about God's standard of sacrifice is violated because God has never required human sacrifice, never permitted it. It's murder.

How can God reverse Himself? How can God contradict everything about His nature that I know to be true? God says take your son and offer him as a sacrifice. What about His nature? What about His truthfulness? What about His faithfulness? This will violate everything he knows to be true about God. What does he do? Does he argue with God? No. Here is the evidence of his faith, no questions asked.

Genesis 22:3-5 (NIV)

³Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

Here's his faith. How's he going to do that? God says go kill the son. He says I'll be back and so will he, we'll come back.

Genesis 22:6-8 (NIV)

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, ⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" ⁸Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

Abraham believed in his heart that God would ultimately provide the sacrifice.

Genesis 22:9 (NIV)

⁹When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

We don't know whether Isaac just said, "Here I am, tie me up," or whether there was a little bit of discussion or whether there was a fight. But anyway, Abraham laid Isaac on the altar.

Genesis 22:10-13 (NIV)

¹⁰Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹²"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." ¹³Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Justified by faith in believing God and justified by works in this greatest act of human sacrifice on his part, and we don't mean the sacrifice of Isaac, we mean the sacrifice of Abraham. This was a truly a crisis of crises. He was a man of great faith all through his life but his faith reached its height at this point.

So, James concludes in verse 22, look at it. ²²**You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.** Do you see that? There's no opposition, that's the point. There's no argument, there's no debate. Sanctifying works support the reality of saving faith. Where you have a man who has imputed righteousness, you will have a man who has manifest righteousness. Where you have a man who is made just before God, you will have a man who will be made just before men. Where you have a man who has received righteousness, you have a man who will show that righteousness.

The **second illustration** is in verse 25.

James 2:25 (NIV)

²⁵**In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?**

Now Abraham was a Jew, Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham's a man, Rahab is a woman. Abraham is a good man. Rahab is an evil woman. Abraham, a noble Chaldean, Rahab a degraded Canaanite. Abraham was a great leader, Rahab a common follower. Abraham was at the top of the social order, Rahab at the bottom. Abraham was the beneficiary of much divine leadership and divine guidance, Rahab a total pagan. Abraham received direct revelation from God, Rahab having only received very indirect revelation about God. And yet if you read the list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, Abraham is there and so is Rahab. And when you go to Matthew chapter 1 and you read the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph and Luke chapter 3 with the genealogy of Jesus through Mary, Abraham is there and so is Rahab. The Messiah Jesus Christ came through the loins of Rahab, a harlot.

In the same way, Abraham was considered righteous, Rahab was considered righteous.

Likewise, didn't this woman of the worst kind demonstrate her true salvation by what she did? Was not the harlot justified by works? Again you must make the same two-fold feature in understanding this very important account. Let's just mention from Joshua chapter 2 a couple

of things about the story of Rahab. Rahab was a harlot living in Jericho. She ran an inn and inns were brothels and she had women in her inn to sleep with men and that was how she made her living. Here was a woman basically who was in the pit of moral muck. She sold her body for sexual favors. As a Canaanite, she had succumbed to the prevailing immorality of her environment. And yet, she believes in the true God. It's accounted to her for righteousness. So into the land has come the wonderful people of God in mass and they are there because God's going to give them Canaan. They arrive at Jericho. They're obviously going to take Jericho so they send some spies in to spy out the city and see what's there. The spies go in. They stay in an inn. Rahab owns the inn. Rahab is a harlot. They're not there for those purposes; they're simply there to lodge. This woman then takes in these spies. When she gets the spies there, she obviously finds out who they are.

In Joshua chapter 2, Rahab believed that God was the true God. She believed that God was the God of miracles who had led His people out of Egypt. She believed that God was the God of power who had defeated the Amorite kings. She believed all she knew about God, the true God, and it was imputed to her for righteousness. At that point, she was justified by her faith. That transformation was then made manifest to men. Again, look at James 2:25, [was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did <justified by works> when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?](#)

So, again, it's the same idea. Rahab believed the truth; then it was imputed to her for righteousness by her faith and then that righteousness was vindicated by the action she took risking her own life to save the life of those spies. She demonstrated her faith by works.

Now what kind of works support true salvation? Going to church? No, it doesn't say, and she went over and worshiped God. It doesn't say of Abraham that he built an altar and worshiped God. In both cases the visible vindication of their justification was putting their life and their dreams and their hopes on the line. That is the kind of work that God wants us to understand that defines sanctification and is demonstrated in true faith. It isn't that you went to church, read a Bible, sang a song or even gave money. It is that you are so supremely committed to God that you would sacrifice your hopes and dreams and ambitions and yes, you would risk your own life to be true to your faith, that's the issue.

You can't tell a person's faith is real because they come to Bible study. Look at your salvation in the whirlpool of life choices. How a young person who comes to church or even a Bible study and someone comes along that looks good and blinks the eyes properly and they go off with an unbeliever? And they sacrifice everything that they once held dear because what they really hold dear has nothing to do with divine things. Or the person who does very well living for Christ until it costs them their family or their job or whatever. Or until the Lord sort of puts a responsibility on them that's going to cost them some of material value. Or maybe it's something that might even be a direction in life that will move them away from what their ambition has always been. They say no to that and they reach out for the things they really love. Yes it's in the direction of the decisions of life where hopes and dreams and destiny and

ambition and life itself is on the line that true faith always reveals itself. And the fact of the matter is that when you get into that whirlpool of decisions, where either your faith is authentic or, sad to say, you're self-deceived. What a tragedy. And James then concludes with **a final analogy, first** Abraham, then Rahab, and finally the analogy of a corpse, very vivid.

James 2:26 (NIV)

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

It's an analogy. And in both cases if the second member is missing, the result is death. If the spirit is missing from the body, you have death. If works is missing from faith, you have death. A body without the divinely imparted life is nothing but a stinking putrefied rotting corpse. A body without life is putrid. It has absolutely no value. It ought to be put in the ground and covered up with dirt or it will rot everything it touches. And so is belief without behavior, just as putrid, just as decaying, just as loathsome, just as dead. This faith is a corpse lying in a casket all dressed up, all made up, looking very life like but with no internal life, no breath, no movement, nothing but a painted smile made to look alive.

So, James is really saying is to look at yourself. Do you have a belief without behavior? Do you say you believe but not obey? Are you religious but you don't long to serve God? You don't love Him to the point where whatever it may cost you you're willing to pay that price because He is supremely dear to you? That's the question James wants us to ask of ourselves, the test of living faith is in the terrible moment of life's pressures when everything is at the crossroads, do you choose to honor God no matter what the cost? Abraham did. Rahab did. Have you proved your salvation? Now to conclude our meeting time, let's all again read John 3:3: together.

Now we know that salvation and going to heaven requires a relationship and that relationship will always produce a transformed life.

Has your faith been justified by works before men? Has your faith been tested? Did you pass the test? Is your faith living or dead?

John 3:3 (NIV)

³In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Prayer

For more information, reference <http://www.gty.org/Resources/Transcripts/90-8>.