

“Fulfill Your Destiny”

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Today’s epistle lesson comes from the second chapter of James, verses 14 through 26. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith without works is barren? Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works.”

“Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness’, and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. Holy God, bless the reading, hearing, understanding, and doing of your living and active word today. Amen.

In the portion of scripture just read, James is talking about a faith that acts and goes out and proves it. James says if you believe in God then let me see it! The question we need to ask ourselves is this. In whom do you believe, and what do you believe? We're not saved by having faith in faith; we're saved by faith in Christ.

Faith that's alive is going to lead to action, and it's more than intellectual assent. Genuine faith is going to lead to obedience on the part of our will. Genuine faith that's alive faith isn't a one-time event. Faith that's alive is making plans today to demonstrate their belief tomorrow. Genuine faith expresses its self continually.

James is firm on saying that good works is the expression of our faith, but he's also the first to say at the beginning of chapter 2 how faith comes first in our Christian lives. James starts out in this chapter and writes, "My brothers and sisters . . ." So, he's writing to those who already have faith.

James says that faith is the root from which good works grow! Take a listen to the summary points James makes in this chapter. Verse 17—"So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." Verse 20—"Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?" Verse 24—"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone", and verse 26—"For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

Verse 14 says the following. "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?" Let me ask you this. Is there ever a separation between faith and works? Can we divorce faith from works?

In verse 21, James uses Abraham as an example. You may know that God declared Abraham righteous because of his faith. Abraham believed God when

God said that his offspring would be as the sands of the seas and as the stars of the sky, but the fact is this—Abraham went on to *complete* his faith by offering his son Isaac on the altar. And he did that knowing that God said, “Through Isaac your descendants shall be named.” Abraham *completed* his faith with works, and works became active along *with* his faith.

Next James sites a case in verse 15 and 16. Verse 15 reads, “If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food . . .” In the Book of Acts this was the first fight in the early church. James realized there was a genuine need in the Jerusalem church; people were hungry! The goal was to have all things in common and share what others needed. So James advances the need to feed the hungry.

Listen to what James says, and I’m paraphrasing some of this. If someone who lacks a warm coat and you say to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” Christians around the world attempt to answer the needs of the poor by saying a quick prayer for the hungry. It’s like saying, “Off you go now; try not to worry. *Do* keep warm and *eat* plenty.” I’m not certain this kind of prayer has much power in its effects until the person gets involved in fulfilling the need.

The time comes when God expects us to act on what we say we believe. James gives the conclusion. “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” Let me ask you, what happens to the body when the spirit leaves? In what kind of condition is it in? It’s dead right? So there’s a unity of body and spirit that’s required for life, and it’s the same for faith and works! They belong side by side in a living genuine experience that’s Christian. Our faith must be more than just a profession; its got to express itself in action.

So to tie this thing up, here’s where the rubber meets the road. God can see your faith, but your congregation, men and women, and our community are waiting

to see your works! Let's do what we can to express and act out what we believe. Christ has fashioned us so wonderfully and so exceptionally. God has a plan for each of us to live a life of good deeds, and it's already prepared for us. It's a perfect plan, but God doesn't force that plan to come to pass .We have to make the choice. I encourage you in the Lord, fulfill your destiny. Amen.