

Faith Without Good Work Is Dead

'Faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself ... Just as the body apart from the spirit (of life) is dead, so also faith without good works is dead' (James 2:17 & 26).

James (in Hebrew, Jacob or Jaakov) was the sibling brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3), not just a brother in the faith. He grew up with Jesus and their brothers Joses, Judah and Simon plus their sisters and cousins. Joseph and Mary would have taught their children about creation, the history of the Jewish people, the Laws of Moses and the writings of the prophets, learning together in this special, world's first and only Messianic family. James would have developed a deep knowledge of the ways and purposes of God plus the intention of God to work alongside all of His believers, both Jewish people and Gentiles. James did not soften his speech but voiced his opinion in straight, direct language. In this context 'works' mean righteous actions, tasks, behaviour, being helpful, showing mercy and kindness or generally doing good deeds, done in obedience as God instructed us to love our neighbours. We will be eternally judged according to what we have done while on earth in our mortal earthly bodies. We will be rewarded according to our 'works'. When we finally get to heaven our immortal bodies will be clothed in pure white linen garments that signify righteous acts or actions.

James wrote, "My brothers (in the faith), do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus our Messiah of glory with partiality (or bias). If a man with a gold ring, wearing fine clothing comes into your synagogue, and a poor man in dirty clothing also comes in and you pay special attention to the man who wears the fine clothing and say, 'Sit here in a good place,' and you tell the poor man, 'Stand there,' or 'Sit by my footstool', you have shown partiality among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts. Listen my beloved brothers, God chose those who are financially poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him, but you have dishonoured the poor man. It is the rich who oppress you and personally drag you before the courts. They blaspheme the Lord's honourable name by which you are called. If you fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You will love your neighbour as you love yourself,' you do well, but if you show partiality (bias, racism, sexism, prejudice or prefer the wealthy), you commit sin and are being convicted by the law as transgressors. Whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles in one point has become guilty of all" (James 2:1 to 10).

'God said, "Do not commit adultery and do not commit murder." If you do not commit adultery but murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. Speak and behave as men who are to be judged by a law of freedom (from the penalty of eternal doom). Judgment is without mercy to those who have shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. What good is it my brothers, if a man says he has faith but has no works? Can faith (alone) save him? If a brother or sister (in the faith) is without clothing and lacks daily food and one of you tells them, 'Go in peace, be warm and filled,' and yet you do not give them the things the body needs, what good is it? So faith, if it has no works is dead in itself ... You believe God is One. You do well. The demons also believe and shudder. Do you want to know, vain man, faith apart from works is dead? Abraham our forefather was justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar. You see, faith worked with his works and by his works, his faith was perfected and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. You see then, by works a man is justified and not only by faith ... Just as the body apart from the spirit (of life) is dead, so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:11 to 26).

We are saved solely by the unmerited grace and mercy of God (Acts 15:11; Ephesians 2:5; 2 Timothy 1:9) along with our faith and the blood and cross of Jesus. Doing good works cannot save our soul but once we are saved we must become faithful servants. 'When the kindness of God our Saviour and His love toward mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness which we did ourselves but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us richly, through Jesus our Saviour so being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life' (Titus 3:4 to 7). A rejected believer is the servant who refuses to serve the Lord and will be called the wicked, unfaithful, worthless servant and will be cast into outer darkness (Matthew 25:1 to 30). God gives us all the abilities and provisions we need to serve Him and on Judgement Day we will be rewarded, each of us according to our works, both good and bad. 'God will bring every work into judgment ... whether it is good or whether it is evil' (Ecclesiastes 12:14). 'We must all be revealed before the Judgment Seat of Jesus so each one may receive the rewards in the (new immortal) body, according to what he has done (on earth) whether good or bad' (2 Corinthians 5:10). 'Each person's work will be revealed. For Judgement Day will declare it because it is revealed in fire, and the fire itself will test what sort of work each person's work is. If anyone's work remains which they built on, they will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, they will suffer loss but they themselves will be saved but as through fire' (1 Corinthians 3:13 to 15).

Our salvation is by faith but our works are what gives us eternal rewards after Judgement Day. We are called to be always ready to do what is right. 'By grace you have been saved through faith, and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of our works so no one can boast. We are God's workmanship, created in Jesus for good works' (Ephesians 2:8 & 9, 10). We must never grow weary of doing good things to serve the Lord (2 Thessalonians 3:13). 'In all things, show yourself an example of good works, in your teaching by showing integrity ... looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus, Who gave Himself for us so He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good works ... Remind them to be in subjection to rulers and to authorities, to be obedient and to be ready for every good work ... Let our people also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses so they may not be unfruitful' (Titus 2:7,13 & 14; 3:1 & 14).

James gave an example of belief without righteous 'works'. James says even the demons believe but they will never be saved or redeemed. They know for sure God exists and they are afraid but there is no hope for them (James 2:19). James gave us two examples of righteousness by works. Abraham believed God, believed in God and was absolutely obedient to what God told him to do, even to the point of almost slaying his son of promise, Isaac (James 2:21 to 24). Abraham was rewarded eternally by being an ancestor of Jesus. James then gave the righteous actions of Rahab as his second example. Rahab supported herself and her family by prostitution which is sin but we must remember, there was no financial government support in those days. She was not Jewish but had faith in the God of Israel and risked her life to save the Jewish spies. Through her brave actions she was eternally rewarded by becoming an ancestor of Jesus becoming part of the world's only Messianic family by marrying Salmon and they became the parents of Boaz, grandparents of Obed and great-grandparents of Jesse the father of David (Matthew 1:5 & 6). The point James was making is this, salvation is by faith and the grace and mercy of God. After salvation, the change in our lives should be evident by our 'works' or 'fruit'. Every one of us is given righteous works to do according to God's will and according to our personal ability and circumstances.

We should delight to do the will of God, which is His purpose for our lives (Psalm 40:8). Doing the Lord's will should not be a chore to us but should bring a sense of satisfaction. By serving God according to His will, we are reaching out to lost souls and God is actually working with us to increase the numbers of people who will eventually be in the Kingdom of God (Acts 6:7). Serving God is a privilege given only to people who love Him and who have put their faith in Him. So what exactly are the tasks God says are 'good works'. Leading people, especially children to God (Deuteronomy 6:7; Matthew 19:14). Caring for widows and children who have lost one or both parents (James 1:27) and not taking advantage of their vulnerability (Exodus 22:22). Helping the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7 & 8; Galatians 2:10) and not taking advantage of their vulnerability (Exodus 23:6). Giving something as small as a cup of water to a child is the same as giving Jesus a drink (Mark 9:41). By feeding and giving water to hungry and thirsty people, clothing people who need it, offering shelter to homeless, visiting the sick, visiting prisoners, giving people our time and patience are all good works. When we do these things for others, we are doing these things for Jesus. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, when you did these things to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it for Me ... Truly I tell you, when you did not do these things to one of the least of these, you did not do it for Me" (Matthew 25:40 & 45). When we refuse to do things like these, we are refusing to minister to Jesus. 'To those who know to do good and does not do it, to them it is sin' (James 4:17). 'Encourage the fainthearted, support the weak and be patient toward all' (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Supporting missionaries is as good as going out on the mission field and we receive the same eternal reward (1 Corinthians 3:8).

The heavenly symbol of faithful service to the Lord is white garments. 'They will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. They who overcome will be arrayed in white garments and I will in no way blot their name out of the Book of Life and I will confess their name before My Father and before His angels' (Revelation 3:4 & 5). 'Behold, a great multitude which no man could number ... standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes with palm branches in their hands ... These who are arrayed in white robes ... are those who came out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Revelation 7:9, 13 & 14). 'Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad and let us give Him the glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His Bride has made herself ready. She was permitted to array herself in bright, pure, fine linen, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of God's people. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:7 to 9).

We cannot get into the marriage feast of the Lamb without the garments of servitude. Being lazy, complacent and disobedient can cost people their salvation. Although we are saved by grace, after we are saved God expects us to do His work and show plenty of good spiritual 'fruit'. 'Walk worthily of the Lord to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God' (Colossians 1:10). We must use the talents God has given to us to do His works. People do not want to know their own righteousness is dead but faith without works is dead faith. In reverse, works without Godly faith are just as dead. 'We all (all of mankind) have become as one who is unclean and all our righteousness is equal to a

filthy garment' (Isaiah 64:6) as opposed to a pure white garment that reveals righteous acts. People who believe they are doing 'good things' to serve God are going to be shocked when they discover their works were never what God intended for them and they will be blown away like chaff. 'You will dream up chaff. You will bring forth stubble. Your own breath is a fire that will devour you. The people will be like the burning of lime, like thorns that are cut down and burned in the fire' (Isaiah 33:11 & 12). 'Every tree that does not grow good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven but those who do the will of My Father Who is in heaven. Many will tell Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, in Your name cast out demons and in Your name do many mighty works?' I will tell them, "I never knew you. Depart from Me you who work iniquity'" (Matthew 7:19 to 23). Sadly, these rejected people did works they thought would please God instead of doing works in obedience to God.

One example of wicked 'works' religious people dream up and believe they are doing a service for God is terrorism perpetrated by misguided, radical Muslims. They actually believe what they are doing and their murderous acts, pleases God. How wrong they are! Their faith truly is dead. When anyone harms a Jewish person, Jesus takes it personally and will send those murderous people to eternal damnation. Jesus warned, "Yes, the time will come when whoever kills you will think he offers service to God. They will do these things because they have never known the Father nor Me" (John 16:2 & 3). Anyone who commits terrorism does not really know God nor do they know Jesus. All terrorists will be 'cut down' and thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is the second and final death. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, when you did these (wicked) things to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me. Depart from Me you cursed, into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his fallen angels" (Matthew 25:40 & 41).

It is not hard to do what is right by mankind. It is written, we must love the Lord first and love our neighbour as much as we love ourselves and by doing so, we fulfil all of God's laws written down for us to follow (Matthew 22:37 to 40). Faith without works is dead but faith filled with good works is alive and vibrant for all of eternity. In return for our efforts we will be given eternal gifts like a garment of salvation, robes of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8), a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4) and we will fellowship with holy angels once we are in heaven. 'You have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the living God, the Heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable multitudes of holy angels, to the general assembly (in heaven) and the assembly of the Firstborn (Jesus) who are enrolled in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the (redeemed) spirits of just men made perfect (by the blood of Jesus), to Jesus Himself, the Mediator of a New Covenant' (Hebrews 12:22 to 24).

Amen and God bless you.

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