

Undivided Faith

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[0 : 00] Hello. Hi, good morning, Church. Today our Bible reading will be from James chapter 2, verse 14 to verse 26. So if you kindly turn to your Bibles. Okay, verse 14.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

If one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead.

But someone will say, you have faith, I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

You believe that there is one God? Good. Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish person. Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

[1 : 48] Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did.

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

And he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

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?

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[3 : 15] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. The outline is also in the bulletin as well. Well, as we come together to listen to God's word, let's prepare our hearts by praying.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for reminding us already this morning of all that you've done. Thank you for the Lord Jesus who left the air of heaven, who chose to come in the flesh to this earth, to come to die on the cross, to show your lavish mercy on us.

Father, help us to not forget that this morning, that when we say that we have faith in Christ, it is this Christ in whom we have faith in.

[4 : 27] The living Christ who loves us so much are to do all this. And so, Father, as we hear your word as well, please would you help us to respond in the right way, help us to truly respond by faith in our hearts and in our actions.

By your spirit, will you help us to listen well this morning. All this we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen. Excuse me.

Now, over the last couple of weeks, we've heard about the marks of a real Christian and a real Christian church. But today, we're going to zoom in on something a little more specific, the marks of true living faith.

I wonder what picture enters your mind if I were to ask you to imagine a person of great faith. What would he or she look like? Well, let me just read to you a couple of verses from the Gospel of Mark and let me know what you think about this person.

I think it should appear on the screen as well. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?

[5 : 52] Now, this person looks like a person of great faith. He doesn't just walk. He runs to Jesus and falls before him. He's excited. He's wholehearted.

He's shouting at the top of his voice and he acknowledges who Jesus is. He says, Oh, you are the Son of God. What are you going to do with me, Jesus? There's one problem though.

Who is this person? He answers a few verses later. My name is Legion. This is a demon or a host of demons speaking.

This is demonic faith. And you can be certain that's not the kind of faith we're supposed to have. Let me just read to you a verse from another gospel, this time John's gospel.

Now, while Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. Excellent. This is what we want, isn't it?

[6 : 58] We pray for God to send signs and wonders. People see the signs and wonders and they put their faith in Jesus. After all, as Nicodemus, the great Jewish teacher, says to Jesus just a little later on, he says, No one could perform the signs you are doing, Jesus, if God were not with him.

So these people want to be with God. They have faith. Or do they? For in the very next verse, we are told how Jesus responded to their act of believing in him.

But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. Jesus did not think their faith was genuine or living.

But if that doesn't show living faith, well, what does? That's what the brother of Jesus, Pastor James, is concerned with this morning. In today's passage, he wants us to see what true living faith looks like.

I hope it was clear to you as the passage was being read that this is his main subject matter. Just about every verse mentions it. And James' big point, as always, is simple.

[8 : 11] We find it in verse 14. Let me read it. What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? Faith in Jesus Christ that does not result in godly actions, James says, is dead.

It's a sham. It's empty. It's nothing. You can call it faith all you like, but it's no good because it isn't actually faith.

Now look closely again at verse 14. Notice that James isn't talking about someone who has faith. He is talking about someone who claims to have faith.

But if this person's claim to faith produces zero output, then he doesn't actually have true living faith.

[9 : 09] He's not connected to the living Christ. It's like if I claim to have a million dollars in my bank account. But what if I also say that there is no bank or ATM machine in the world where I can withdraw that money from?

I'm not actually connected to that supposed million dollars. So my claim to that million dollars is empty for all intents and purposes it's shown to be false.

That's James' big point. Faith in Jesus Christ that does not result in godly action is dead.

It's false faith. Now this is important to get early on because otherwise we might struggle to understand what James is saying for the rest of today's passage.

He's speaking in particular against false faith. And his big purpose in telling us his big point is also quite simple. He wants us to avoid having this kind of false faith.

[10 : 16] Because this is no mere academic matter. Such faith cannot save. If I were kidnapped and the kidnappers demanded that I pay a million dollars to them for my freedom, well what good is my earlier mere claim to have a million dollars?

If I can't produce it, can it save me? It's useless. And James doesn't want us to have such useless faith. Indeed what he wants us to have is a living faith.

One that does save. That's his big purpose. He's not here to condemn. Notice just like last week he says, my brothers and sisters.

He regards the people he's writing to as Christians, not apostates. But he is here to warn once again, this morning he's going to say plenty of challenging stuff.

But that's because he wants the best for us. So he tells us what living faith looks like. And as he does so, he reminds us, don't deceive yourselves.

[11 : 27] There will be some among us here this morning who especially need to hear what he's about to say. So let God's word of truth do its work in us, humbly accept it.

Listen. Take it to heart. Exercise that living faith. The Bible wants what's best for us. I want what's best for us.

So what does living faith look like? Well, firstly, living faith is not merely verbal. Living faith is not merely verbal. Just like last week, James paints a scenario for us.

Verse 15. Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about your physical needs, what good is it? So what we have here is a man, not necessarily fully naked, but certainly without anything that could pass for proper clothes. He is stunted because he is malnourished, having to survive on just a small portion of your teal porridge every day.

[12 : 39] And you see him and you say, Shalom. Go in peace. Very religious sounding. Very nice. And you might follow it up with advice.

Hey, abang, keep warm and well fed, okay? You look very skinny. You should eat more. It's getting cold. Better dress up. And you might even say a prayer.

May the good Lord keep you warm and well fed. But what good is it? The answer is obvious.

No good. James is saying words without any corresponding action is useless. They carry no meaning. And they expose our faith as dead, not living.

Now, James isn't saying, of course, that words are of no use. Indeed, we'll see next week how much power words can carry.

[13 : 44] And to pray, of course, is a good thing. But he's saying when words act as a cover for a failure to act, when words are used to excuse inaction, then it's no good.

It's when a brother or sister has been unemployed for a long time and we say, oh, the Lord is good. The Lord will provide.

But once the person is out of mind, out of sight, rather, the person is out of mind. It's when a single mother with young children is sick and we say, don't worry, don't worry.

Take it easy. And we leave it at that without considering how in the world she's going to take it easy. when meals have to be prepared, children have to be sent to school, and the floor has to be swept. It's when we say to a person going through a difficult time, I'll pray for you, but forget to do so, that that's inaction in itself, or we fail to follow up.

[14 : 49] It's when we say to another overwhelmed person, the Lord will guide you. Keep praying without realizing that the person has been praying and the Lord is expecting you to be the answer to his prayers.

Now, James is not asking us to play the Messiah. He's not asking us to fix every single problem that comes our way as if we could. He's not saying that somehow you're a worse Christian if you're not volunteering at the women's shelter, or you're not delivering food to the homeless, or you're not up to date about the latest on the intricate web of human trafficking.

Now, he's not saying that. Our calling is not to save the world, but to serve the one whose job it is. Now, some of us will directly serve him in the spheres that I've just mentioned, but not all of us will. But although serving him doesn't mean that we do everything, it does mean we do something, especially with regards to loving our neighbour.

It could be just an offer to babysit for the overworked parents so that they can go to a Bible study or go on a date night. It could be simply volunteering to drive someone to a hospital appointment.

[16 : 14] That's the nature of living faith. It's not merely verbal. And we have to work out what actually does serve our neighbour, not what we think will serve our neighbour.

For instance, when we want to help a sick or grieving person, don't just say, if you need anything, just call me. I've been guilty of this before.

Because the person probably won't be in a state of mind to be able to think about how you can help. So it actually makes it worse. You put actually more burdens on them. We think we're serving our neighbour, but we're not.

So instead, offer something specific. Offer to bring dinner one evening. Offer to bathe the dog. Offer a listening ear. Or if visiting is actually a bad idea, then don't offer, but stay away for the moment. If that is what would do good to your neighbour, that's what serving your neighbour is all about, it's actually what would actually do good to them, not what you think is good. But whatever way it is, the point is clear.

[17 : 29] Living faith must never be mere sentiment without action. Otherwise, it's dead. Verse 17. In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, it's dead.

One commentator puts it well. This kind of inaction is a mute but powerful testimony to its deadness. Dead bodies do nothing.

By contrast, action can give vivid testimony to our living faith in our living Christ. This week, I was listening to one of the daughters of Pastor Raymond Corp, talking about her father.

And she recounts an incident in a rather incredulous tone when he came across a shirtless beggar at Puduraya, I think it was. His daughter said in a rather breathless way, he just took off his shirt there and then and gave it to him.

That simple incident clearly made an impression on beggar and daughter alike. Living faith is not merely verbal.

[18 : 51] Secondly, living faith is not merely doctrinal. Living faith is not merely doctrinal. Now, James now anticipates an objection to what he's said so far, verse 18.

But someone will say, you have faith, I have deeds. The point the objector is making is this. Hey, James, you know we're all different.

We all have different spiritual gifts, right? We're all differently wired. We all have our own way of being Christian. So for some Christians, they have faith.

Maybe they're the ones who are very good at praying, or they're the ones who are very good at reading and note taking. And then there are some of us who are the doing types.

We might not be at Bible study, but we're at the gotong royong, we're bringing the refreshments. You just said that not everyone can do everything, right? So you've got faith, I have deeds. But James says to divide faith and deeds like this is pure nonsense.

[20 : 02] Verse 18 again. Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by my deeds. They can't be separated.

Suppose I have the best recipe for nasi lemak, sambal sotong in the world. I know exactly the right amount of coconut milk to add, the right length of time to fry the anchovies, the right way to pound the paste, all thanks to this recipe.

But to actually eat it, what do I need? Well, first of all, I do need this recipe, no recipe, no way to get started. But then I also need to cook it.

I can only show you that this recipe is the real deal, that is the best recipe in the world by cooking it. Otherwise, it remains something on paper or in my head.

The proof has to be in the pudding, as they say, or in this case, the actual nasi lemak. same with faith. The only way to show the genuineness of our faith is in action.

[21 : 10] We have to cook it. Show me your faith without deeds, James says, implying that you can't, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

There's no other way to see faith. If there is no action, it remains an abstraction. faith and deeds are undivided.

Living faith is not mere knowledge, but knowledge in action. To illustrate how living faith must go beyond mere knowledge, James now talks about demonic faith.

Verse 19, you believe that there is one God, good, even the demons believe that, and shudder. Demons, as you know, do no good works, but they sure are spot on with their beliefs.

They know how to quote the Shema, which is what every young Jew would know from the time they were a child, which is Deuteronomy 6, which says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[22 : 25] their doctrine is correct, but correct doctrine is not equivalent to a living faith. It's like that recipe again.

Unless it's cooked, it brings nothing to the table. Living faith is not merely doctrinal. So, do you know there is a God?

Do you know that he is one? this morning, do you know who Jesus is? Congratulations, you have much in common with the demons. Do you differentiate your beliefs from the atheists and the secularists and the Taoists?

Are you able to answer every question in the Bible study that matches the leader's guide? Well done. Your theology is just like the demons. Do you see how living faith cannot merely be doctrinal? If it was, the demons possess living faith. But Pastor James says, doctrine in itself is necessary but not sufficient.

[23 : 37] To have living faith, we need to see doctrine in action. Now, James is not saying doctrine is unimportant. All throughout this letter, he shows deep knowledge of the Old Testament and what

Jesus teaches.

Think about last week when he quoted Leviticus to argue his point. So he clearly thinks doctrine is important. He's not saying right beliefs don't matter. In our context, in Sarawak, where unfortunately false teaching exists and people are often led astray without realizing it, we do need to emphasize how essential doctrine is.

But in emphasizing that, we need to be careful. We need to say at the same time that living faith is doctrine lived out, not just doctrine in our heads.

Living faith knows Jesus personally. And if we truly know Jesus, it will show. This morning, is your faith doctrinally correct but did?

Some of you this morning believe the right things. You might come to church week after week. You might even be able to give a correct definition of the gospel. You don't live obviously immoral lives. [24 : 57] But do you know Jesus? Is he in the driving seat of your life? Or is he just a passenger that you just bring along for the ride sometimes?

Is your faith in him, the living Christ? Or is your faith just purely intellectual in a creed that you agree with but that makes no actual difference to your lives?

Here's a little test. Have you put into action anything that you've learned from the sermon or from the Bible study in the last two weeks? You see, it is possible to have such dead intellectual faith. one of the most sobering stories I've heard in the last two years is of a fairly well-known theologian who is theologically conservative, who is a smart guy with a PhD, who was pastoring, who sat on the leadership team of various Christian organizations, and who even wrote a book on the doctrine of sin, who was exposed as having multiple affairs and then committed suicide.

His faith seemed to have remained on the merely intellectual level. And if we were to meet the living God face to face with a faith like this, well, we would react just like the demons.

[26 : 23] We shudder. We fear. Because we have not encountered the real Jesus, whose perfect love drives out fear.

And how would verses 18 to 19 apply to our church? We have our four core convictions, all derived from the Bible.

Now, what are these core convictions? Well, I want you to just now take out your bulletin with me, and I want you together with me to read them together. So on your bulletin, left-hand side, I'm going to read from at our church, and then together we'll read the core convictions together.

At our church, we strive to make this our core convictions, together, to be centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be driven by God's word, to focus on growing disciples, and to be a community of truth and love.

Great! See, these are our core convictions. But when will KEC truly be a church with a living, vibrant faith? It's when those core convictions don't remain words on a paper.

[27 : 45] It's when those core convictions are the recipe that is cooked. KEC will only be a church with a vibrant, living faith when we live those convictions out.

For if we don't, KEC will be a church with a demonic faith. Imagine that. So what is your church's statement of faith like?

A visitor might come in and ask. Is it like the Baptists? Is it like the Anglicans? I hope not the Mormons. Actually, sir, it's just like the demons.

Our convictions are biblically sound. They just don't get put into action. let's not be that kind of church. Let's not be a church where our actions undermine our convictions, which is a recipe for driving people away.

It's demonic faith. Instead, let's be a church that mimics the faith of Abraham and Rahab.

[28 : 57] For thirdly, living faith is evidential. Living faith is evidential. Pastor James now brings two case studies from the Old Testament to help us see that.

And the first person he points to is Abraham. If there is one person, anyone with a Jewish heritage is going to respect, it's Father Abraham. But there's something strange about what James says. Many of you have probably picked it up already. Verse 21. Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

Or down in verse 24? You see that the person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. Wait a minute.

It doesn't Christianity say that our works don't save us? In fact, the NIV slightly softens the language in verses 21 and 24. It actually says more directly as in the ESV, was not our father Abraham

justified for what he did?

[30 : 11] You see that a person is justified by what they do and not faith alone. Now how in the world does that fit with what the rest of the Bible says, especially Paul?

just consider these verses from Brother Paul. Here's Romans chapter 3 verse 28 on the screen. Romans chapter 3 verse 28.

Okay, here we go. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or Romans chapter 4 verse 2.

If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about and not before God. Well, it seems clear, isn't it?

It isn't justification by faith alone. Are we not declared righteous by God, not on our own merit, but on Christ's merit? Is James having a quarrel with Paul?

[31 : 11] Well, to understand James' point here, we need to remember two things. Number one, people can use the exact same word to mean two different things.

Now, take the word and, for example, e-nd. It could mean to conclude something, I end my speech. Or it could mean something like aim, intention, or purpose.

Do you have a particular and in mind? Same word, same spelling, same sound, different meanings. Although somewhat related. Or take the word lay, L-A-Y.

It could mean that I put something in a position of rest. I lay the book down on the table. Or it could mean to knock somebody down. I lay him low with a punch.

Same word, same spelling, same sound, different meanings, although somewhat related. And it's helpful to know that Paul and James here are using the word justify in two different ways.

[32 : 18] Same word, same spelling, same sound, different meanings, although somewhat related. When Paul uses the word justify in places like Romans 3.28 and 4.2, he means a judicial acquittal.

It is the verdict of the judge that you are declared not guilty. And that's what theologians often mean when they use the word justify and justification.

And so Paul is saying, a person can only be declared righteous by God when he places his faith in Christ alone, not in the law or in works or in anything else.

James, on the other hand, is using the word justify to mean something more like vindicate. It is the vindication of someone as actually righteous.

Now, sometimes the New Testament uses the word justify in this way. So, for example, in Luke 10.29, we read that a teacher of the law wanted to justify himself.

[33 : 28] He wanted to vindicate himself as being in the right, having gone to test Jesus, and he wants to show that he is a good law keeper, and so he asked Jesus, who is my neighbor?

He wanted to justify or vindicate himself. So, same word, same meaning, same spelling, sorry, same word, same spelling, same sound, but different meanings, although somewhat related.

Number two, remember that James and Paul are speaking to different contexts. Paul is showing how only Jesus and Jesus alone can bring us into a good legal standing before God's judgment throne, and how both Jew and Gentile alike are included into his people.

James, on the other hand, as we said already, is combating a view of dead, false faith, and helping to show us what true living faith looks like.

And so, with those two things in mind, we are more ready to understand James' point in verses 21 to 24. James recalls a key event in Abraham's life, which we can read about in Genesis chapter 22.

[34 : 46] Abraham was asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. And that seems to be a completely senseless act, given that God has already promised Abraham that he is going to have descendants as many as the stars.

That's what God promised back in Genesis chapter 15, when Abraham was getting on in years and still childless. And Abraham believed God. He trusted his word.

And this was credited to him as righteousness, as James chapter 2 verse 23 says, quoting Genesis 15. So, Abraham trusted God's word back in Genesis 15.

But at this point now, the question is, does Abraham really trust God's promises? And in Genesis 22, he's been asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

But, he was willing to obey. And many of us know the story, God provided a substitute animal, and his son didn't need to be sacrificed.

[35 : 58] sacrifice. But the point is, yes, he did trust God. He kept faith in God's promises.

And this was shown in his action, in his obedience to God. His actions vindicated him. That's why verse 22, his faith and his actions were working together.

in other words, his faith was shown by its fruit. That's what it means when James goes on to say that his faith was made complete by what he did.

The recipe has been cooked. The fruit is visible. That righteousness that was said to be credited to him back in Genesis 15, well, is shown to be genuine.

Abraham has living faith. The evidence is all there. And it's the same with Rahab in verse 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?

[37 : 11] Now, on the face of it, Rahab is the opposite of Abraham. He's a man, she's a woman, he's a Jew, she's a Gentile, he's a rich man, she's a poor prostitute.

And yet she too put her faith in action. She had heard about who God is and what God had done. But that wasn't what distinguished her because the other Gentiles had also heard of who God is and what he's done.

But it was that she acted on her beliefs by protecting the Hebrew spies, a story that you can read on your own in Joshua chapter 2. And so James concludes with the very thing that he's been saying all throughout this passage.

Verse 26. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. Now the reverse can also be true.

Works are dead if it is not lived from faith in Christ. But that is not Pastor James' point here. He simply wants us to know unless your faith is lived out, it is no better than a dead body.

[38 : 33] Living faith is evidential. So this morning, as we end, it's good to examine ourselves.

those of us listening this morning will fall into different groups. Some of us are naturally anxious and introspective.

Already during this sermon, you're examining every past action and wondering whether you live up to what God wants. And in fact, your conclusion is, oh no, I'm not living up to what God wants.

Well, if that's you, it's still good to examine yourselves. But don't just examine all your faults. if you examine yourself and you do find evidence of faith in action, acknowledge it.

Find assurance that although you're still a work in progress, there is progress. It is a sign that the word is at work in you. It is a sign that God has planted his word of truth in you, that you're that new kind of human being.

[39 : 43] And if you fall into this group, well, don't never forget that the God we serve is the God who spared Abraham's son, but did not spare his only son in agreement with him for your sake.

God But there will be some of us listening this morning who automatically assume that we're fine. You're thinking, oh, no, no, no, no, I'm doing good.

Well, if that's you, now is the time to truly examine yourself. Just as the other group might overlook the good fruit, well, we might choose to overlook the bad fruit.

we ignore the fact that our faith is not being put into action. Well, if that's you, don't ignore it any longer. Remember, such faith cannot save.

In fact, perhaps a few of you, as you examine yourselves, are realising for the first time that you're not Christians, even though you call yourself one. Your faith is false.

[40 : 52] Well, that's a good thing, because that's exactly what James wants to do. He wants to expose false faith. And if that's you, then he invites you to truly put your trust in Jesus Christ this morning.

Come to the Christ who shows mercy and is ready to accept those who truly repent and have faith. And for all of us this morning, well, let us exercise genuine living saving faith, shown in action, that we might distinguish ourselves from the demons.

So let me just give us a few moments to reflect on our own, to do any business with God, and then I will lead us in prayer.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[42 : 48] One that displays the character and the love of Christ. Would you help us to run to you, to back to the cross, where we know we have sinned, to ask for forgiveness, to know that mercy triumphs over judgment, and help us then to live out our lives in true godly action.

So, Father, be at work in us this morning. All this we pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.