

James 2:14-26 Faith that works

Read James 2:14-26; Matthew 25:31-36; Romans 4:1-5; 9-15

1. Are we saved by faith? Or are we saved by works? This passage from James is one of the most controversial passages in all of scripture. It may seem the each of these passages give us a slightly different answer. What has been your understanding of this controversy coming into the study of this passage from James?

Note: In the sermon Tim noted that many commentators suggest that Paul and James are using the word justify in slightly different ways. Paul is saying how are we justified, declared right before God? It is not by anything we do, but our trust, our faith in what Jesus has done for us. James is using the word justify to say how do we justify, prove, give evidence that we have saving faith? Our faith will be evidenced by our works.

In the passage James will give two evidences of saving faith, a vertical one, and a horizontal one. A vertical one in our relationship with God, and a horizontal one in our relationship with one another. We will look at each in turn.

Vertical Evidence

2. To bring greater clarity to each evidence James will give a negative example first. Look at James 2:19. How is right belief, good theology, not an evidence of saving faith?
3. The positive example of saving faith in relationship with God is given through the life of Abraham (James 4:21-22). Read Genesis 15:1-6, Genesis 22: 1-18 and Hebrews 11:17-19 for background. How are Abraham's actions and words evidence of his trust in the promise that God would make him a great nation through Isaac?
4. What would be the attending actions in our lives if we trusted the character and promises of God? (Hint: Explore some of the core truths of the gospel – you are loved – you are forgiven – you are accepted – he is coming again to make all things new – and explore what attending actions are evidence of faith in these aspects of the gospel)

Horizontal Evidence

5. Again James gives a negative example first in James 4:15-17. What response is he picturing to the fellow Christian in need, and how is this deficient?

6. The positive example of saving faith in relationship with one another is given in the life of Rahab (James 2:25). Read Joshua 2:1-16. How is Rahab's treatment of the spies evidence of her faith?

7. Given the example of Rahab's treatment of the spies in comparison to his negative example in vs. 15-16, what does James see as the horizontal evidence of saving faith?