

The Proof is in the Pudding

(James 2:14-26)

12/9/15; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

In the 1600s in Great Britain, large sausages were very popular.

These sausages would be made from the left over parts of processed cows, pigs, and what whatever other meat was lying around...

All of this meat would be gathered together, some seasonings would be added to it, and then this entire mixture would be wrapped in some kind of casing...

The whole mixture would then be fried, boiled or grilled over fire...

And the name that was given to this food was pudding..

Which may seem unusual to us because we think of pudding as this sweet tasting smooth dessert that comes in a variety of flavors.

However in Great Britain in the 15, 16 and 1700s, pudding was simply a name for what we call sausage.

Well, there were many people who made sausage pudding, and some were much better than others...

However, you never quite knew how good the sausage pudding was by appearance alone...

All you saw when you looked at the sausage was the outside casing that hid the inside...

And there was a phrase that we all use that came out of the sausage tasting in Great Britain...

The proof of a good pudding was only discovered when you actually took a bite of the sausage...

We know this phrase as... “the proof is in the pudding.”

And it is phrase we use if we are undecided if something is good or not...

If you can't tell by outward appearance, you need to take a bite and found out if it is good or not...

Well, we come to a text tonight in the book of James that is truly the focal point of this entire book...

It is probably James' biggest test of true saving faith...

And if I could sum up this test in a phrase...

James is going to teach us that the proof of true faith is in the pudding....

And the pudding is the works that come after someone claims to be saved...

In other words, true saving faith will show up in obedience and good works...

Let me get on a soapbox for a minute here before we get into these verses...

In a recent survey of Americans, 71% of the claim faith in Jesus Christ...

That means that 3 out of 4 people that you meet on any street in America claim to be saved..

I think all of us would agree that number is way too high...

I think it would be high to even consider 1 out 4 people in America are truly saved...

Judging by all the sin that we see committed in our world...

But the question is why would so many people think they are saved when they truly aren't?

And here is what I would suggest to you...

The church has lowered the bar on what true salvation is..

The church and pastors have made salvation into an act of raising a hand or saying a prayer or walking an aisle....

And once those things were done, you were signed sealed and looking forward to heaven...

Now, let me be clear here...

Can true biblical salvation begin with a prayer?

Sure it can.

Can it begin with a walk down an aisle of a church?

Absolutely.

Can it begin by you raising a hand at an invitation?

Yea.

True salvation can begin in all of those ways and 1000s of other ways...

But those things alone without any further evidence are not enough to save a person...

And that is why 71% think they possess saving faith in Jesus Christ, even though a huge percentage of them are not saved at all..

And let me say this is especially true in the South...

Look, i don't like to pick on pastors, but so many of them made it their goal in ministry to get people to say a prayer....

But never tell them that the words of that prayer are not evidence alone that the person was saved...

But that true evidence would been seen in a changed life and a changed heart...

Jesus did not tell Nicodemus in John 3....

“You need to say a prayer.”

Instead, he told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again...

True salvation does not come though good works, but true salvation will always produce good works..

And that is James point here in the verses that we will look at tonight...

This is an incredibly important passage that we will look at tonight...

In fact, if I could only have a few sections of Scripture that I could teach to people in our part of the world of the rest of my ministry...

These verses in James 2:14-26 would be in my top 3...

They are that important in determining if a person's faith is real or not...

So many people are self-deceived into holding to a prayer or a raised hand to say they are saved...

And so many other people struggle to know if they are truly saved or not...

James is going to answer both of those questions in these verses tonight...

I have divided these verses into 3 sections...

I. False Faith Found in Empty Words(14-17)

II. False Faith Found in Empty Belief (18-20)

III. True Faith Proved by Extraordinary Works (21-26)

Now, before we get into our passage tonight, remember the purpose of James...

He is writing to the early church...

And his point is to help the people who were coming to that early church to determine if their faith in Christ was real..

That has always been a question in the church even from the very beginning...

And it is a question in many people's minds today...

Do I possess saving faith?

Well, God is going help us that answer that question tonight with test of true salvation #5....

The first test was a test of how we viewed trials...

True believers see trials as a joy and do not fall into the trap of blaming God for their troubles...

The see trials as God's blessing of making them more like Christ who suffered through various trials as well..

The second test was the test of true salvation is your attitude toward temptation...

Those who have a true saving faith do not blame anyone but themselves for the temptations that come into their life...

And when temptation does come, they don't give into it every time because they focus on God's goodness to them and refuse to sin against Him.

The third test was a test of how we view God's Word?

Does it anger us when we hear it?

Do we speak out against it?

Are we eager to hear it?

And then does it humble us or cause us to be resistant to it?

And are we doers of it or simply hearers of it.

Finally last week, we looked at test #4 which was a test of favoritism and partiality...

True believers do not play favorites based on outward appearance.

They love others fully impartially because that is how God loves people...

So now, let us get into our 5th test of true salvation...

And the test is simply this...

Do your works after your claim of salvation demonstrate a new life?

In other words, the proof of true salvation is found in the works that follow...

Let me say a quick word on the original audience of James letter...

We know that he was writing to Jews who had come to faith in Jesus as their Messiah...

And what had happened in these early Christians is that they began to reject the idea of doing good works...

All their life, they had grown up to and been taught to put all their hope of salvation in their good works...

Now, they had come to faith in Jesus as their hope of salvation, they had rightly put less importance on good works...

However, like so many Christians today, these early Jews had gotten out of balance...

They learned that good works didn't save them, but instead of still doing good works, they began to reject them all together....

In their minds, if repentance and faith in Jesus is what saves us, then who needs good works?

And they were coming to faith in Jesus and then living like they always lived....

Instead of seeing that good works were pleasing to God, they began to see good works as the enemy..

And James is going to remind them tonight that good works are not bad...

We don't do them to get saved, but once we are saved, good works should follow as evidence of being truly saved...

And this is what we are going to find tonight in our 5th test of salvation as we look at James 2:14-26...

We will begin with..

I. False Faith Found in Empty Words(14-17)

Let's read verse 14, which sets the stage for what is to follow....

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can [n]that faith save him?

This verse sets the stage for the entire section...

And here is the situation that James is presenting...

The key word here is the word "says".

James is giving us an example of a person who says they they have faith..

This is the person who tells you that they are a Christian...

They claim Christ.

They claim salvation.

They claim heaven as their destination...

Which is all well and good.

We should rejoice when people claimed to be saved...

But here is the problem that we need to address and here is the problem that James mentions...

They claim to be saved but they have no works...

Now, let me give you a situation where a person may be truly saved but have no good works...

And that situation would be someone who just got saved...

In that case, only God knows if that faith is real...

He is the only One who can look on the heart and know if the claim is real or not...

And James is not addressing that situation here at all...

He is talking about someone who claims to be saved for a period of time, yet they have no change of life to go with their claim...

They have no good works that have been evidenced after their claim to faith...

And so he simply asks the question at the end of verse 14...

Can that claim of faith save him?

In other words, is a person who says they are saved but continues to live like they lived before that claim to faith; is that person saved?

And like he often does, James follows his question with an example of what he is talking about in verse 15...

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, [o]be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

James gives us a situation to describe the person he is talking about in verses 15-16...

A person who claims faith but has no works that follow his claim of faith is like the person of verses 15-16....

They see another Christian in need, but instead of meeting that need by the actions of giving them food or clothing...

They only offer empty words to that person in need..

And what James is trying to show is that people who have true faith follow words with action....

Words that aren't followed by action are empty.

In the same way that words spoken to a person in need are useless unless the actions to meet the need follow...

The words of a profession of faith in Jesus Christ are useless unless the actions of a life lived in obedience to Christ follow...

Words without the actions that follow leave people hungry and cold...

Words without the actions that follow leave a person lost and hell-bound.

And James simply makes that point in verse 17...

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is [p]dead, being by itself.

Simply put faith not followed by works is dead..

It is not a genuine saving faith...

It is simply a faith of empty words...

It is dead, and it will not save but only lead to a far worse death for the person making the empty claim of salvation.

Listen to two well-known preachers comments on this passage...

J. Vernon McGee....

“Faith alone saves, but the faith that truly saves is never alone. It will produce something, (according to this passage in James). After faith is exercised, you will see the muscles of good works that follow.”

Listen to Billy Graham,

“Faith that saves has one distinguishing quality, saving faith is a faith that produces obedience and a new way of life.”

A false faith is full of empty words....

But that is not all we see here...

A false faith can also be full of empty belief....

II. False Faith Found in Empty Belief (18-20)

Let's read verses 18-20....

18 But someone [q]may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that [r]God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

In verse 18 to 20, we meet someone who disagrees with James....

Their claim is that you will see the true salvation of a person simply by the fact that they believe in God.

While you will see the true salvation of others by their works...

Their objection is this...

James don't go overboard with the idea that works show our faith....

Some people are saved and you will never see it in their works but only in their belief...

Because once you believe in God, it doesn't matter if good works follow or not...

Well, James blows that argument out of the water in verses 18 - 19...

By simply saying this...

If you claim to be saved based only on belief and don't have the works that follow that belief in God, you are serious error...

Because the demons believe in God...

If your remember from Mark....

How the demons dress Jesus?

O Holy One of God...

In those words alone, what do we know about demons?

They believe in a God, and they even see Jesus as His Son...

Now, the question is...

Can you believe that there is a God and can you even believe that Jesus is His Son, but not be saved?

Absolutely. None of the demons are saved..

Satan isn't saved.

And neither is the person who claims to be saved based upon an empty belief in God.

How do we demons aren't saved even though they believe in God?

Their works never change.

Their mission in life never changes...

And the same is true for people who hold on to an empty belief in God...

Now, let me be clear again, you need to believe in God in order to be saved....

And that believe in God and in Jesus as His Son who died for your sins and rose again is a starting point of true faith...

But belief in those facts is always followed by works when someone is truly saved...

This brings up an interesting phrase...

According to James, there are people in the world who can be called "unsaved believers."

In fact the world is full of them...

If you remove the idea of being a Christian from the survey and simply ask people if they believe in God...

86% of people in the world believe in God.

Yet, the vast majority of them are simply what James would call “Unsaved Believers.”

Their belief is like the belief of the demons...

Empty, dead and useless....

And certainly incapable of saving them...

Let me go to our last section....

III. True Faith Proved by Extraordinary Works (21-26)

In these final section, James is simply going to prove his point even further by pointing to the incredible works of faith in the OT.

Let's read verses 21-26...

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and [s]as a result of the works, faith was [t]per-fected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James loves to use illustrations and examples of what he is trying to teach...

He did it with the rich man and poor man who come into a church when he taught about favoritism...

He did it earlier tonight when he talked about a person's empty words offered to a person in need...

And he does it again in verses 21-26 when he points to the real faith of two OT saints...

Abraham and Rahab..

He couldn't have picked two more opposite characters...

Abraham is the father of the Jewish people...

Highly respected and honored...

Rahab was a Gentile prostitute...

The outcast of society.

The disrupted and the dishonored.

Yet, the Bible clearly teaches that both of these OT were saved...

They are both included in the hall of faith in the book of Hebrews, but we also know from their actions in the OT that they were truly saved...

By possessing a saving faith in God.

The reason for picking such opposite people as examples is to show that saving faith looks the same in all people...

It is further attempt to answer the person who object to him in verse 18 with the claim that some people can have faith without the works to follow, but others may have faith with the works that follow...

James is simply saying in these closing verses that every example of true faith in the Bible is followed by good works...

They are two classes of Christians...

One who believe and one who show it through their works...

No, true faith is always evidenced by good works....

Whether it is highly respected Abraham or the lowly harlot Rahab...

And James is simply pointing that out to us in these verses...

And here is the point....

James and Rahab had professed faith in God in the OT.

We know when Abraham did it; he did it in Genesis 15...

We are not sure of Rahab's claim to believe in God, but she had claimed faith in God before the spies showed up at her door..

And so we have in the Bible who claimed to be saved, but the only way for us to truly know their claims of faith were real is to look at the works that followed...

In Genesis 22, which is 7 chapters after Abraham's claim of faith in Gen 15, he takes his son and prepares to offer him to God...

Then some time after Rahab's claim of faith, she takes in God's spies and hides them from God's enemies..

And James is simply reminding us that we know both of those OT characters had true faith because we see it in the works that followed their claims of faith in God.

Let me take us to Gen 15 for a minute because this is where people get confused in what James is teaching here...

This is the passage that James is talking about in verse 23...

*15 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying,
 “Do not fear, Abram,
 I am a shield to you;
 [a]Your reward shall be very great.”
 2 Abram said, “O Lord [b]God, what will You give me, since I [c]am childless, and the [d]heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “[e]Since You have given no [f]offspring to me, [g]one born in my house is my heir.” 4 Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying,
 “This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own [h]body, he shall be your heir.” 5 And He took him outside and said,
 “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your [i]descendants be.” 6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

Ok, so imagine the scene...

Abraham is taken outside by God after God tells him all these promises that will come to him....

And we simply read in verse 6 that Abram believed in the LORD...

So, here is what I want to suggest to you...

At that point on that night, who knew if Abraham's belief in God was real?

The only who knew if that faith was saving faith was God...

He was the only one on that night who could look into Abram's heart and know if that faith was true saving faith...

Let's just imagine for a minute if there were people standing around Abraham on that night....

And let's imagine that he told them or maybe even said out loud...

I now believe in God...

Would those people have known if Abraham was telling the truth?

Would they have known if he was truly saved by the words he spoke?

And the answer is clearly no....

Now, it turns out that he was saved on that night, but the people around Abraham probably never knew that until they saw him 7 chapters later getting ready to sacrifice his son Isaac to the Lord...

The same was true for Rahab..

Rahab had probably told some folks in Jericho that she believed in the God of Israel...

And I am sure some said, “Yea, right.”

Or some may have said, “well, thats great.”

But no one besides God knew that her faith was the real thing until she was willing to risk her life to save God’s spies.

And that is the point of James is trying to teach us here..

Unless you are like God and able to see into the hearts of people, you have no idea how sincere a person’s words are or a how true a person’s belief is.

It often takes time to see the works that follow true faith, unless you are God..

That is why claims of faith are simply that...

Claims of faith.

Now, God knew that Abraham truly believed Him in Genesis 15...

And if Abraham would have died before Gen 22 where he was willing to sacrifice his son, he would have gone to heaven...

Abraham didn't need to sacrifice his son to prove his salvation to God...

People are never saved by good works...

He was right with God when he believed in Him in Gen 15...

However, when he showed he was willing to sacrifice his son, he did prove his faith to everyone else...

And that's the point that James is trying to get across...

Good works after salvation evidence for everyone else that points to a person's true faith...

However, God knows for the very beginning if your faith is real...

You don't need works to prove to God you have truly believed...

But if you truly believe, those works will prove to everyone else that you are truly saved...

Conclusion

And that is really the point of this 5th test of salvation...

Is your life filled with good works after your repentance and faith in Christ?

Have those works come out of a heart that loves God and wants to please him?

IF so, you can have confidence that your faith is genuine...

If however, no works have come after your claim of faith in Christ, you should be concerned...

And if your works after your claim of faith in Christ are only an attempt to please men and try to fool everyone else..you should be concerned...

The 5th test of true faith in James is what works have come after you confessed faith in Christ?

Was your confession of faith in Christ nothing but hot air?

That is the test that James is putting us through in these verses..

The proof of the goodness of the pudding is the tasting of it...

And the proof of the realness of your faith is the works that follow your claim of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord...

Here is a Peanuts cartoon to end our night...

As you can see, Charlie Brown and Linus notice that Snoopy is cold...

they walk over to him and tell him to be of good cheer but they take off their coats and hats and offer them to him...

That is certainly a humorous way to see James 2:15-16...

But think about it this way...

Imagine all the people who have come into churches...

Heard the truth that they are sinners and that they need a Savior....

Then say something like I believe in God and I believe in Jesus...

But then walk out the door and never take off their old life and start obeying Jesus....

I am sure when Charlie Brown and Linus left Snoopy, they felt better...

We saw that he was cold and we talked nice to him...

And I am sure when people leave churches after saying they believe in God, they probably feel better too...

Yet, James is teaching us that words of faith not followed by acts of faith are empty...

Empty words didn't save Snoopy from the cold..

And empty words won't save anyone from hell..

Let us pray.