

James Chapter 2 - John Karmelich

1. If you have been reading my lessons for a while, you are aware that one of my favorite themes is the question, "If you are saved, what are you doing about it?" That is also what James is asking in this section of text. Therefore, my goal is to discuss what we are doing with our salvation.
 - a) Christianity preaches strongly that we are saved by our faith in Jesus alone. That is one of Paul's key themes. (As an example, see Ephesians 2:8.) The question that each of us needs to ask is, "How do we know we are saved by faith?" Is it just a matter of standing still and realizing we believe Jesus is both God and Lord of our lives? Yes and no. While that fact is true, a key issue for all of our lives is if we are saved by faith alone, what are we doing about it? In this chapter, James says in effect, "If you believe Jesus is God and in charge of your life, prove it, and put your time and money where your mouth is".
 - b) I am not asking you to send me a check, although I do encourage prayer for my ministry. At the same time, we each need to examine our own lives and wonder are we putting our money and our time based on what we believe to be true about Jesus.
 - c) Does that believe I have to quit what I am doing to go work for Jesus? The answer to that question is quite literally between you and Jesus. For most of us, God wants us to go be a good witness right where we are in life. For others, it does mean changes. I have found that when we make the effort to seek Him, somehow He makes it obvious to us what it is He wants us to do next in life.
 - d) This leads me to a related question: Does this mean our salvation is dependent upon how hard we work for Jesus? Never. Our salvation is by faith alone. If we have that type of faith, shouldn't we just want to work that hard? Think about Paul's life. He worked hard and looked back at his life and realized that he used his life after he was saved in order to make a difference for Jesus. He didn't get more saved by all of that hard work. However, since Paul was grateful for his salvation, he used the most valuable asset he had, his time, in order to make that difference for Jesus.
 - i) I actually know of many Christians who near their death were worried that they have not done enough for Jesus. These are people who have made a tremendous difference for Jesus with their lives. A god balance in life is working hard in order to make that difference for Jesus, but at the same time realizing that if we prayed our way through our lives, and keep a humble and teachable attitude as we go it, then we our or have been doing what He called us to do.
 - ii) The older one gets, the more one becomes conscious of time. One begins to realize what a valuable asset time is and how we should properly be using that time.
 - iii) Does that mean I can never relax or have downtime? Of course not. We all need rest at time. The Gospels mention how Jesus got away from the crowds in order to rest. I counted four direct references to Jesus resting in the Gospel accounts. The point is not to kill ourselves trying, but at the same time, if can't think of any way that we are making a difference for Jesus, then we should question whether or not we have that faith in Him in the first place.
 - iv) Bottom line: this chapter is full of examples of how one acts based on that faith.
2. This leads me to a discussion about Chapter 2 itself. The main issue brought up is about fairness when dealing with people. James focuses on how we treat rich and poor people. The underlying issue is if we love God, and if we desire to please Him and if we care about people, shouldn't we then treat everyone the same regardless of their status or accomplishments in life?
 - a) This also applies to debate issues. One is only saved based on their trust that Jesus is God and He is in charge of our lives. To state the obvious Christians disagree on a lot of other issues. A question then becomes are we willing to accept believers that we disagree with?

- b) As an example, there was a fairly recently deceased prominent Christian who holds what is called the "post-tribulation view" of Jesus Second Coming. That view is essentially that believer's who are around in the final days before Jesus' return also live through what is known as "the great tribulation" with nonbelievers. My only point here is that this is an old debate issue within the Christian church. One's view on that issue should never be an excuse to disassociate with someone in church. That fairly well known teacher was not welcome in some churches because of that view he held and that disassociation is wrong.
 - i) The same question can be applied to Pentecostal Christians. I'm not talking about the type of church one goes to. The issue is about whether or not we are willing to accept as Christian brothers and sisters those who do worship God different ways than we do or hold a different view on some debatable issue than we do. This can apply to issues about race, looks or background. I'm not saying that there is not a proper place and time to debate issues. I'm just saying a true believing Christian should never be excluded from our "fellowship" based on debatable issues.
 - ii) That is why James brings up a rich versus poor debate. It is an easy for us to relate to as a prime example of treating all Christians the same regardless of status.
 - c) Coming back to the chapter, if all it is, is saying, "Treat everybody fairly and put your time and money where your mouth is as a Christian", this lesson is done for the week. However, James is using that issue to point out how the evidence of our faith is what we do and that is his underlying point of the chapter. Speaking of which, time to start.
3. Chapter 2, Verse 1: My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?
- a) In order to explain these verses, it is best to start with where we left off in Chapter 1. To state what most of you already know, in the original text, there are no chapter breaks. James is writing this letter to Christians from Jewish backgrounds who are currently on the run for their lives as it was declared illegal to be a Christian at that time in Israel.
 - b) James main point is that if one is going to be good witness for Jesus, one has to do this in good times and bad times, and even when one's life is in danger. It just means one has to keep trusting in God in order to get through one's life. That belief that Jesus is both God and trusting that He is in charge of our lives helps us with our problems. What is more important is that despite whatever are our circumstances, James wants us to be a good witness to others around us. That is why this letter was written.
 - i) With that said, James topic of the moment is essentially how to be a good witness for Jesus. The specific topic of the moment is in effect how we act in church.
 - ii) Notice that James assumes that one can still go to a synagogue (or a church today) despite the persecution. James is assuming that wherever the readers of his letter are living at the moment they are in a safe enough place where they can still get together with other believers. Think about it this way: Even if their lives are still in danger, one wants to gather with others who are in the same predicament and that is why the issue is addressed of how one acts in church settings.
 - c) With that stated, the specific issue of this paragraph has to do with how we treat people that come into our church fellowship. Are we showing more kindness to those who by their appearance look wealthier than other people? One can apply this principal to any sort of bigotry one may have. In the history of United States, there were times and places where people of color or of questionable backgrounds were not welcome in to be a part of certain churches. The point of these verses is simply that all who want to worship Jesus should be treated the same.

- d) A little historical background might even be helpful for these verses. A traditional Jewish synagogue at that time did not have enough seats for everyone. Most people had to sit on the floor during a service. There were usually some seats saved for the important people. That is why James is saying don't save those seats for the well dressed and have the poor people go sit on the floor. To state the obvious, we need to treat all people the same when it comes to gathering together in church. I read that there was not much middle class at that time. One was either rich or poor. Therefore, when those who had money got saved, when it came to church, it was obvious who was who based on the way they dressed.
- i) Even today in church settings, if one looks carefully, one can usually tell who is of better means by the way one is dressed or the car one drives coming to church.
 - ii) To state it another way, we as believers have enough problems as it is, bigotry just makes matters worse. That is why James in the first chapter makes the big point that if one has money, one needs to be humble about it and realize that all of one's blessings come from God. At the same time, if one is poor, one has to remember that one is eternally blessed beyond measure, which is the main topic of the first three chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The underlying point is whatever wealth one has in this lifetime may be a good thing in this lifetime, but it has no effect on our eternal destiny.
- e) For what it is worth, I have seen this problem surface in subtle ways in churches. I have seen people who smell badly issued to the back part of a church. I have also seen guests ushered to the front who appear to fit in with the crowd. A good sign of a healthy church is one where all are treated the same and just as importantly, guests are greeted with the same attitude no matter what they look like or what appears to be their background. That may seem like the obvious to most of us, but one would be surprised how often problems occur at such church settings.
- i) I've been correctly taught that one of the most important times of a church service is the fifteen minutes before and after the service occurs. That is the time when we can say, greet a stranger or be helpful to someone in need. We can also just take a moment to say hello to someone we don't know very well. I've seen many times how the right or wrong thing said at those times effects people's lives. A nice little prayer to say before going to church is to ask God to use us to make a difference in someone's life around the time of that service. Remember that it is all about using His power and not our power to make a difference in the world, and includes the times before and after our church services.
- f) OK, I've beaten us all up enough over this issue. Time to move on.
4. Verse 5: Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?
- a) To explain these verses, it is best to give a history lesson about living under the Roman Empire at that time. As I stated earlier, there was not much of a middle class that lived under that empire. There was the rich and there was the poor. What made matters worse was that many of the rich exploited the Roman court system to steal from the poor. Many of those who had money and power would abuse that situation. When poor people could not afford to pay rent or taxes the poor were dragged before the courts to demand money.
 - b) Remember that roughly two thirds of the Roman world was slaves. They were not made slaves based on skin color, but simply a matter of where or how one was born. When the Romans conquered the world, they usually made slaves of those they defeated. Coming back to the idea of say, rent it is not like the people had a choice where they could then live elsewhere. They were forced to do what the rich demanded.

- c) All of this leads back to how we treat people in church. There was hatred of rich families by many poor families and vice versa. Church is supposed to be a place of comfort and refuge from our regular lives. The idea of a church service is to help us collectively focus on God and help each other draw closer to Him. That is why James is beating it over our head in this section the importance of treating all people the same in these verses. James is well aware of the fact that a lot of injustice occurs in the world back then as it does now.
 - i) James is saying I can't fix the government, but I can discuss how we should treat other Christians in church settings. Also, let me (James) remind all of us how God sees rich and poor people. That is the essence of these verses. Even though James is in Jerusalem and Christian believers were scattered through out the area, word got back to James how Christians were not all treated the same in church settings.
 - d) To paraphrase James, "why are some of you treating rich people better than poor people when it is those same rich people who are using the court system to take oppress you?" James is not saying to exclude any true believers from a church setting, but only to treat all believers the same. If anything, making those wealthier believers part of one's church setting might even help in how they are treated outside of the church if and only if they are treated the same as everyone else.
 - e) I remember having lunch one time with a fairly wealthy client of mine at work. He told me the story of how he once met a famous televangelist. Once that televangelist sized up my client and determined that this man had no interest in God, the televangelist in effect walked away as he thought my client would not be of any benefit to him or his needs.
 - i) I am assuming that story is correct as it was told to me.
 - ii) My point here is simply that we need to be a good witness for Jesus to all people and not based on what they could eventually do for us. Our motives to do good works should only be to make a difference for God in this world.
5. Verse 8: If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.
- a) Speaking of tying the concept of treating all people the same in church as it applies to the concept of "putting our money and our time where our mouth is", that is what James is doing here in this section. In effect, James ends his example of treating rich believers and poor believers the same, by now discusses something called "the royal law". To explain further, I should first explain what is the royal law at this point.
 - i) First, we don't have to wonder what is the royal law. James himself explains what it is in the latter part of Verse 8. It is "Love your neighbor as yourself".
 - ii) If one searches the Old Testament for the term "royal law", it can't be found. Also remember the New Testament was not written yet. Therefore, James used a term that was probably common to Jewish Christians living at that time. Let me explain why he probably used that term here in these verses.
 - iii) To explain, first remember that the most important law in the Old Testament is in effect "the Lord our God is one" which is from Deuteronomy 6:4. Jesus Himself quotes it as being the most important law in the Old Testament. Then Jesus said the second most important law is that one should love one's neighbor as oneself. (See Mark 12:31.) That second law is not part of the 10 commandments, but it in Leviticus 19:18. Maybe James knew that Jesus did consider these two laws to be the most important and that is why he refers to the second one as "the royal law".
 - iv) Before I can discuss how these laws are relevant to James' point about treating all people fairly, it is probably important to take a few moments to discuss why this royal law is significant to Jewish people and why it should be to us as well.

- b) Before I do that, let me first discuss the classical question of how can Jesus be God, when Jesus Himself said "Our Lord God is one". That is a great question. A Jewish title for God is the transliterated word "Elohim". That is the plural of the Hebrew word "El". To use a classic bible example, in Genesis 1:26, God says let us (Elohim) make man in our image."
- i) That leads to the question of who was God talking to in that verse? If one answers angels, my response is how can angels make man? Whoever God was talking to did have the ability to make man and make him in our (plural) image. My point is simply that Jesus was part of the "one" that is part of the Old Testament verse that says that "Hear O' Israel the Lord our God is one" from Deuteronomy 6:4.
- c) The next question is why the royal law of "Love your neighbor as yourself" so significant that James calls it the royal law? The answer is that in effect all of the Old Testament laws hang on the principal that we are to worship God and no one else, and treat our neighbors (those in our sphere of influence) the same as we would treat ourselves. To put it even in a simpler phrase, "Love God and love others". If one goes through all the Old Testament laws, one realizes they are all in effect based on those two principals.
- d) OK then, but aren't Christians living by faith and are not under the law? Of course. The classical question and the one James is bring up here is "What are we doing with that faith in God?" James is not in any way implying that we are saved by our good deeds. What James is saying is the only way another person can tell if someone has faith in God is based on how they treat other people.
- i) To put it another way, one does not have to learn all of those Old Testament laws in order to be a good Christian. However, our faith in Jesus as God and as the one who is Lord (in charge) of our lives should naturally lead to learn more about how we act on that faith and how we treat other people.
- ii) Considering how much time I spend teaching the Old Testament, I suppose I must think pretty highly of it. ☺ I have discovered that the secret to studying the Old Testament laws is to study them from a New Testament perspective. That is what I strive for in all of my lessons on those books. It is also about realizing that the only way we can have the ability to obey those laws in the first place is through God's power (which is also called the Holy Spirit) and not by our own will power.
- e) Believe it or not, all of this does lead me back to the text. The key point of this section is not that one has to obey all of the Old Testament laws in order to be saved. The point is that because we are saved by our faith in Jesus, we just want to do something about that faith. That leads to James "Royal Law" of loving our neighbors (those who are within our sphere of influence) as much as we love ourselves.
- i) So why is loving others so important? I'm convinced that the greatest growth in the Christian church occurs when we love someone into the kingdom. When we care more about the lives of others than our own lives is the moments when we are the best witness for Jesus. Does that mean we will never make mistakes? No. It just means that when we act that way, people see us differently. A natural instinct is to do and care what is best for us. When we consciously make the effort to put others first, it makes other people realize that we do care about their lives and that makes us a better witness for God.
- ii) In summary, James makes the point that we as Christians should want to obey the "Royal law". We should do that obey that law to prove our value to God, but just because we have faith that He is guiding our lives. James then comes back to the example of showing favoritism by treating rich people differently then how we treat poor people. To state the obvious, sin is still on the books for Christians even after we accept Jesus as complete payment for our sins. James' key point here is that we should still desire to please God based on our faith in Him, not to "earn points" by trying to be obedient to the royal law let alone all of the laws.

- f) If one gets the impression that the only thing James cares about in this section is how we treat other Christians, one needs to read these verses again. Verse 10 states that if we are guilty of breaking one law, then we are guilty of breaking all of the laws. Does that mean that all Christians or even say, all people are guilty of breaking every law listed in the Old Testament? Of course not. The issue is not how many laws did we break. The issue is, are we "perfect" before God?
- i) A classical debate in Christianity is whether or not all sins are the same. To use a simple example, does God consider a parking ticket the same as murder? I admit, I would be disappointed in God if He treated both the same. That is why I believe there are two separate issues involved here. The first is that God, by definition is perfect and He requires that we be perfect as in perfectly forgiven to be with Him forever. That is why I emphasize so much the issue of Jesus paying for all of our sins, past present and future. Being perfectly forgiven means just that, and now we can spend our eternities with a perfect God because we are perfectly forgiven.
 - ii) That leads me to something that Jesus Himself said. When He was on trial before Pontius Pilate, Jesus said in effect that the group that delivered Him to you (Pilate) is guilty of the greater sin. (That is taken from John 19:11.) No matter whom Jesus was talking about to Pilate, Jesus is literally making the statement that someone or some group is guilty of a greater sin than someone else. That means that God does not view all sins the same if we accept Jesus' words as fact.
- g) So how do I reconcile Jesus use of the term "greater sin" with the idea that James teaches that if we are guilty of breaking one law, then we are guilty of breaking all of them?
- i) One way to look at it is to remember that all sins are forgivable except for the sin to deny Jesus as God. When Jesus made that statement to Pilate, the people who put Jesus on trial literally denied that He was God, which is why the Jewish high court sentenced Jesus to death. Pontius Pilate was deciding whether or not to actually end Jesus life on earth, but he didn't judge Jesus claim to be God. That is why Jesus could claim that the sin of the group that denied His deity was a greater sin than Pilate's just judging whether or not Jesus should live or die.
 - ii) My point is the way God punishes us for sins is often to allow us or make us suffer now for the consequences of that sin. There is an old Christian saying that we are not allowed to get away with anything. That means in effect that God loves us too much to let us get away with sin and an appropriate punishment usually occurs.
 - iii) However, eternal judgment is a separate issue. That is why James is preaching the concept that if one is guilty of breaking one of God's laws, then in effect we are then guilty of breaking all of them. James is talking about God's standard of being perfect, which is perfectly forgiven in our judgment before Him.
- h) OK, after spending two pages on these three verses, I'm convinced it is time to move on.
6. Verse 12: Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!
- a) The first thing I need to discuss here is the phrase "the law that gives freedom". What is James talking about with that phrase? Reading this idea in context it has to be that God does forgive our sins. It is about knowing one is forgiven if one asks for that forgiveness.
 - i) To state it another way, we are trusting in God's complete payment for our sins, so in effect we are free to do what we want. As one of my old pastor's used to say, I am free to sin all I want. The issue is, how much do I want to? I believe that is what James meant by the "law that gives freedom".
 - b) I believe James is saying we should judge other people realizing that God can and does forgive other's sins if they believe that Jesus has forgiven them just as He has forgiven us. This is a concept that Jesus taught Himself and it would be best to describe that quickly:

- c) To use a classic example that most of us are familiar with, in the Lord's prayer, Jesus said to forgive one another as God has forgiven us. That in effect is what James is saying here in these verses. That is "don't be tougher on others than God is on you." Remember again that James is writing to people on the run for their lives for the crime of being a Christian. I'm sure a lot of Christians at that moment in time have a lot of anger at those people who want them dead or are trying to kill them. James is saying in effect, "If you believe that God has forgiven you of your sins, then you better forgive those who are after you."
- i) That leads to the topic of why should we forgive those who hurt us? What if that pain is legitimate? What if the person who hurt us really had bad motivations? The point is it doesn't matter. As long as we don't forgive them, we are hurting ourselves and not them. Jesus encourages us to forgive others not that say, the guilty won't be punished, but just so we can let go of how we have been hurt.
 - ii) Many years ago, I had someone stole a lot of money from me. The way I let go of that pain was to pray for that person daily. Over time, I did forgive him. If I ever see him again, I still want to him pay for that crime that he committed, but that is a separate issue from forgiving him for what he did. I no longer hold on to any pain from what that person did to my wife and myself.
 - iii) Let me try this concept another way: What if I am permanently injured due to the sin or crime of another person? Do I still have to forgive them? Ask yourself if the person who did that to you is suffering due to your hatred? Of course not. Again, that is a separate issue from having someone, say go to prison for a serious crime.
 - iv) The issue of forgiveness is about letting go of how others have hurt us in order for us to move on with our lives. Yes it takes time, but also, it can be done and Jesus said it starts with praying for the well being of that person who did that to us.
- d) So what does any of this have to do with these verses here in James? Everything. When James says that "mercy triumphs over judgment", James is talking about forgiveness being a more important concept than getting revenge. The person who hurt us may or may not suffer in this lifetime for what they did. However, having mercy on them, which is about forgiving them, gives us internal peace and makes us a better witness for Jesus. If one can remember that concept alone, one gets a key point about how Christians should live out our lives during times of difficult circumstances.
- e) With that said, I believe James is now ready to preach to us some more. ☺
7. Verse 14: What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- a) We are now back to the main issue of this chapter about "faith versus works". What he is saying in these verses is in effect, "What good is having faith if you aren't doing about that faith?" James uses the illustration of telling a hungry and naked person, "Go be well" and not do anything to actually help out their condition.
 - b) So is James saying we should give away all we have to help the poor? Is James arguing for some sort of socialist system, where distribution should be equal to all people? In both cases, the answer is no. The issue is not about what we should be forced to do, but what we should just want to do. It is like when I said earlier, Christians are free to sin all they want to, the issue is how much do we want to? The same principal applies to helping a person in need. We don't have to, but if we have faith that Jesus is God, we should want to help out someone we see is in need.
 - c) Let me quickly end the argument that James wants some sort of socialistic system where all people are to be equal with "stuff". One of the 10 commandments is not to steal from others. If God is against stealing then He is in favor of private ownership of stuff.

- d) My point is that James is saying we should care about helping others because we of some sort of guilt trip or because we are being forced to. It is just something we should want to do in the first place. It is how we prove our faith.
 - e) Now let's think about this in context of James' readers who are on the run for their lives again for the crime of being a Christian. One would think that the natural thing to do is to hang on to what we have as our lives would be in danger at that moment. James is saying to us, that God knows our situation and He does not desire that we too, be starving and without clothing. That means if we trust that God is going to provide for our future, we have to trust that He will, period. It means having the heart to care about others, even at those times when our own circumstances may be difficult.
 - f) In summary, James is not saying, "give away all you have so you can be equally poor with the person you are trying to help". Instead he is saying the best way to live the Christian life is to show one has faith by putting our money where our mouth is. So does that mean I give money to everyone who asks? No. I try to use good judgment and trust God about who to help and when to help them.
 - g) In effect, James is asking the question, how do we know we are a believer? We can claim to have faith in our trust in Jesus, but how does anyone else know that? It is only by our actions where we can be a witness to others around us.
 - h) Well I may be done beating this point to death here, but James is not through with us yet.
8. Verse 18: But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.
- a) Suppose someone walks up to us and says in effect, "I am a good person and I help others, but I still don't believe Jesus died for my sins." How do we respond to that? Remember that the issue is not how good we are as a person, the issue for salvation is about whether or not we are perfect before God. This comes back to the misconception that God grades us on a curve. A perfect God can have no tolerance for sin whatsoever. Someone may be a good person and do good things. However, God doesn't say, our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds when it comes to spending eternity with Him. I know that because I accept the idea that God is perfect. If He is perfect, He must be perfect in judgment as well as be perfect in forgiveness. That idea of "perfect in judgment" means that He can't eternally judge us on some sort of "curve system".
 - b) That leads to the other issue that one can draw from this verse. That is the question I've been beating over all of our heads of how do we know if we are saved? We can't read other people's minds. All we can do is judge people's actions. That is why James makes the fairly famous statement of "I will show you my faith by what I do". The issue is not about proving to God we have faith. The issue is about proving to others we have faith.
 - i) So why would we want to or have to prove our faith to others? That comes back to Jesus mission statement for all Christians. The short version is that Jesus did command all believers to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. (See Matthew 28:19.) We can't do that unless we are proving our faith by good deeds.
 - ii) Remember that to be saved in effect requires two things: The first is to believe that Jesus is God and He died for our sins. The second is to accept the idea that Jesus is in charge of our lives. I based that idea on Romans 10:9. If we do believe Jesus is in charge of our lives, then we should want use our lives to make a difference for Him. That means showing our faith by being a good witness to those around us, including believes and potential believers.
 - iii) Coming back to the idea that James' audience is on the run for their lives. James is saying in effect that is no excuse for not being a good witness for Jesus and doing works in order to prove one's faith to others around us. Now consider the idea that if we are not in danger of our lives for being a Christian, why would we think that Jesus expects any less of us than He does of those on the run for their lives?

- c) So John, are you giving us a guilt trip to work harder for Jesus? The answer to that comes back to the idea of using our lives to make a difference for Him. Of course all of us need our times to relax and do other things. My point is that if there is no evidence one can see that we are making a difference for Jesus, then one can question our faith. That is what this verse is trying to get across. With that bit of guilt stated, James is now going to go on and give a strange bit of proof how we should treat our relationship with Jesus.
9. Verse 19: You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.
- a) I'm going to assume for the moment that those of you reading this study do believe that demons are real. If you don't believe in their existence, that requires a whole different set of arguments to go over. The question to ponder for the moment is in effect do demons believe God exists? I would argue yes that they understand that God created them.
- i) So if demons believe God exists, how are we different from them when it comes to the issue of having faith in God? In fact the last word of Verse 19 says shudder. That means they get nervous at the concept of considering God's judgment.
- ii) The difference between believers and demons with regards to God's existence is that those demons don't want God to rule over their lives. If we claim to have the faith that Jesus not only died for our sins but also that He rules over our lives, then we are going to want to do something about that faith, and that is James' point.
- b) That leads me back to the question of why do demons exist in the first place? Why would God create Satan and a legion of demons if God knew they would rebel against Him?
- i) The answer is, that the existence of those demons gets us to stick close to God. The idea is that we don't have the strength or power to overcome those demons by our own willpower. However, trusting and having faith in God gives us the power to overcome anything that such demons can do to us.
- c) So why did those demons rebel against God if they believe He exists? The same reason most people rebel against God. The idea is that most people do believe He exists but they don't want to submit their lives to Him. That is probably why those demons turned from serving God and that is why they encourage us to turn away from Him.
- i) This also comes back to the idea that if we believe our world began at one time, it is also going to have an ending one day. Those demons realize that if this world is going to end one day, then God is going to judge them too, for not being obedient to Him. That is why the biggest goal of demons is to delay as long as possible our world from coming to an end. That is why they work as hard as we assume they do, in order to keep people from becoming believers in the first place and keep believers from being good witnesses for Jesus.
- ii) That is also why we have to depend upon God's power to overcome such forces. If we believe God is perfect, then He must be more powerful than what He has created, including such demons. Therefore, we rely upon His power and not our own willpower to overcome such forces that we can't see or usually sense.
- d) OK, enough about explaining the purpose of demons. It is time for James to get back to chewing us out collectively on the issue of not having deeds to go with our faith.
10. Verse 20: You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ 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. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.
- a) James ends this section of his letter by giving two examples of faith and works. The first is the common ancestor to all Jewish people, Abraham. The second is a minor character from the book of Joshua. We will get to that second character in a bit. The point of this text is to discuss how Abraham was saved by his faith and how he demonstrated it.

- b) Let me review a couple of key points about the life of Abraham here as it relates to this text. In Verse 23, God called Abraham "righteous" because he believed in God. The idea is that Abraham was saved because he had faith that God exists and trusted in that God in order to guide his life. Many years after that statement that God declared Abraham to be a righteous man, is when Abraham was willing to offer up Isaac at God's request.
- i) The basic point is that because Abraham believed in God, Abraham was willing to do what God requested him to do, which was to offer up his son as a sacrifice.
 - ii) Was Abraham saved by faith alone? Yes. Did Abraham demonstrate that faith by his willingness to offer up his son? Of course. The point is again that our works do not save us, but if we do have faith, our works will naturally follow that faith.
 - iii) Before I move on, let me discuss why Abraham was willing to offer up His son in the first place. In effect, God was asking Abraham, "Do you love Me as much as the pagan's around you love their false gods?" I say that because it was a common practice in that culture to offer up one's own children to one's god in order to show that one trusts in that false god to bring one more children.
 - iv) That story is also significant in that the same location where Abraham offered up his own son is the same place where God offered His son for our sins. I am also convinced that Abraham understood that "God had a problem". That is because God promised Abraham many years earlier that he would have many descendants through his son Isaac. Therefore, if God wanted Isaac dead, then Abraham knew that God had to resurrect Isaac in order to keep that promise. That is also why the story of Abraham offering Isaac is a great illustration to use when explaining to others how the story of Jesus resurrection is predicted in the Old Testament.
- c) Coming back to James, I believe his related point is that our faith builds over time so that we can grow in our trust in Him and grow in our works based on that trust. To be honest, if we accepted God's existence and offering our only child all on "day one", that would be too much for most of us to accept. That is why there was a long period of time between the time Abraham was first called righteous for believing in God and the time that he had to actually go through the ritual of offering up Isaac as God commanded.
- i) My point being is that if one feels that one is too scared to do things for God, then the idea is to keep on trusting in Him and He does build up our faith over time. As our faith builds, so are works just naturally follow.
 - ii) I believe it was Billy Graham who first said that the concept of faith and works is like breathing. If one has faith, it is like taking air into our lungs. If our lungs are full, then we just naturally want to let it out.
- d) Ok, last set of verses and we can wrap this up for the week.
11. 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? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
- a) Remember how I said that James ends this section by listing the common ancestor to all of the Jewish people (Abraham) and a fairly trivial bible character as examples of faith? In these two verses, we get that second character. Let me give her background first:
 - i) The book of Joshua was mostly about how the Jewish people first conquered the Promised Land. The idea behind that book is how we grow in our faith in God by learning to trust Him one step at a time. As I like to preach, the Promised Land is not about heaven, but about learning to trust God with every aspect of our lives.
 - ii) Anyway with that said, the first city that the Israelites conquered was a city called Jericho. Before the city was conquered, Joshua sent two spies to check out that city. Those two spies were given a place to hide by a prostitute named Rahab.
 - iii) Apparently the city of Jericho's guards were keeping their eyes on the Israelites and figured out some spies had worked their way into their city.

- iv) The spies hid out in this prostitutes house. Let's be honest, people who have such houses are used to hiding people. Therefore, the woman who ran that place did have a place for the two spies to hide out from the guards.
- v) All of this is from Joshua, Chapter 2.
- b) James picks out this story as to show that someone who is not Jewish can have faith that the God of the bible is more powerful than any other god, and then demonstrate that faith in effect by "putting her money where her mouth is". The reason she believed the Jewish God was more powerful than the local gods was she was aware of how the Israelites had gotten out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. Apparently that story was well known in Jericho and Rahab relied upon that information to believe in the Jewish God.
 - i) Do I believe Rahab was an expert in Judaism? Of course not. The point is that we don't have to be an expert on say, our bible in order to trust in God. We just have to realize that again He is God, He did pay the price for our sins and finally that He is in charge of our life. If we have faith in that concept, we like "breathing" are going to want to do something about that faith. Rahab did something about her faith by hiding the spies.
 - ii) The point is James uses this Old Testament example of how to act on one's faith. James' related point is we don't have to demonstrate our faith by doing something on a grand scale like being willing to offer up our only son like Abraham. In case you don't know that story, Abraham didn't actually have to offer up Isaac as God provided a substitute for that offering. Even doing a simple act is a way to prove one's faith. That is what Rahab did and that is why James picked it as an example.
- 12. Hopefully, I have convinced you by now how we are saved by faith alone, but what we do with that faith is a demonstration to others around us (not to God) that we do believe in God and we do believe that Jesus is in charge of our lives. If you get that concept, then hopefully I have done my job and helped to explain how having faith and acting upon that faith go "hand in hand".
 - a) With that said, thanks for reading, and hopefully we will talk again in another lesson.
- 13. Let's pray: Father, first of all, we thank You that we don't have to do anything in order to earn our salvation with You. Help us to increase our faith to trust that You not only paid the price for all our sins once and for all, but that we can also come to You to guide our lives so that we can live to make a difference for You. We don't know what You have planned today, but we realize that we can't make a difference for You without first believing in You and second, to trust in Your power in order to make that difference. Guide us today, as we use the most valuable thing You give us, our time, in order to make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.