

Sunday, November 1, 2020
Text: James 2:14-19
Title: A Faith that Can't Save

Proposition:

In James 2:14-19, we will follow James' argument that faith by itself cannot save you so that you will evaluate whether you have faith *alone* or *only* faith.

Outline:

James' Proposition: There is a faith that cannot save. (v.14)

James' First Claim: Faith without works is useless as warm wishes. (vv.15-16)

James' Second Claim: Faith without works is dead. (v.17)

James' Third Claim: Saving Faith is demonstrated in works. (v.18)

James' Fourth Claim: Saving Faith is more than believing right doctrine. (v.19)

Study Guide Questions:

(As always, leaders who use these questions can pick and choose which they think are best for their group. I include more than enough so you have freedom to give direction, and not so you feel like you need to ask or answer them all.)

1. How has James encouraged the Christians in James 1:1-2:13? In those same verses, what has James said to cause them to examine their confession? Has James said anything to cause you to examine your confession? If so, how have you been responding to your examination?
2. In v.14, what kind of faith cannot save? How does thinking about a faith that cannot save make you feel? Do you know anyone you think may have this kind of faith? Have you ever had that kind of faith?
3. Does Paul's teaching in Ephesians 2:8-9 contradict James' teaching in 2:14?
4. How does James' illustration in 2:15-16 work on two levels?
5. Can someone have the right object of faith and yet their faith still be useless? Explain how that can occur in someone's heart.
6. Is there a relationship in your life in which you are failing to do good to someone you have a responsibility toward? What does repentance look like?

7. James 2:17 describes a faith that “has no works.” James’ point is not that we would look hard for some evidence of work, but that faith should consistently be accompanied by works. Faith by itself is dead; it can’t save. That being said, when we are surrounded by many people who do many moral deeds, from the day to day caring for family to more grand acts of sacrifice, how are the works of a true believer different?
8. What would be some possible ways a lost person could misapply James 2:17? How could a saved person become confused and misapply it?
9. In James 2:18, the ESV has probably better captured James’ intent by placing the quotation marks as, “You have faith and I have works.” Why would someone possibly argue for two kinds of Christians? Have you ever been tempted to distinguish either yourself or a loved one as a “faith” rather than a “work” Christian?
10. Are you comfortable with thinking of someone being able to show or prove their faith by works (2:18)? Why or why not?
11. How can you describe the works of a Christian in such a way as to distinguish them from a moral non-Christian? Does that description match you?
12. What is another argument James uses in 2:19 to distinguish saving faith from dead, useless faith?
13. How often do you look to an affirmation of a doctrinal statement to confirm your or someone else’s salvation? What are the advantages and limitations of doing so?
14. How often do you look to the presence of works to confirm your or someone else’s salvation? What are the advantages and limitations of doing so?
15. James 2:14-19 is heavy. How do you balance faith in Christ alone (and the glorious truth of justification as in Romans 3:21-28), and yet let James have his say, making sure that you don’t have faith *by itself*?