

I feel it is only fair to offer a PG 13 warning as I begin my sermon; the picture I am about to show on the screen is a close-up of my feet. If you ate an unusually large breakfast, or, are newly pregnant and have an unsettled stomach, you might want to avert your eyes.

This Summer my daughter wanted to test out her sparkly nail polish on someone. Mom wasn't around. Older brother was unwilling. That left me and my less-than-beautiful feet. They say a picture is worth a thousand words but when I posted this picture on Instagram, it became clear that my feet weren't going to inspire nearly that many words.

My good friend, Jay Ewing, Pastor at Tenth Ave. Alliance, simply wrote, "*My eyes!*" Another close friend, Greg Kline wrote, "*I'm not sure it worked, maybe a little electrolysis needed.*"

Did you know that the human foot is composed of 26 bones, 33 joints, and more than a hundred muscles, tendons, and ligaments? While the foot is not typically celebrated for its beauty, feet are crucial to human functionality.

A number of years ago I had the opportunity to go to Israel as a part of a study tour. Every participant had come to Israel to learn about its ancient history, to visit archeological sites, and take a deeper look into the Scriptures, but our tour guide—Todd Lanting—shaped our experience in a deliberate way.

During the three years that Jesus engaged in public ministry, He was most frequently addressed by the title of *Rabbi*. "Rabbi" simply means "teacher" but Jesus' teaching method, and the goal, was different than what we might associate with a University professor

today. A university professor invites you into her/his classroom, instructs you, and gives you assignments; a Rabbi invited you to walk in their footsteps. There was instruction to be sure, but it was the walking, the following in their way, that set their instruction apart.

Todd was convinced that there are **some things can only be learned by walking**. For example, it's impossible to fully understand what David wrote in Psalm 63 without a personal experience of desert-induced-thirst. "*You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.*"

We got off a nicely air-conditioned bus in the Israeli desert, and were promptly hit with a blast of 49 degrees Celsius. We proceeded to hike through the desert for a few hours, following Todd to the Spring of En Gedi. **Some things are only made real by walking.**

I've begun my sermon as I have because of what comes next in our preaching series through the Book of James. Ten to fifteen years after the resurrection of Jesus, His half-brother James, wrote a letter that was circulated among Christians who had fled Jerusalem to escape persecution. This letter reveals an insider's knowledge; James knows his readers' questions, concerns, and challenges. Of one James' chief concerns was the way in which people were thinking about faith.

It seems that there were those who wanted to define faith in purely credal terms, in other words, *faith is what we believe about God*, but James's definition is more comprehensive. For James, **faith = belief + behaviour**. If what we believe about God doesn't affect and transform the way we live, James says that such "faith" is worthless.

Real faith certainly includes credal statements—what we believe about God is of vital importance—but faith isn't passive, it's active, which is to say, *faith does something*—it does something in us, and it does something in the world. **Faith is proved genuine by the way we walk.**

Let's take a closer look at what James writes, in chapter 2:14-26. If you are using the Blue Bible from the seat rack in front of you, our text can be found on page 978.

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 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? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

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 my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our father 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 considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

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.

I have chosen to summarize James' main idea with the following phrase—**faith has feet**. When God takes hold of our life, we begin to change. Not all at once, we don't become perfect, but the Holy Spirit begins to transform us. Change, growth, and fruitfulness are normal outcomes of following Jesus. Our faith is personal but it's not private; real, genuine, saving faith will be seen, heard, and felt by others.

As we make our way through the text, we're going to explore the four examples of faith that James highlights; the first two examples are counterfeit, the last two are genuine.

1. Counterfeit "Faith"—Example #1 (vs. 14-17): James begins in vs. 14 with a question: "*What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?*"

In every question there is an invitation to pause, to reflect, to engage. If James' audience were prone to wandering minds then asking a question, or better yet, *asking this question*, was a way of ensuring engagement. He begins with a question about life, death, and saving faith. *You say you believe, but is your faith genuine? Is it a saving faith?*

The person of vs. 14 claims to have faith, but vs. 15-16 demonstrate that the claim is unfounded—it lacks concrete evidence. Vs. 15-16,

“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?”

James uses an example to illustrate the disconnect between what we believe about God and how we behave towards others. He could have used many other examples but he chooses this one because it is particular to the problems confronting his churches. Impoverished Christians were being ignored by other Christians within the church community.

In Jesus’ *Sermon On The Mount* we are taught to pray for daily bread, but God’s normal way of fulfilling this request isn’t to perform a miracle. Most often, God provides for the hungry through people like us who have something to share. James describes the one in need as *“a brother or a sister;”* and in so doing it’s clear that he’s referring to needs within the church community.

Those who had nothing were being seen and ignored by those who had something to share. But if we think about it, it’s actually worse than I just described; those who had something to share were doing less than nothing—they were making matters even worse by their words.

To respond to a dire need with, *“Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,”* is a kind of back-handed blessing. It properly recognizes God as the source of provision while at the same time distancing oneself from any kind of responsibility. It would be more honest to say, *“God*

will provide (but not through me), *I hope things turn out for you* (but not at my expense).”

Real, genuine, saving faith can be seen, heard, and felt by others.

Faith without action, without evidence, is like an empty promise—it’s just words, it doesn’t mean anything. In vs. 17 James goes on to say, *“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

With the 24 hour global media that exists today, we are made painfully aware—moment by moment—of the needs of the world. There is so much need that we can become paralyzed. Which needs do we address? With James, we begin by looking to the needs within our own community, and then we choose to live/give sacrificially.

There are people in our midst who experience a crippling poverty, or mental illness, or addiction. There are people in our midst who are withering due to physical health, or loneliness. One author writes, *“In every area there is some opportunity to experience the great Christian truth that the abundance of the one is designed for the need of the other (2 Cor. 8:12-15).”*¹

But we don’t just look within our own family, or church community, we also look to our neighbourhood, our city, and our world. No doubt we will become aware of more needs than we could ever possibly meet, and so, we look to the Lord, asking Him to guide our priorities. As a church, among other things, we’ve sensed the Lord’s call to bring a second refugee family to Canada; by addressing this need, there are other needs that we will not address.

¹ J.A. Motyer, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of James*, 111.

But what is completely contrary to faith is to conclude that we don't have any responsibility outside of ourselves. Our faith is personal but it's not private; *genuine, saving faith will be seen, heard, and felt by others.*

2. Counterfeit “Faith”—Example #2 (vs. 18-19): Let's turn to the second example of counterfeit faith, found in vs. 18-19. *“Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”*
19 *You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.”*

Here James resists the notion that faith can be sub-divided, as if one could prioritize “belief” but ignore behaviour; the one cannot live without the other. And to make his case, James uses the example of demonic spirits.

Let me begin by saying that God can be known; He has revealed Himself through His Son (incarnation), through the Scripture, and through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And yet, there is much that we do not see or perceive in God. There is a veil between heaven and earth that prevents us from seeing and knowing all that we will one day see and know.

Demonic spirits, however, once lived in God's glorious presence; they saw Him face to face and heard His voice. In one sense, they see and know God more clearly than we do, so much so, that they affirm His oneness and tremble in fear before Him. A demonic spirit could quite easily sign off on our Statement of Faith but that doesn't mean

they have faith. Do you “believe” in Jesus Christ? Fully God, fully human, died on the cross, raised three days later, and ascended to the Father's side? Evil spirits believe these same truths but belief alone does not equal a genuine, saving, faith. If what we hold to be true about God does not lead to love, worship, and obedience, it isn't faith, it's counterfeit. James calls such a faith “useless.”

3. Genuine Faith—Example #1 (vs. 20-24): After highlighting two examples of counterfeit faith, James then shares two examples of genuine, saving faith—the first is expected, the second is unexpected.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, Abraham could be described as a “father of faith”. James uses an example from a particular chapter of Abraham's life but allow me to tell Abraham's story in brief. When God called Abraham to follow Him, He promised to bless Abraham, making him a father of many nations. In fact, the promise that through Abraham and his offspring, God would bless the entire world. We're told that Abraham believed God's promise, but there was one small challenge to this promise—Abraham and his wife Sarah were unable to conceive. How could their offspring bless the world if they remained childless?

When Isaac was given to Abraham and Sarah, he was loved by his parents with a fierce and generous love. Imagine how painful it must have been when, years later, God spoke to Abraham saying, *“Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”*

The testing of our faith is not like a math test, where we are called upon to produce the right answer; when it comes to faith, how we

live *is* our answer. The point James makes here is that Abraham was commended for how he *acted*; his faith in God's promise was seen as he and Isaac made the journey to Moriah. Abraham's faith had feet; he didn't hold anything back from God, not even his son.

In vs. 22 James says that Abraham's "*faith was made complete by what he did.*" Some things can only be learned by walking. Abraham's faith was not mature until he acted upon it; the same is true for all of us.

Before I move on to the second example of genuine faith, I want to briefly address an issue that stems not from what James writes here, but from something that the Apostle Paul would write 10-15 years later.

James was writing to Christians, arguing for the unity of belief and behaviour—they are two sides of the same coin; this is clearly seen in vs. 24. But the Apostle Paul, years later, would argue strongly that we are saved by grace, through faith, apart from anything we do—that our action does not make us acceptable to God.² As a result, some have set James and Paul in opposition to one another; I believe this is unmerited.

Both Paul and James have something important to say about faith, each with a different point to make. Both would agree that God's grace comes before our obedience, belief comes before a change in behaviour, and forgiveness comes before transformation. Paul wants

² Ephesians 2:8-10.

³ Francis Gench, *Hebrews and James*, 106; as quoted by Blomberg and Kamell, 139.

everyone to know that salvation comes to us from God, as gift, since we couldn't possibly earn it. Paul is concerned with how Christian life begins, while James is concerned with how Christian life grows and matures.³ What we *do* does not make us acceptable to God, but *what we do does reveal whether our faith is genuine and growing.*

4. Genuine Faith—Example #2 (vs. 25-26): If you know the Scriptures, the mention of Abraham in connection to faith isn't surprising but James' second example is unexpected.

We tend to think of life before God in terms of a ledger, with debits and credits. And so we might feel smug and superior about having lived a "better" life than others, or, in thinking that our ledger has less debits than another person's ledger.

This kind of thinking is foolish. As has been said many times before, the ground is level at the foot of the Cross. All of us come to God, through Christ; all of us come in need of His grace and mercy. In this regard, no one is ahead, or behind. But the choice of Rahab as an example of faith is unexpected.

Vs. 25-26: "*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?*"

Rahab and Abraham are different in almost every conceivable way.

- Rahab was female and Abraham was male.

- Abraham was wealthy, privileged, and powerful; Rahab was poor, and lacking privilege and power.
- Abraham was generally thought of as a moral example, whereas Rahab lived on the outskirts of her society, forced to make her living as a prostitute.

And yet, both are named as examples of faith. Rahab trusted God and the genuineness of her faith was proved through her actions. When called upon, Rahab offered her house, her resources, and her ingenuity to shelter and protect Israeli spies.⁴ If caught, Rahab's life would have been forfeit, along with the spies. God honoured Rahab for her faith and courage. Her checkered past wasn't held against her; her trust in God led to faithful action, and as a result, she was grafted into God's people.

Rahab ended up marrying an Israelite named Obed, they had a son named Boaz, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David who became king over all Israel. In fact, Jesus Himself—in His humanity—was a descendant of Rahab and Obed. Rahab is not the exception but the rule; God loves to include people in His family—there is room for you today.

With his conclusion in vs. 26, James is beginning to sound like a broken record:

- **Vs. 17:** *“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

⁴ J.A. Motyer, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of James*, 110.

⁵ Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament: James*, 141.

⁶ Motyer, 116.

- **Vs. 20:** *“faith without deeds is useless”.*
- **Vs. 26:** *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”*

This final analogy speaks to the unity of the human person. We live at a time in the West where outside of medical personnel, very few people ever see a dead body. I have had the privilege of being present with people as they took their last breath. Within moments following death, the person's colouring begins to change; it is plain for all to see that the person is no longer alive.

James takes this stark example and applies it to the unity of faith and works, or belief + behaviour. Craig Blomberg writes, “Faith that does not reveal itself in works—in a changed lifestyle that glorifies God and seeks his heart for the world—is dead, lifeless, workless, and worthless. In reality, it is not faith at all; it is only the shell or corpse of faith.”⁵

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, let's go back to James' question about life, death, and saving faith. *You say you believe, but is your faith genuine? Is there any evidence to back up your claim?*

What was Abraham's evidence? When asked, he didn't hold anything back from God. What was Rahab's evidence? She saved Israelite spies who were at risk of being captured; she fed them and helped them to escape, even though it put her own life at risk.⁶

What about you? *You say you believe, but is your faith genuine?*

Faith—real, genuine, saving faith—always has feet. Change, growth, and fruitfulness are normal outcomes of following Jesus. Our faith is personal but it's not private; genuine faith will be seen, heard, and felt by others.

Pray

Worship

Benediction