

## Scripture (NKJV)

<sup>14</sup> What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

<sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? <sup>17</sup>Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

<sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

## Outline

- What good is a faith that does not bear fruit?
- No conflict between James' and Paul's view of works not earning Salvation.
- James turns around to view faith from the perspective of what comes from it, not what leads to it.
- He is writing about this relationship in faith (with Jesus), which responds through works.
- As mock charity is useless, so will a mock profession of faith in Jesus, when presented to Him for examination on the Last Day.
- This is the litmus test of any faith; a tree is known by its fruit.
- He persuades us to examine ourselves for the Saving faith in Jesus, coexisting with works brought about by that same faith.
- If found deficient, only one choice but to throw oneself at the foot of the Cross and cry for Mercy.

## Lesson

James challenges the one, professing to be a believer in Jesus, to examine himself for the evidence of the root of his faith. He begins by asking: What good is a faith that does not bear fruit? 'What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?' He can ask this, because he knows that anyone Saved has faith in Jesus the Savior, and that faith has to come from God, leading to a relationship with His Son. And if there is a relationship with His Son, then that relationship must produce nothing less than an outpouring in response. (**Jn 7:37-38**) So then, if there is not fruit being borne out of a faith, what good can it be, for it cannot be the type from God, which would inherently produce those fruits. And therefore, if it is not of God and thus not of Jesus, then how can this kind of faith save him? **'Can faith save him?'**

There is no conflict here between James' and Paul's view of works not earning Salvation. (Rom 11:5-6) In both cases, they seek to put the issues of works in their proper place and order. Paul writes of Salvation '*according to the election of (God's) grace*', (v 5), which cannot be earned through any works of the one to be Saved, (v 6). If this were so, then that person's contribution would negate the nature of grace itself. Grace is a gift to someone who has no basis of deserving it, and who has no means of paying for or contributing to it – '*otherwise grace is no longer grace*' (v 6). Paul does not allow for the Saving Grace from God to be the result of any works of mankind. James' argument supports this too; he agrees with Paul on the issue of free Saving Grace, then turns around to view faith from the perspective of what comes from it, not what leads to it. He knows that on this side of Justification the believer will respond to his faith through an encounter with the Holy God. He is writing about this relationship in faith, which responds through works.

So how might he quantify it? What example might he use to illustrate the reality of a 'dead' faith? He offers v15 – **'If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food'**. These people are shown to be in a terrible state – their lives are endangered for a lack of fundamental necessity. The situation is not only punctuated by the measure of basic humane concern, but also in that God has commanded us to aid the poor (**Lev 25:35**). However, **'one of (us)'** who confess to be a child of the God of compassion, - **'(who) says he has faith'** - offers a token blessing of love and comfort – **'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled'**. However, they are sent away empty-handed. Here, **'(we) do not give them the things which are needed for the body'**, that which is a basic need. James' illustration shows the utter uselessness of this hollow charity. And, as this mock charity is useless, so will a mock profession of faith in Jesus, when presented to Him for examination on the Last Day. This faith, in failing to produce works helpful in the most basic of ways, nor in the compassion of a heart found in one of God, betrays itself as hollow and of no value. **'Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.'** This is the litmus test of any faith; a tree is known by its fruit, and the value of the works Judged by God's Measure will reflect the state of faith in one's life. (**Matt 7:24-25**), (**Rev 20:12**) Under the demand of our new spirit we are called to react, and only the faith that God grants can produce works righteous before God. All other faiths are dead.

For the sake of illustration, James offers someone's declaration of the validity of his works, in contrast to James' plea – **'But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works."'** He persuades us to examine ourselves for the Saving faith in Jesus, coexisting with works brought about by that same faith – **'Show me your faith without your works,'** (you cannot) **'and I will show you my faith by my works.'** (I do).

James acknowledges this person's works, but shows that works can be present without faith, and this is no better to save him. Works or dead faith, by themselves, will both prove worthless at the Judgment. And so, if in examining his own faith, one was to find it in question or deficient, he has only one choice but to throw himself at the foot of the Cross and cry for Mercy in Jesus. This person of v18 can only show works, which he cannot prove to be in response to Saving faith, and so cannot defy James' logic nor prove to himself his works qualify him as Saved. And as a reference point, James uses a life like his own as an illustration of this doctrine, as his life had the marks of one saved – **'and I will show you my faith by my works.'**

## Cited Scripture

### John 7:37-38

<sup>37</sup> On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." <sup>38</sup>He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

### Romans 11:5-6

<sup>5</sup>Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. <sup>6</sup>And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

### Leviticus 25:35

<sup>35</sup> "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.

### Matthew 7:24-25

<sup>24</sup> "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: <sup>25</sup>and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

### Revelation 20:12

<sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.