

**Sermon Notes of  
Pastor Craig Kuhlman's Sermon on September 5, 2021:**

**"Works of Living Faith (James 2:1-17)"**

**[In today's sermon, Pastor Craig Kuhlman, at church in the Y, shows us how James contrasted living faith, which gives us spiritual fruit with dead faith, which gives us human judgment against others.]**

Introduction:

- Now, today's passage perhaps is one we wouldn't choose to cover, if it weren't placed in the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary) of Grace Communion International.
- We might not go over verses that are corrective in nature, because it might make us squirm.
- But by the end of today's message we will find that there is no reason to squirm or to have fear, shame, guilt or doubt.
  
- Pastor Craig has titled this message, "Works of Living Faith."
- Now "living faith" is usually not a term that we'll find in scripture, but rather it's kind of implied.
- But, we will find James talking about "dead faith."
- So, if he talks about "dead faith", it's axiomatic that there has to be living faith.
  
- Pastor Craig is going to get our creative, thoughtful, reflective juices flowing a bit by asking the question, "What is the difference between dead faith and living faith?"
- Brother Bradley says that it's all about the heart.
- Now, faith is our living trust and belief that we place in our living Savior, Jesus.
- Everything that comes out of that belief is all about our relationship with Him.
  
- Now, our relationship with Jesus is our hallmark and center piece of what distinguishes the difference between dead faith and living faith.
- Ed says living faith bears fruit and dead faith bears nothing.
- Yes, dead faith bears no spiritual works.
- Now, we used to think that all works had some form of legalism and backed away from that.
  
- Now, interestingly, a few years ago, Dr. Deddo wrote an article which talked about the faith of obedience, which sounded strange to most of us.
- Obedience isn't such an admired word in our Western culture, so Pastor Craig has substituted it with the word "yield" rather than the word "submit" which also has a negative history in our culture.
  
- Now, interestingly, the book of James was a late coming into the authorized version of the New Testament, because of some of the things he had to say.
- What James tells us isn't untrue and it doesn't make it unreal in terms of our family relationship in how we treat each other.

- Again, we need to understand that our living faith is centered in our relationship with Jesus Christ.
- And, if it isn't, then those spiritual works will not come, which is the distinction between dead faith and living faith.
- Now the only works we have to do is to make sure we are abiding in the vine, because that's how Jesus tells us we will bear much fruit.
- So, if we are abiding in the vine in our relationship with Jesus, then those spiritual works will naturally flow.
- There is nothing to feel ashamed about, or judged about, or hurt about, because if we are constantly involved in that relationship with God living in us and living through us, we will bear much fruit and that's the basis of the works that James will write about in this passage.

### Who was James?

- He was the brother of Jesus.
- James was also known as the leader of the Jerusalem church.
- So, he carried a little bit of weight and a little bit of clout.
- And he wrote this letter to the Jewish diaspora, who had moved away from Jerusalem and Judea.
- To be honest, James had to deal with some snarky family members.
- And, part of the problem he had to deal with is this concept of wealth versus poor, favoritism and partiality versus being impartial.
- What he is essentially saying is this attitude toward wealth and the attitude from wealth was not appropriate for brothers and sisters and the family of Jesus Christ.
- Now, those attitudes were reflected in that the wealthy looked down upon their poor brothers and sisters.
- And in the Church of God, that should not be – we are family, period.
- There's no room for favoritism, there's no room for partiality, no room for looking down upon someone just because they come from a different socio-economic class.

[In the past, Pastor Craig had the opportunity to rub shoulders with some fairly wealthy people, when he was working in trust and wealth management at a bank in Beverly Hills. So he talked about their attitudes he saw, when the wealthy interacted with others.]

### **James 2:1 (NASB), My brothers and sisters, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.**

- So, who or what is our faith in? It's Jesus Christ.
- And how does James describe Jesus? Glorious!
- So, because we have this relationship with Jesus, we shouldn't have an attitude of personal favoritism.

**2) For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and is dressed in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, 3) and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4)**

**have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?**

- So, today, that attitude is reflected differently.
- We can have critical attitudes concerning our brothers and sisters based upon their political bias, based upon their race, or based upon who they might associate with.
- But this shouldn't happen.
- Yes, we can have those differences of opinion and not let it affect our relationships with them.

**5) Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters: did God not choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?**

- Back then, the rich had this practice that when they came into contention with someone, they would quickly take you to court as opposed to working it out with them.
- Jesus tells us in Matthew that we need to go our brother and sister and work things out.

**7) Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called? 8) If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the Law as violators.**

- James is confirming that if we show partiality and dishonor, we do not love our neighbor as ourselves and thus are committing sin.
- As brothers and sisters, we're to show each other love and compassion.
- James is showing us what kind of works we have when we are in relationship with Jesus and what that living faith looks like and it doesn't show partiality or dishonor.

**10) For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all. 11) For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do murder, you have become a violator of the Law.**

- Now we would consider adultery and murder as some of those as high profile sins, which would have greater consequences than just coveting what your neighbor might have.
- But James places those high profile sins along with our attitudes we might have with our brother and sister.
- Now, we might not think our attitudes are such a big deal, but it does matter.

**12) So speak, and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. 13) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.**

- Now, what kind of judgment are we talking about?
- This is neither the judgment of condemnation nor the judgement of punishment, because Jesus took care of that on the cross.

- This judgment here has to do with works – it's the same judgment that Peter was talking about in his letter regarding the church and what happens with works that are based on living faith and dead works which is based on a lack of faith.
- Now the works that come out of our humanity will be burned as rubble.
- Now, the works that are produced by the works of the Spirit and the fruits that Jesus talked about by abiding in the vine will be judged as appropriate and will be rewarded.
- Our living works is what Jesus is looking for and those living works have to do with our relationship that we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ and the way we treat each other as family.
- We need to support each other as family.

**14) What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 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, be warmed and be filled," yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17) In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.**

- So, as a believer, we can have dead faith if we are not continually abiding in and developing our relationship with Jesus through prayer, study, meditation, and through conversation, curiosity and contemplation.
- But, when we are abiding in the vine of Jesus, the Holy Spirit just flows through us like living water and a living river and our spiritual works are then created even though we don't always know what we were doing.
- Now obedience without faith is legalism.
- So, if we trying to obey just on our own and not letting the Spirit flow through us, then that leads to a legalistic approach to things.
- But, if we are involved in abiding in that vine and seeking the kingdom and Christ's righteousness and staying involved in that relationship with Jesus, then these things just naturally flow through us.
- And some day, in the future, we'll hear, "Well done good and faithful servant."
- All of us want to be commended for living faith rather than dead faith.
- And James tells us that we do that through our relationship that starts right here by loving each other, providing for each other and fulfill the needs of others – that's what a family does.

Closing prayer:

Communion by Redida Edwards:

- As we participate in communion today, let's remember that we do so in freedom, because Jesus has given His all for this freedom.
- So, when we participate in communion today, it's something not to be taken lightly because it is so important.
- We need to remember our brothers and sisters around the world, especially those who are being persecuted would love to have that freedom that we have to come to this table and participate with Jesus without having to look over their shoulders.

**Ephesians 5:2, And we walk in the way of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

- What a privilege and honor we have here today to give glory to the One who gave it all for us and all our brothers and sisters around the world.
- When we take communion, it's a reflection of what Jesus did for us.
- He made a way for us to have fellowship with our Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
  
- He made this way for us, but it came with a price. Freedom often comes with a price.
- So, as we take the bread and wine, let's just reflect on that spiritual nourishment we can participate with our Lord and Savior, who gave it all.
- Our Lord was so wonderful – it was His love and His faithfulness on the cross that brought us here.
- Jesus made a way for us and let us never forget it.
  
- So, let's take the bread which represents Jesus.
- And let's take the wine which represents His blood.
- By doing this, we have fellowship with Jesus.

Prayer over the elements: