

YOU

Bible Study

Sermon Series: How to Share Christ

To be used with: Live the Message

Sermon Title Possibilities: A Faith That Works

Scripture: James 2:14-26

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study How to Share Christ, these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Introduction: When I was little, I came across a book called Teenage Tales. As the title suggests, it contained different stories about teenagers and young adults. Most of the stories were from the 1950's, so I suspect the book once belonged to my older sibling. I still enjoyed it, though, and one of my favorite stories in that book was called "The Big Shot". It was about a group of Marines that had a new man who was constantly bragging about himself. He bragged about his expertise in sports, marksmanship, singing, dancing—you name it. He even bragged that he had dated a famous movie star. The trouble was he never tried to prove anything. He just bragged. Needless to say, the other guys found him more than a little tiresome. At the end of the story, ironically, they found out his claims were true! The narrator of the story said, "We didn't like him before, but when we found out he hadn't really been bragging about anything, we really hated him."

The great baseball player Dizzy Dean used to say, "It ain't bragging if you can do it." With that thought in mind, I want to raise a question: if someone were to ask you to prove that your faith was real, how would you respond? Anyone can say they love Jesus or have faith in Him, but how can you prove that your love and faith is real? The second chapter of James answers that question: you show it by your works.

A provocative interrogation.

- A. James asked a question about a man who said he had faith, but who had no works to back it up.
 - 1. "Can faith save him?" – Literally, "Can such faith save him?"
 - a. James did not deny the importance of faith, but he wanted to define what constitutes genuine faith.
 - b. In the original Greek language, the question is worded so that it expects a negative answer.
 - 2. On this point, James does not contradict Paul in the least.
 - a. Paul emphasized that we are saved by faith, not works, but he also noted that faith produces good works (Eph. 2:8-10).
 - b. He warned against abusing one's Christian liberty (Gal. 5:13).
 - Vance Havner illustrated it this way. Suppose he was trying to sell hair tonic? (He was bald). He said the first question someone would ask him was, "Have you tried it?" If he said no, then the person would say, "I don't think you should try to sell me a product if you haven't tried it yourself." If Dr. Havner said

yes, then the person would say, “It doesn’t work!” As Dr. Havner said, “The gospel works, but the world needs to see it work.”

B. James illustrated his point by talking about a man in need.

1. The word translated “naked” does not mean he was completely bare. It speaks of insufficient clothing.
 - a. Suppose you saw a person like that, you acknowledged his need, and you wished him well. Would that improve his condition?
 - b. The only way you could solve his problem is by your actions.
2. Some use this passage to promote a “social gospel”. Christians should help people in need, but that was not James’ point.
 - a. His point was mere words would not put food in the man’s stomach or warm clothing on his body.
 - b. True compassion is more than words, and so is true faith.
3. James addressed those who affirmed their faith in God.
 - a. He wasn’t denying the importance of doctrine. The whole Gospel is based on certain truths about Jesus.
 - b. “The devils also believe” – Faith involves more than intellectual agreement. It means trusting Jesus enough to obey Him.

Some perceptive illustrations.

A. The example of Abraham.

1. Abraham was regarded as a righteous man.
 - a. Many Jews thought his righteousness would be passed down to his descendants (Matthew 3:7-9).
 - b. Paul emphasized that Abraham was not declared righteous by his circumcision, but by his faith (Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:2-3).
2. Abraham’s works proved that his faith was genuine.
 - a. His faith was tested when God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac.
 - b. It’s one thing to say you trust God, but it’s quite another to trust Him so much that you’ll do whatever He commands you to do.

B. The example of Rahab.

1. She hid the two spies when they came to Jericho (Joshua 2).
 - a. She was not only a pagan, but also a prostitute.
 - b. Because she believed in the God of Israel, her family was spared when the city was destroyed.
2. How was Rahab declared righteous?
 - a. She believed in the true God, and she was saved by His grace.
 - b. She demonstrated her faith by hiding the two spies.
3. James compared faith without works to a body without a spirit.
 - a. A body that has no spirit is dead.
 - I’ve often heard people say, “Well, I can’t be there physically, but I’ll be there in spirit.” I know what they mean by that. They’re saying they can’t be physically present, but they’ll be thinking about the people who are there. Still, is it really possible for your spirit to go anywhere unless your body goes with it? If your spirit is separated from your body, then you’re dead!
 - b. A faith without works is equally dead.
 - I’ve conducted a lot of funerals through the years. I’ve always been impressed by the way a mortician can fix up a dead body.

They often look better than they did when they were sick in the hospital. In the same way, many people will dress up a dead spirituality in the same way a mortician dressed up a dead body. They'll wear their finest clothes, attend church, and sing louder than anyone else. Yet their faith makes no difference in their daily lives, so it is dead.

Conclusion: The story goes that a preacher was talking to a man about Jesus. The man insisted that he had trusted in Jesus as his Lord and Savior. The preacher asked him what church he attended. The man said, "I don't go to church, but the thief on the cross never went to church and he still made it to heaven." The preacher asked him if he'd ever been baptized. The man replied, "No, but the thief on the cross was never baptized and he still made it to heaven." The preacher asked the man if he had ever partaken of the Lord's Supper. The man replied, "No, but the thief on the cross never partook of the Lord's Supper and he still went to heaven." The preacher finally said, "The only difference I see between you and the thief on the cross is that he was dying in his faith and you're dead in yours."

Is your faith dead or alive? Is your faith real, or are you just going through the motions? I'm not saying Christians are perfect; we're not. I'm not saying we never struggle with sin; we do. I am saying if you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, He will make a difference in your daily life. You have a new love for Him that makes you want to please Him and obey Him. Do you have that kind of faith today?

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¹ Michael Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989, p. 141.