



Ed Miller  
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## **JAMES 2:10-26**

Great to be with you. We do have a wonderful privilege in this country of being able to gather together. You know we don't need to come together to worship. We don't need to come together to study God's word. But we have the privilege of coming together and doing that. It's a great thing. We take things like this for granted often that we have such privileges in this country, but it's a tremendous blessing for us to be able to gather together as people who love the Lord and to encourage each other.

You don't need me here either to teach the word of God. We have the word of God. At other times in history you needed a priest to present the word of God to you, but we don't need the priest. You can go directly to the Lord. But again, we have the privilege of coming together and looking at the word of God.

Many people in our culture don't really take a lot of time to reflect on their life. One of the things that this does for us is it gives us an opportunity every week to think about what's really important in life and to readjust our lives in accordance with God's word, to get more in line with His word. It's a privilege.

I am Ed Miller and I am the on-call preacher when Pastor Scott is detained someplace else, as he is this time. It's a privilege. When I speak we're working through the book of James together, so we're going to get back to that.

Some of you know me well, but some of you don't know me that well, so I always like to give a little bit of an insight into my life again as I begin to preach. For most of my life I have had the privilege of ministering to college students through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. It's just a wonderful thing in my heart that my son and his wife are assisting those who are moving off to college this year as well. I spent most of my life, over thirty-five years, working with college students.

I'd like to just take a moment and ask us all to pray for college students. Many students are going to be going back to college in the coming weeks.

Things have really changed on the college campuses in the last ten years. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is involved in outreach, discipleship, leadership development in colleges and universities throughout the country. Today many of those groups are struggling with access to the college campus. College campuses have moved more toward restricting any kind of religious group if that group will not allow anyone into leadership in their group, if they will not allow someone with any religious belief to be a part of the leadership of that group.

So it's kind of crazy actually, but that means that the Muslim group on campus has to be open to Christians in leadership. The Jewish group needs to be open to Christians or Muslims in leadership. It also means that the Christian group needs to be open to someone of another belief. And if they cannot affirm that, if they want their leaders to believe in the fundamental things their organization stands for, they are being denied access even to using the facilities on campus. So that's a pretty significant thing in our country today.

What happens on our college campuses is often the first thing and then it starts to move into the rest of our society. So we need to pray that God would just use these students and the leaders to continue to be faithful, to continue to serve Him, continue to do the work that God has called them to do, even if they are restricted in access, and God would change this direction or this policy. Let's pray.

[PRAYER] Lord, you know that my heart in many ways is still on college campuses with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and many of my colleagues there. I thank you for the great work that's being done with college students to help them process the things they're learning in class, and how that relates to their Christian faith, and how to be faithful in serving you in terms of being disciples and leaders and reaching out to friends. I thank you for my friends there, Lord. I pray that you would open doors for these Christian ministries to have access to facilities on campus, to be able to do the work that you've called them to do. Would you open those doors, Lord, and would you give them wisdom and strength as they do that. I pray for those who are going off to college in our body. I pray that you would prepare them, that you would go with them, that you would, even now, be preparing friends and colleagues and people that they can spend time with to encourage and nourish their faith. It is a difficult place in many ways. A place of stretching and of challenge. But when we're stretched and challenged that's often when we grow the most. So I pray that you would be with them now. In Jesus' name, amen.

Okay. If you want to follow along, we're going to be in James 2 this morning. We're going to look at James 2:10-26. We're going to be looking at a couple of very fundamental tenets of the Christian faith this morning. Let's do it together. Let's read starting at verse 10.

*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.*

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Let's just look at that section for a while. Earlier in chapter 2 and the last time I spoke, which was quite a while ago now, we looked at this whole concept of favoritism and how God views each of us. In God's eyes we're all equal, of equal value, yet different. We have different gifts, different strengths, different genders, different ages. There are many ways that we are different, but in God's eyes, in terms of value, we're all the same. We're all His loved children.

Another way we're all the same, though, James tells us here, is that we are all lawbreakers. If we have broken one part, one piece of the law then we are lawbreakers and we have fallen short of the perfection that God demands. The Apostle Paul says *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. And James is clear here that to stumble in even one point is actually to break the whole law.

That's not the way our society tends to look at things. Our society tends to look at good and evil in terms of counterbalances, weights and balances. You take all your good things over here, take all the bad things you do over here, and if the good outweighs the bad then you're a good person. If the bad outweighs then you're a bad person. But James is making clear to us that that is not the way that God sees things. If we break the law in one point, we have broken the law in every point.

Here's one way to think about this that I find very helpful. If you take a pile of rocks – think of a big pile of stones or a big pile of rocks. If you remove one rock it still remains a pile of rock. A better illustration of how God uses this is to consider a pane of glass or a mirror. It's a mirror as long as it's all together, but as soon as I throw a rock at it it shatters. It's no longer a pane of glass, it's no longer a mirror; now it's a broken pile of glass. It changes, doesn't it? So in the same way if we break the law in any one point then we are a lawbreaker or we are a broken pane of glass.

Here's another great illustration to illustrate this point. I did not memorize this. I'm going to read it.

Adolf Eichmann was one of the primary architects of the Holocaust and when he was tried for war crimes at Nuremberg, Yehiel Dinur, who had survived Auschwitz, faced Eichmann for the first time since leaving the concentration camp. When he saw Eichmann, Dinur sobbed and fainted.

Years later, Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* asked Dinur what happened. Was he overcome by hatred? or fear? or horrid memories? And Dinur's answer is stunning. He said he suddenly realized that Eichmann was not some godlike authority in military uniform who sent thousands to their deaths. He was just an ordinary man. "And then," said Dinur, "I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable of doing this also. I am exactly like he." That's pretty profound.

We're broken panes of glass. We're lawbreakers.

I shared in a past sermon that at one point in my life I went to counseling. I was discovering certain things in my life and anger was coming out. I needed to look inside and find out where that was coming from. Looked at issues in my past.

As I went through that whole process, my counselor said something extremely striking to me. He said, "Ed, you think too highly of yourself." Hmm. That really took me aback because I've always thought of myself as a very humble man. But he said, "In reality, Ed, you think too highly of yourself. You really think that you're better than others. You need to come to grips with the

fact that you are just like everyone else.” You’re a lawbreaker. You’re a sinner. You’re not better than anyone else.

That transformed my life, actually. Thinking of myself as a lawbreaker, just as everyone else is, a sinner. It was very helpful to me. It was very humbling, but a good thing for me to do.

I think this is what James is looking at here when he talks about the fact that we need to go easy on other people. We need to not be so quick to judge other people. Because we’re just like them. But by the grace of God we could be doing some of the same kinds of things that they’re doing. God’s grace maybe has freed us from some things. But we need to be merciful to those who are sinners like us and not be judgmental. *Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Let’s continue on. Verse 14: *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

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

*You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? He’s going to give us some illustrations now. Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 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. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.*

*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? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

This is some of the most controversial teachings in scripture. The teachings of Paul are very clear and are often brought out as an essential tenet to the Christian faith that we are saved by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ. Very clear throughout Paul’s teaching in Acts and in Romans and in the other books that are altered by Paul that this is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith.

We cannot earn salvation by our good deeds no matter how many good deeds we put on this side of the scale. All kinds of good deeds. One act is going to be our downfall. So we cannot earn that. We need to recognize our need to be forgiven and saved by the grace of Christ. He accomplished that on the cross and there’s nothing that we can do except to affirm that and believe that and put our life in God’s hands.

Now it seems as if James is contradicting that point here. It seems that way. In the Middle Ages the church was beginning to drift toward a works-based orientation to faith. The Protestant Reformation was really about going back to this fundamental understanding that salvation can be earned by deeds. We know that's not true.

Is James in fact contradicting this idea? I would say he's not. I would say what James is doing is he's helping us understand what true faith is. He's helping us gain a clear understanding of what faith really is. He's not saying that salvation can be obtained by works, but he's saying that genuine faith is going to manifest itself in action and in good works.

For someone to say, "I believe something, I have faith in something," and there's not to be a change in their life, not to be a change in the way that they respond, the way that they live means that that faith is not genuine. We know this, don't we? It's easy to say I affirm something, I believe something, to give mental assent to something. It's easy for us to do that. It's a whole other thing for us to take that affirmation and let it affect every aspect of our life, to let it impact everything that we do, to let it transform us.

For us to say, "I believe that I'm saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, saved from my own selfishness, saved from running my own life and doing the damage that I do, saved from that to allow Jesus to run my life," it's one thing to affirm that, to say that I believe that it's true. It's a whole other thing to live as though that is true.

That is what James is getting at here. He's saying it's not good enough to just say that you believe something. If there's not evidence in your life that that is changing your life, then it's not genuine faith.

I want to do a demonstration. Paul gives three examples of this, but I want to do a live demonstration and I need a volunteer for this. It has to be someone that trusts me, has faith in me. If you don't know me, you might not want to do this. But I need a volunteer. Do I have a volunteer to come up? We're going to do a trust fall.

Come on down. Well you know what, I said the only thing you have to do is trust me. You don't have to know what's going to happen. This illustrates the point even better. You have to be courageous. That's good.

The key is now I'm going to tell you exactly what to do. Alright? Don't do anything yet though. I did this one time and somebody started falling backwards before I said, "Go." Don't do anything until I say, "Go." This is a good demonstration of faith here.

I'm going to tell Kimberly to fall backwards. Kimberly, I want you to put your arms out to your side like that and I want you to stay straight. Not yet. When I say, "Go," you're going to fall back. Not yet. I am going to catch Kimberly. Okay?

If you've ever fallen backwards, you know it's not a very fun feeling. It's not a very fun feeling and I'm saying you have to have faith in me, Kimberly, that I'm going to catch you. If she were

to say, “Alright. I believe that, Ed,” but she refuses to fall backwards, is that really faith? That’s not. Faith is putting what you believe into action. Isn’t it?

Okay. Are you ready? Go ahead. Fall backwards. Good! Good! Good! Excellent. Thank you so much.

That was just great. Very good illustration. I love that illustration. I do that all the time. I was on a mission trip in Belize and out of the blue I was told I had to give a little talk to these kids about faith. So the first thing I did was use that illustration because it demonstrates in very clear terms what it means to actually put your faith in something and to let that be lived out with action.

If you don’t fall backwards, if we don’t fall back into God’s arms, do we really believe in Him? Let’s look at the illustrations that James gives us to make this point. He gives us three examples.

First of all, he says, what if we encounter someone who has some physical needs? We encounter them and we say nice words. We say very nice words. “*Go in peace. Be blessed.*” We say very nice words, but we do not take action to meet their need. He says are we really a person of faith in Jesus Christ if we don’t act on what we believe? Great illustration. If we’re going to say that we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and we do not help other people when they are in need, do we really believe that Christ is our Lord and Savior?

Then he looks at Abraham. One of my favorite stories from the Old Testament – the story of Abraham and Isaac. Very briefly, God commands Abraham to go up with his son Isaac to the mountain. He says that we’re going to have a sacrifice and He tells him he’s going to need to sacrifice his own son. I don’t know about you, but that would be very... I cannot even contemplate that, to be very honest with you. I can’t even contemplate what that would be like.

Abraham decided to believe God, to trust God, to put his faith in God, that God knew what He was doing, that God knew better than what he knew. He raised that dagger and he was ready to kill his own son and God said, “Stop.” God did not make him go through with that. But he was ready. He was ready to do what God said. He was ready to take action. His faith allowed him to take action. His faith was made complete by what he did. Those are James’ words. *Faith is made complete by action.*

Third illustration – Rahab. Great story again. Rahab was the one who helped out the spies and who protected them and directed other people away from them. Rahab was a prostitute; Rahab would not have been considered a righteous person. In weighing out those scales, Rahab’s bad works would have been up here. Her good works would have been here. But her act of faith, trusting God in this situation, the scripture says, was *credited to her righteousness*, her action.

Actions speak louder than words. That’s a famous saying. I think in this case it’s true, isn’t it? We can say so easily that we believe something, anything. But if we’re not willing to take action then do we really believe? That’s what James is saying. He’s not saying that works will save us, but he’s saying that genuine faith in Christ is going to make a difference in how we live. It’s going to change how we live. And if it doesn’t then we actually have to say is it genuine faith that we have?



I think this is a challenge for us as Christians today. There are many people who claim to be Christians, who go to church, but much of what they do in their life does not demonstrate that they are following Christ. That is a reality of the world that we live in and it's something that we as Christians have to fight against constantly because a lot of people look at Christians and say they are just hypocrites. They go to church, they act pious, they do some pious things, but when it comes to the crucial things of loving others and putting their faith to action they're not doing a very good job. They don't know how to love their own kids, they don't know how to love their own families, their relationships are a mess, they're bad employees, etc. I think we have to fight against that.

The way we have to fight against that is to just do what this passage says and what James tells us. We need to be different. We need to live out the faith that God has called us to. I'd like to say that the problem with most Christians is not what they don't know, but what they do know and don't practice. The problem with most Christians is not what they don't know, but what they do know and don't practice. We can't do too much about other people, but we can do something about ourselves. We can search our own hearts.

James uses one final analogy to make this point. He tells us that *the body without the spirit is dead*. That's a good point. *The body without the spirit is dead*. I think of someone who's on life support and their brain is not functioning anymore and their spirit is gone. That body is actually technically alive, but is that body really alive? It's not. James says it's the same way with faith. Faith is the same thing. *Faith without deeds is dead*. It's this shattered pile of broken glass, not a pane of glass.

What does this mean for us in our life today? You know we always want to take Jesus home with us. We always want to leave here with something that we can apply in our lives.

I'm just going to ask you to take a moment, as I usually do, to reflect and I'd ask you to reflect on two things. Consider the nature of your faith. Is your faith in Christ such that you trust Him with everything in your life and it results in a new life, it results in actions? And is there any area, one particular area maybe where you're having a hard time trusting God right now, having a hard time being obedient to Him? Consider that. Maybe repent of that and turn that over to Him.

Let's just take a few moments to reflect.

[PRAYER] Lord, we started out this morning by praising you for the wonderful work of redemption that you've done, the great salvation that you've accomplished for us. We are grateful that it is through grace that we have been redeemed. Father, we also ask for your help to live out a life of grace and redemption. Faith in you is the leader of our life. Help us to trust your word and trust your commandments and live as if the faith that we believe makes a difference. Help us, Lord, in our weakness. Help us through your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.