

**February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007**  
**“Salvation By Faith”**  
Reverend Darryl R. Curtis

**James 2:14-17**

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

**15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,**

**16 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?**

**17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

There has been a debate going on in Christendom ever since Protestantism broke away from Catholicism. This subject of this Christian debate is: If a person has faith in Jesus Christ, do they actually have to live a Christian lifestyle to be eligible to go to heaven? James, in the first verse of our text for the morning, takes one side of this question. He says, in **James 2:14**:

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

Those that take the other side make their point using verses like **John 3:16**, which says:  
**16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

There is nothing in **John 3:16** about living a Christian life, going to church, or doing anything else that we associate with being a Christian. The verse makes believing in Jesus Christ the only criterion for receiving everlasting life. **Ephesians 2:8-9** reinforces this by saying:

**8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**

**9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

Grace is defined as God’s unmerited favor, an attribute of God that causes Him to act spontaneously and favorably toward us although we have no merit of our own. **Ephesians 2:8-9** makes it clear that salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is the gracious gift of God; it is not of works, so there is nothing that we have to do to receive it.

Is the insistence of the Church that members of the Church live a Christian lifestyle actually contrary to the teachings of the Bible? Can we simply do whatever we want and then be forgiven by God because of our faith in Jesus Christ? There is a notable Biblical example of

someone that did that very thing. The episode in question is recorded in **Luke 23:33-35, 39-43**, which reads as follows.

**33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him [Jesus], and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.**

**34 Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.**

**35 And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, “He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.”**

**39 Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”**

**40 But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?**

**41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”**

**42 Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”**

**43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”**

Consider this passage of Scripture. Verse 32 of Luke 23 specifies that the men being crucified with Jesus are criminals. Not only are they criminals, they are criminals that have done something so heinous that they have been sentenced to the death penalty. In verse 41 of Luke 23, one of the criminals acknowledged that the two of them deserved their sentence.

These two criminals were speaking from the cross. The Romans were cruelly efficient about crucifixion. People who were nailed to the cross did not come down from the cross; they were taken down after they were dead. This fact tells us that these criminals were not going to have a chance to do anything to atone for the crimes that they have committed. They would not be able to do anything to help with the further extension of the great work of Kingdom building. They would not be able to pass out any tracts, they would not be able to present the gospel to anyone, they would not be able to put any money in Church, they would not even be able to help uplift the spirits of a Christian neighbor with a kind word.

How did a criminal, convicted of a capital crime, being executed on the cross, become the only person that the Bible tells us was saved? Yes, we assume that Peter, Paul, James and John were all saved, but the Bible never makes the flat statement that they were saved. In fact, in **1Corinthians 9:24-27**, Paul seems to recognize the possibility that he might do something that would disqualify him for entrance into heaven, as he says:

**24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.**

**25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.**

**26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.**

**27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.**

Disqualification is a concern for Paul.

The criminal, on the other hand, had no such concern. Jesus indicated that the criminal was going to heaven in **Luke 23:42-43**, which says:

**42 Then he [the criminal] said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”**

**43 And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”**

After having lived a life worthy of execution, and, as he is being executed, the criminal is assured that he is going to heaven, even lacking any opportunity for further restitution. Is it any wonder that some people take the position that they can live any way that they want, repent at the last minute and end up in heaven? Their belief comes from their knowledge of this episode recorded in the Scripture.

James, however, takes the opposite position. He tells us in our text, **James 2:14-17**

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

**15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,**

**16 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?**

**17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

James uses a pragmatic example to make his point. Suppose you needed food, and someone with resources saw your need and wished you well, but did not do anything to help you. What would you think about that person? A good Christian? As I was driving recently, a fellow cut me off so closely that the sides of our cars touched. I pulled over to the curb and exited my car to see the damage, and the other fellow pulled up behind me. A lady, who was not involved in the accident, rolled down her window as she passed and said to me, “I’ll be your witness if you need one.”

I looked at the damage, and there was only a tiny dent in the front quarter panel. The only reason that I saw the dent was because my car was dirty and the contact of the two cars wiped the dirt off of the spot. While I was looking at my car, the lady pulled over and wrote her name and telephone number on a piece of paper and gave it to me so that I could call her if I needed a witness. She involved herself in the situation without any encouragement from me.

Jesus tells a story about a bystander getting involved in the tragedy of others, as He answers the question as to how one can become eligible for eternal life, eternal life being a synonym for going to heaven. **Luke 10:25-37** says:

**25 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him [Jesus], saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”**

**26 He [Jesus] said to him [the lawyer], “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?”**

**27 So he [the lawyer] answered and said, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’”**

**28 And He [Jesus] said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.”**

**29 But he [the lawyer], wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”**

**30 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.**

- 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.**
- 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.**
- 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.**
- 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**
- 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’**
- 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”**
- 37 And he [the lawyer] said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”**

Understand that Jesus says that those that want to go to heaven should do as did the Samaritan that showed mercy on the half-dead man. That, my friends, is good works.

So which is it? Do we, as Christians, have to do good works or not?

Well, first of all, let me say that doing good works will not get you into heaven. Were you to do all of the good works that you are able to do, your good works would not atone the fact that you are a sinner, and not worthy of heaven.

Jesus Christ did not die on the cross so that people could do good works.

Jesus died to remedy the fact that the sinfulness of mankind estranges man from God.

God pronounced condemnation on mankind because of our universally sinful condition, which started in the Garden of Eden when the man and the woman ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and continues to this present day in which adults break the law of God and children disobey their parents. **Romans 3:10, 23** tells us:

**10 As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;  
23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

I mentioned in the last two lessons that our starting point to understand the book of James ought be the fact that we are all sinners in the sight of God, and that rather than thinking of ourselves as good Christians, we ought to focus on the fact that we are all guilty of sin before God.

Our disobedience to God has earned us a place in hell, and we are not worthy to talk about heaven, lest known go there. You should acknowledge what I am saying; don’t make me follow you around for a week and point out your sins, and please don’t follow me. If you were to ask; ‘based upon personal merit, who is worthy of heaven?’; the answer would be “no one”.

Young people, your parents, grandparents and great-grandparents are not worthy of heaven.

Adults, your children are not worthy of heaven.

Brothers, your wives are not worthy of heaven.

Sisters, your husbands are not worthy of heaven.

Lay people, your spiritual leaders are not worthy of heaven.

Clergymen, the members of your congregations are not worthy of heaven.

I am not worthy of heaven, but, like the thief on the cross who wasn't worthy either, I'm going to heaven anyway. Listen to Paul as he explains, in **Romans 5:6-11**:

**6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.**

**7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.**

**8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

**9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.**

**10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

**11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

Verse 10 of Romans 5 tells us that we were enemies of God, but were reconciled to Him by the death of Jesus Christ. God settles scores with those who are not reconciled to Him at the end of time, as recorded by the Apostle John in **Revelation 20:11-15**, which says:

**11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.**

**12 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.**

**13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.**

**14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.**

**15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.**

Hades is "the place of the dead", where the unsaved dead go to await their final judgment. All of God's enemies will be in one of these three places, the sea, Death or Hades, when they die. Hell is the lake of fire into which all whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be cast. All of God's enemies will end up in Hell. Who will be the first inhabitant? The Bible tells us in the verse before our last lesson, in **Revelation 20:10**:

**10 The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.**

The lake of fire was designed as punishment for the unholy trinity, that being, the devil, the beast and the false prophet. Knowing this, the three of them are busy influencing as many people as possible to join them in disobedience to God. Maybe these three think that if they deceive enough us, God would choose to have mercy on some of us, and then would not be able to justly condemning anyone, including them, to the hell that all of us deserve. If sin is worthy of death, how could a just God condemn some sinners to hell while allowing other sinners to go free?

In response to our sinfulness, God, who is rich in mercy, developed a plan by which He could justly have mercy on mankind while still maintaining the sentence of hell for the unholy trinity. God did so by coming to earth in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. **John 1:1, 14** informs us:

**1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

**14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.**

God, in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a perfect and sinless life, and then died to pay the penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed. Since, as **Romans 6:23** tells us, **the wages of sin is death**, Jesus Christ, having done no sin, satisfied the justice of God by dying, and collecting our wages for the sins that we have committed. Jesus Christ took the punishment that we are due because of our sins, and the time that He spent in Hades, presenting the Plan of Salvation to those who were there at the time, gave those that died before He was born into the world a chance to repent of their sins, just as the preaching of His life in our Churches gives us the chance to repent of our sins. **1Peter 3:18-19** describes:

**18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,**

**19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison.**

Because of the mercy of God, we are no longer condemned to the wages of sin, but, as the complete text of **Romans 6:23** tells us:

**23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

God has made the avoidance of hell contingent upon our faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as **John 3:16-21** says:

**16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

**17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**

**18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

**19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.**

**20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**

**21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."**

A person that believes the facts that I have just presented is properly designated as a Christian. Jesus Christ died so that our sins could be forgiven and that we could ultimately avoid the Lake of Fire, and Christianity is the only religion based upon this specific set of historical and spiritual facts.

Jesus Christ was a real person. He did not record the events of His own life in the New Testament, but He was able to convince twelve men to follow Him, and then to make a record testifying to what they themselves actually saw and heard. The record that they made and the facts of the testimony that they gave convinced so many people that, not long after Jesus Christ died, Christianity was the predominant religion in the world.

To be eligible for Baptism, one has to understand, believe and have faith in the historical and spiritual facts that I have just presented in this lesson. We become Christians by faith, not by

works, so the criminal on the Cross that acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus Christ was eligible for heaven, even as he was nailed to the Cross.

Let us go back, for a moment, to the Scripture that I quoted from Ephesians, and look at one more verse. **Ephesians 2:8-10** reads:

**8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God**

**9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

**10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

Verse 10 tells us that we are created in Christ Jesus, that is, we are saved from the Lake of Fire and given a new perspective by His sacrifice, in order that we might do good works, prepared by God in advance that we should do them. God navigated the Good Samaritan to the half-dead man in order that the man might receive help. People that need help cross our paths so that we, as Christians, can help them, develop relationships with them, and tell them the good news that we know about the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our good works are a critical component in our ability to spread the Gospel. Good works do not substitute for sharing the facts that we know about Jesus, but good works do give us an entrance into the lives of the people that we help so that we can more comfortably and effectively share the good news about Jesus Christ.

If you meet someone that is hungry and you decide to feed their soul by telling them about Jesus without giving them any physical food, how well do you think that they will receive your information? Our text tells us, in **James 2:14-17**:

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

**15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,**

**16 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?**

**17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

A dead faith is a faith that you keep to yourself.

It has no life because, like a dead body, it does not interact with the environment surrounding it. When you leave the church today, listen to the conversation that you have with whomever you will be talking. You will find yourself discussing subjects that are of interest to you, and you will try to engage the other person to become interested in that which you are interested. You will do your best to make your position on the subject come alive to the person with whom you are talking, and will try to convince them to come to your way of thinking about the substance of your subject.

James poses the question: Is your faith in Jesus Christ living or dead? Do you live in such a way that people will be receptive to your discussion of Him, and then do you discuss Him with the people before who you shine the light of your life?

The story is told of two men who were good friends, one of whom was a Christian and the other was not. They lived in the same neighborhood, worked at the same place, were bowling and golf buddies, and their wives were friends with one another. The Christian did not discuss religion with his friend, because he knew that his friend was not religious, and he did not want to

ruin the friendship by seeming judgmental, or by bringing up topics that they did not have in common.

Finally, the two of them died, and found themselves at the judgment together. The man that had no religion was called first, and the record of his life was shown, prominently displaying his sins. The record showed that his friend was with him as he committed many of them. After this recitation of sins, the man was condemned to Hell.

While the man was waiting to leave for Hell, the man who was religious was called, and the judge pronounced that, because of the man's faith in Jesus Christ, that his many sins would be forgiven, and that he could enter heaven. His condemned friend turned when he heard the pronouncement, and looked at his former friend with shock and dismay. "You knew about this place?" the condemned man asked. "You knew and you didn't tell me? You didn't warn me?"

"I didn't want to embarrass you and ruin our friendship", yelled the saved man, as his former friend was being taken away to the Lake of Fire and Brimstone that burns forever and ever.

Yes, theoretically, you can be saved without doing any good works, but James makes it clear that, without your good works and your testimony, your faith is dead.

Finally, for those of you that may plan to wait until you come to the point of death and then repent a the last minute like the thief on the cross, I have one piece of information for you.

The episode of the thief begins with **Luke 23:32**, which says:

**32 There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.**

It is an interesting fact that there were two criminals that went to the cross with Jesus. Both of them were equally guilty before God, and each of them was condemned by man. The significance of this fact is that although there were two criminals, only one of them was saved. I'm sure that you can see that, according to this episode, if you wait to the last minute, you have at best 50/50 chance to be saved, as one criminal was saved and one was not. Don't wait to the last minute, because there is no guarantee that you will have the opportunity to make your confession just before you die. **Hebrews 3:12-15** warns us:

**12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;**

**13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**

**14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,**

**15 while it is said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

Those who hardened their hearts in the rebellion were those Israelites that would not go into the Promised Land when Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb tried to convince them to do so. Later, some of them changed their minds and decided to obey God, but God had withdrawn His provision for them and it was too late for them to enter the Promised Land. Don't be in that camp.

There is no guarantee that the judgment will not start in the next few minutes. **Matthew 25:13** tells us:



**13 “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.**

Don't wait until it is too late to decide to believe in the historical fact of Jesus Christ, and the theological realities of heaven, hell and salvation. Today, as you hear my voice, make your decision to cast in your lot with Christ, become a Christian, be baptized, and do the good works of evangelism that the Lord has appointed to your hands.

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis  
Family Life Baptist Church