

Sermon Summary | Sunday 8th February 2026 | James 2.14-26

This is a searching passage about the difference between faith that is merely claimed and faith that is truly alive. James is not attacking faith itself. He is attacking a claim of faith that produces no living fruit. There is a kind of faith that is easy to carry: it fits comfortably into a busy life, rarely asks for sacrifice, speaks Christian words, but does not move towards obedience, mercy, or costly love. James has the pastoral courage to say that such faith is not simply immature. It may be dead.

First, James exposes dead faith: faith that only talks. He gives a practical example from church life: a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking daily food, and someone responds with warm religious words — “Go in peace, be warmed and filled” — but gives them nothing they need. The words may sound kind and spiritual, but James asks, “What good is that?” Words without action can become a way of protecting ourselves from costly love. They allow us to sound compassionate while remaining unchanged.

James then considers correct belief that does not submit. Someone might claim that faith and works are separate categories, as if some people are “faith people” and others are “practical people.” James replies that faith is invisible, but works make it visible. Works do not replace faith; they reveal it. Even the demons believe true things about God and shudder, but they do not love, obey, or belong to him. So James warns us that verbal faith and intellectual faith are not necessarily saving faith. Christianity is not mere agreement. The question is not only, “Do I know the right words?” but, “Has the gospel made me alive?”

Second, James gives us the example of costly faith: Abraham’s faith that obeys when it hurts. Abraham was made right with God by faith, as Genesis 15 teaches. But later, in Genesis 22, God tested him by commanding him to offer Isaac, the child of promise. James says Abraham was “justified by works,” meaning not that his obedience earned righteousness, but that his faith was shown to be genuine. His works displayed the reality of his faith.

Abraham’s example presents us with a serious question: where might following Jesus cost us something we would rather keep? Our “Isaac moments” may involve comfort, control, money, reputation, privacy, time, or carefully protected plans. A growing church does not mainly need more opinions; it needs more costly love. It needs people willing to serve when tired, give when it pinches, open homes when inconvenient, disciple others when messy, and show up consistently rather than occasionally. Such obedience is not payment for God’s love. It is the fruit of having received God’s love in Christ.

Third, James points to risky faith: Rahab’s faith that identifies when it is dangerous. Rahab had a compromised past, little social power, and every reason to protect herself. Yet when she heard what God had done, she believed that the God of Israel was the true God. Her faith became visible in public allegiance as she received and protected the spies. Like Abraham, she was shown to be righteous by works — not because her works earned salvation, but because they demonstrated living faith.

Rahab’s example speaks to our reluctance to risk relationally. Living faith does not remain hidden. It moves from attending to belonging, from distance to being known, from a pleasant smile to asking for prayer, from caution to courageous ministry. Rahab reminds us that God uses outsiders, people with complicated pasts, and those who feel unimpressive or unqualified. The question is not, “Am I impressive?” but, “Will I entrust myself to God and step out in obedience?”

James concludes that faith without works is dead, just as the body without the spirit is dead. Works are not the root of salvation, but the fruit. They are not the price, but the proof. This gives both invitation and assurance. If our faith has been mostly words, ideas, or attendance, James invites us to Christ, who did not love us in words only but gave himself on the cross. And for anxious

believers, James is not demanding perfection. He is looking for life: repentance, growing obedience, mercy, costly steps, and risky steps, however small. Small fruit can still be real fruit.

Questions for personal reflection

1. Where is my faith most in danger of remaining at the level of words, agreement, or good intentions rather than moving into practical obedience and mercy?
2. What is one costly or risky step of faith Christ may be calling me to take — not to earn his love, but because I have received it?