

# WEEKEND Edition 27/28 August 2022

## “Dead or Alive?” (James 2:26)

Hello, my 'Walking with Jesus' friends,

Yesterday I left you sitting in a room with one of the apostles of Jesus named James. Perhaps you remember James and Jesus had a unique relationship... *they were siblings!* Yes, James was the son of Mary and Joseph, born sometime after Jesus, so everyone understood them to be brothers. From what we know James did NOT believe Jesus was who He claimed to be, nor did he evidently believe the preposterous stories his parents told him about Jesus' birth... *at least not while Jesus was alive. But everything changed with Jesus' resurrection!*

*James could not deny the clear evidence...* he saw, spoke with, and likely had some meals with the resurrected Jesus, and was evidently on the Mount of Olives when Jesus elevated into the sky and returned to heaven. James then accompanied his mother Mary back to Jerusalem and was with her when the Holy Spirit came in power upon them on the day of Pentecost!

The other disciples were of course delighted that James turned from being a skeptic to passionate believer in Jesus, and with Stephen the deacon executed by stoning, and James the brother of John executed by King Herod, and Peter the apostle in hiding, *James evidently surfaced as a primary leader and spokesman of the apostles.*

With Jewish Jesus followers suffering great persecution in Jerusalem, and everywhere in the Roman empire, James was led by the Holy Spirit to write a letter of encouragement and instruction to them. Historians believe his letter is the very first document written and distributed, by any of the apostles, after Jesus' ascension.

So, let's rejoin James in his writing room. *He's in the middle of giving a profound explanation of a shocking statement regarding how actions validate a person's faith-based salvation* and using the most revered Jewish hero as his example. He wrote: **"Abraham's faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did."** (James 2:22) James knew his Jewish readers everywhere in the empire, regardless of their age, their education, even their ability to read or write, all Jews knew very well and highly respected the story of Abraham and Sarah in their old age, holding firmly in their great faith to the promise of God made 25 years before, that they would have a miracle son in their old age. *But more than that was the remarkable proof of his faith in God which Abraham exhibited when he took Isaac up Mount Moriah to sacrifice him in obedience to God's outrageous instructions as we see in Genesis 22.*

James, moved by the Holy Spirit of God, picked up his stylus to write two more very significant summary statements of this incredibly powerful concept: Here's the first

statement: **"You see, a person is considered righteous by what they DO and not by their FAITH alone."** (James 2:24) Be very careful my friends how you interpret and apply this statement to your life. It means this: **we are saved from our sin condemnation and sin bondage by our full faith in Jesus Christ;** His atonement death on the cross; and God's promise to accept Jesus' death as payment in full for our sin. Because of our faith *God can forgive us of our sin, declare us justified, and adopt us as His children into His family, and assure us of eternal life with Him.*

But it also means this: **Our faith in Jesus Christ, and our trust in God's promises, are proven by our actions which are the EVIDENCE of how the Holy Spirit has changed our lives as He has cleansed us from our sin and given us a new spiritual nature, as we are reconciled to God in our relationship with Him.** 2 Corinthians 5:17 says **"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come. All this is from God who has reconciled us to Himself..."**

James was making a bold, courageous, powerful statement which has resonated, for almost 2000 years, anywhere in the world, with every authentic Christian who has read or heard these verses! May I give you my paraphrase of what his powerful verses mean in practicality? **"The God honoring behavior of a Christian person validates the invisible, life changing work, which God has done in their soul and spirit, in response to their saving faith in Jesus Christ alone, for their salvation from their sin."**

Now friends, that may be one of the most significant statements of truth that you will ever hear. It separates those who are legitimately 'born again' (John 3:3-7), new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), forgiven and adopted sons and daughters of God (Eph. 1:7; Romans 8:14-17), from... those people who say words, perhaps make claims about their spiritual faith in God, *but those words are meaningless since they have not legitimately been 'regenerated', saved from their sin, by God's work in their life.* Don't rush past that statement friends... let it simmer, it's very significant!

I told you James made two, powerful, declaration statements summarizing his teaching about faith and deeds. Here's the second statement, you'll find it in James 2:26 **"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."** Wow James's words are penetrating, aren't they? In an era where machines can keep a person clinically 'alive' for a long time, the first part of this verse is very significant. *By God's design a human being is comprised of three distinct parts: physical body; human soul; and human spirit.* We all understand our physical body and that death occurs when our body ceases to function normally, particularly heartbeat, lung breath, and brain activity. Every human body is distinctively unique with its own eye print, fingerprint, DNA etc., but death is a common experience for every human life.

**Soul** is that part of every person which combines our emotions (feelings), our intellect (thoughts), our personality and our will (choices). When that part of you and me ceases to function, we are dead, even if our human body may be kept alive by some artificial means. The term "brain dead" is an example of this aspect of death.

**Spirit** is that part of every person which has the capability of understanding moral right and wrong, thinking spiritual concepts, and engaging in a relationship with God. *We are all born with a sinful spiritual nature of both sinful soul and sinful spirit.* When we are 'born again' by the Holy Spirit of God, as we repent of our sin and trust Jesus to be our Savior, the Holy Spirit of God births in us a new, holy, spiritual nature with the ability and deep desire for a relationship with Holy God!

*Both Soul and Spirit are immortal and at the moment of death, both leave our human body and enter into eternal existence.* For the person who has trusted Jesus Christ to be their Savior and has received a new spiritual nature from the Holy Spirit, their soul and spirit goes immediately to be with God at the moment of their death. That's why the apostle Paul twice in his letters referred to death as 'departure', leaving earth and going to be with Christ in heaven which is better by far! (Phil. 1:23 & 2 Timothy 4:7,8) Do you see this is what James is making very clear in his powerful statement?

*But do we also see that James is using the certain evidence of human death as an exact reflection of the certain reality of a dead spiritual faith if that faith is not evidenced, not validated by God honoring deeds or behavior* that Jesus taught, and God's word clarifies are behavior of a God saved person? **The behavior of a person is the observable evidence of the condition of the soul and spirit of that person.** Therefore, it is not difficult for us to make direct, personal application of James' words to ourselves first, and then to every person with whom we come in contact.

But wait a moment, I know what you are thinking right now! All of us, everyone one of us, has found ourselves behaving in ways which are NOT true to who we really want to be. We have all made mistakes, we've all said or done things we regret. So, what does that mean about us? Ah, that my friends is a life and death question, and I'll answer it MONDAY when we come back together with James right here. I'll show you that the apostle John wrote some very clear explanation to this dilemma. See you right back here Monday my friends. Meanwhile give this some very serious thought... your eternal destiny may depend on it!

**Today's Scripture is James 2:26.**