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Obedient Faith

James 2:20-26

Prayer: Father God, I thank you for your word, I thank you for the incredible gift that it is and I just thank you for what an awesome God you are. And Father, I thank you for the book of James, I thank you for the difficult material that is in it. I pray this morning as we are working our way through this material that again, you would give us a spirit of wisdom, a spirit that does not become confused because it's easy to confuse these two very critical parts about faith and works. And so Father, I just pray especially for the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you would guide us into your truth and again, that we would make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, last week we looked at one of the most controversial scriptures in all of the Bible, and we summed it up and we can sum it up with the words of James in James 2:17. James there says: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* Now, we compared that to another controversial scripture stated by Paul in Romans 4:5, and he says: *And to the one who does not work but*

believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Now, we pointed out that for centuries people have been pitting the words of James against the words of Paul, but in reality, both James and Paul are describing what faith is from opposite sides of the same coin. James is looking at how faith expresses itself which is the works side of the coin, and Paul is looking at the other side of the coin, the belief side, to describe genuine faith which actually drives the works as the only source of true righteousness.

So I thought perhaps the best way to understand the difficulty of getting faith and works right and to review what we discussed last week, I'd like you to imagine yourself journeying, and you're taking a journey on a very, very narrow path between two very foreign countries. To your north is a place that we would call the land of faithless works. Faithless work. This is the land where the Pharisees live. This is the place where "doing" in itself has become everything. You don't have to care; you don't have to love; you don't even have to believe. Just do. Just do these particular religious tasks and you have made yourself worthy of God and his kingdom. We pointed out how much God hated the land of faithless works. Folks who live there had icy cold hearts and they did their good deeds not out of a spirit of obedience or love but out of the an attempt to justify their own existence by their own perceived

ideas of their own goodness.

There are lots of rules in the land of faithless works, and most of them have been made up by the Pharisees. They were designed not to give honor or worship to God but to show how religious these people were. And Jesus said this in Matthew 15:7. He said: *You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."*

We spoke last week about some of the inhabitants of the land of faithless works. One group was the proud doers. And they were not as extreme as the Pharisees in that they weren't blatantly seeking to grow a reputation by acting religious. They were just regular old folks who thought that God judged people by balancing their good deeds against their bad deeds, and they hoped that their good deeds would offset their bad deeds and so they would gain entrance into the kingdom. Proud doers are the primary inhabitants of the land of faithless works. They say they're only trying to live by the ten commandments or maybe by the Sermon on the Mount because they think that somehow, some way, if they try really hard, they can be good enough for God. They either don't know or they don't want to know that God's standard for what is truly good is flawless

perfection and that anything less than perfection is, in God's eyes, not good. They're unaware that when the Scripture states in Romans 3:23: *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, that God is declaring that any deed done by anyone that falls short of his perfection is a deed that God cannot accept as good. And that makes every deed we do, no matter how hard we try, unacceptable in God's sight. And that is the curse that everyone of us is under. James tells us in James 2:10: *For everyone who keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it*. This is the bad news that always accompanies the good news of the gospel. We are born cursed to be unable to work ourselves into worthiness before God.

Now, the good news of the gospel is that God himself came to earth in the flesh to deliver that goodness to us. Jesus Christ lived the life we were supposed to live and then he offered up that life as a flawless sacrifice for all of the works that we did that fell short of the glory of God. And by faith, God offers to exchange his perfect righteousness for our sin. The problem is most of the folks in the north country prefer to trust in their own righteousness.

Now there's other folks in there besides proud doers, other folks who live north of the middle road in the land of faithless deeds.

These are the terrified doers. These were folks who were never quite sure if their "doing" was doing enough. They didn't understand that at the cross Jesus had paid it all and that the work of securing our salvation had been finished right then and right there, that that salvation could only be received by faith and not by doing. Terrified doers spend much of their time trying in some way to justify the free gift that they had received from God by doing works. Trouble was, they never knew how much doing was enough. Because they knew that God had paid an infinite price for them, the terrified doers were stuck in a cycle of trying to justify the unjustifiable, and so they had no peace. They didn't hear Paul when he said in Galatians 5:1: *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.* And so they suffered.

Now, to the south of this middle road was a very different country. It was the exact opposite of the land of faithless deeds. It was the land of work less faith. It was a place where faith was simply a set of beliefs agreed to by the believers. Everyone in the land of work less faith believed that Jesus was God incarnate. Everyone believed that he came to earth as a baby born in Bethlehem, that he lived a sinless life, and that he went to the cross to offer that life up for us. Work less faithers, they even believe in the resurrection, and they rest their assurance on the

fact that Jesus rose from the dead. The problem is is that they haven't risen from their own spiritual death, that is. You see, they, too, don't realize that they are still dead in their sins. This land south of the middle path is even more dreadful than the Northland because the folks in this land unknowingly share a belief system with demons. They think that because they agree with what the Bible says and they confess that agreement to others, that somehow they are the new creatures in Christ that Jesus spoke of. They can even quote the Bible where it says in Romans 10:9: *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* See, these folks who live in the south country of workless faith, they don't understand that when God used the phrase "believe in your heart," he was speaking about something far different than mere belief. He was speaking about a new heart. And the only way to get that new heart was through a heart transplant that God alone could give. James even spoke directly to these folks, and he tried to make it very clear to them that simply understanding the truth about the nature of God and Jesus and his birth and his death and his resurrection ultimately meant nothing in terms of salvation. James said in 2:19: *You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder!* You see, demons, demons see with crystal clarity. They know precisely who God is, what he did, and what their fate ultimately will be, but that doesn't stop

them from making it impossible to truly understand the nature of saving faith. God says in 2 Corinthians 4:4: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* You know what that's saying is your chance of getting the gospel on your own is zero. Zero. And even the disciples realized that salvation is a gift that overcomes impossible odds. When Jesus told the disciples that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a wealthy man to inherit the kingdom, they were -- they were upset. This was a jarring piece of information to them because their whole tradition had taught them that wealth was this incredible sign of blessing from God, and now Jesus is telling them that wealth had the exact opposite effect. In Matthew 19, says: *When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Those who have received the impossible gift of salvation, they know that they could never live in the North Country where faithless works produce proud doers or terrified doers; they also know that they couldn't live in the South where workless faith produced phony believers who had convinced themselves that mere belief was all that was required to be a child of God. They understood exactly what Jesus was getting at when he said in Matthew 7:21: *"Not*

everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

These folks who are walking the middle path between faithless works and workless faith, they understood what Jesus was getting at, because the middle pathway they were on was called "obedient faith." They understood that the gift of faith included with it the gift of obedience, and that when God promised a new heart and a new spirit, he also made clear that the new spirit would always include a desire to obey. That's why God said in Ezekiel 36: *I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* You see, this new spirit of obedience had to come from God as a freely bestowed gift because God knew how easy it was for us to be tempted to view even this obedience as something that we would offer up to him in exchange for our salvation. God never wanted us to think of ourselves as earning something that he freely gave us as a gift, and he knew that that thinking would always lead to a spirit of boasting about something we had never earned. That's why he said in Ephesians 2:8: *For by grace you've been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the*

result of works, so that no one may boast.

Okay. So then how did those who were journeying through faith on that middle road of obedience know that that is a gift that always comes with faith? How'd they know that? Well, they knew it because God said so. They heard Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:13 speak of *the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ*. They heard Peter in 1 Peter 1 describe *the sanctifying work of the Spirit, ...to be obedient to Jesus Christ*. And they heard Jesus in John 14 saying: *"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."* They also heard his words in John 10:27: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* They understood that all genuine faith in Christ carries with it a brand new alien spirit that is a gift from God above, and along with the gift of faith comes the Spirit of God who will *"cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."*

You see, James knew that every new believer had within them a God-given drive to obey that was part of the gift of faith. He knew that this obedience was also a part of God's great plan that he told us about in Ephesians 2. That's where he told us that faith had to be a gift and not the result of works so that no one could boast about his works. But then he went on to tell us that those works were already planned by God before the world was even

established. In Ephesians 2:10, he said: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* You see, Paul said that because he understood that works were inextricably bound to faith, and the cords that bound them were cords of obedience.

And this brings us once again to James' final discussion in this chapter. This is what James says in James 2:20-26. He says: *Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" -- and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

You see, James chose Abraham because Abraham is someone whose walk was right down the center of obedient faith. Now, of course, during his life, he wandered about. He wandered into the North country of faithless works, and it created for him a disaster. God

told him that he would have a son through Sarah, but Abraham after many years grew tired of waiting, and so he impregnated Hagar, the servant girl. His son through Hagar was named Ishmael, and he became the father of the entire Arab world, and Isaac, his son through Sarah, became the line through which the Jewish identity was established. And for thousands of years now, the progeny of both brothers have been bitter enemies. You see, the result of Abraham's faithless work are being played out now thousands of years later in the conflict between Hamas and Israel. Both sides detest each other, and yet both Jews and Arabs claim Abraham as their father.

And Abraham also wandered through the south country of workless faith. You see for a time, his belief in God never translated into works when it came to trusting in God's protection. On two separate occasions, Abraham told Sarah to say that she was his sister, not his wife, because he feared that he would be killed because, after all, Sarah was very beautiful. And each time he lied, he created disaster for himself.

So we might ask, why in the world does James focus on Abraham, this flawed example of someone wandering off and on the center road of obedience, someone whose excursions off the road into the Southland and the Northland of pseudo faith created this tremendous

distress? And how does Rahab the harlot, how does she find a place in this narrative? Well, in fact, she is the key to understanding what God means by saving faith. You see, James understood what that middle road of obedient faith was all about, thus he could say in verse 24: *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.* We all know those are very, very dangerous words, that there's a great deal of mischief that can be done by isolating that verse away from its context. You can very easily find yourself right back in the land of faithless works. If you understand that all of the works that we do stem from this gift of the obedience that comes through faith, then you'll begin to understand what James is getting at here; but to do that, you need to look a little bit deeper into the story of Abraham and see how he received the gift of faith. Genesis 15:1-6 gives us the details of the faith that produced obedience. It says this: *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number*

them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Abraham's act of faith was believing God when he told him that his offspring would one day be as numerous as the stars. Now, the key to that promise was Isaac. And James in our text this morning takes us to an incident that occurred many years later. Isaac is now a young man. This is Genesis 22:1-19. He said: *After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."*

I think we all know the story of how Abraham and Isaac went up on the mountain with only the wood for the sacrifice and no sacrifice. We know that Abraham's obedience was such that he was willing to offer his only son for the simple reason that God had commanded it. Again, Genesis 22 says: *Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*

I would like to you interject just a few thoughts here as an aside. I can't let this passage go by without making some comments on it, because this incident has come under an awful lot of intense scrutiny in the last few years as an example to the pagan world, to the -- to the atheist world of what a terrible God Jehovah God is. I mean, it's no accident, this is the pivotal incident in our faith, and this is an incident that fills the atheist community with rage. Let me just read to you from *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins who is probably the leading anti-Christian atheist. This is his comments on the incident. He says this: God ordered Abraham to make a burnt offering for his longed-for son. Abraham built an altar, put firewood on it, and trussed Isaac up on top of the wood. His murdering knife was already in his hand when an angel dramatically intervened with the news of a last-minute change of plans: God was only joking after all, 'tempting' Abraham and testing his faith. A modern moralist cannot help but wonder how a child can ever recover from such psychological trauma. By the standards of modern morality, this disgraceful story is an example simultaneously of child abuse, bullying in two asymmetrical power relationships, and the first recorded use of the Nuremberg defense: 'I was only obeying orders,' yet the legend is one of the great foundational myths of all three monotheistic religions.

Okay. Few points are necessary right here. First of all, Isaac

was not a child. He was somewhere in his late teens, perhaps even as old as 20. Therefore this was not an asymmetrical power relationship where one is strong and the other is weak. In fact, it is entirely likely that Isaac was stronger and more powerful as a young man than was Abraham his father who was aged. And like Jesus, Isaac submitted to his father out of love, not because his father was asymmetrically stronger. But aside from Dawkins misreading the entire passage, there's one overarching point that he completely misses, and that is this. God is omniscient; God is omnipotent; God is omnipresent. He knows the past, the present, and the futures of everyone, including Abraham and Isaac. This is what David said about that in Psalm 139. He said: *O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*

Now, I want you to think about that for a second. I want you to just wonder, do you think God hit a blind spot when it came to Abraham? I mean, do you think an omniscient God was in heaven holding his breath as Abraham went up the mountain? Do you think that God needed to find out what Abraham would do in this test or do you think Abraham himself, the father of the faith, that it was he who needed to know what Abraham would do. I certainly won't

deny that this was a difficult test, but all tests given by God are designed for the testee and not the tester. The point of the test was for Abraham's growth and understanding in his own faith, not for God to get some kind of heavenly jolly by watching Abraham squirm. Furthermore, we know that Abraham passed the test with flying colors. And what James is focusing in on with Abraham is the obedience that accompanied his faith. You see, Abraham mirrors each of us who have this God-given drive to obey and that he certainly was not by any means flawlessly obedient. He played fast and loose with his determination to trust God for a son, and God told him that he would have a son through Sarah, and after many years, he just grew tired of waiting, and Sarah became insistent. So he impregnated Hagar. That was a great failure of faith. And he lied repeatedly to protect himself from foreigners. That, too, was a failure. He made profound spiritual mistakes, yet God's commitment to Abraham was such that the gift of faith he was given and the obedience it produced would eventually win out, because deep within him was the Spirit of God moving him to be careful to obey his words. His God-given faith produced God-given obedience which produced God-given works, good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. And that's why James says what he says in 2:21. He says: *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was*

completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" -- and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Now the Greek word that's used for "justified" here can either mean to be made righteous or to be demonstrated as righteous. Perhaps a better word for that under those circumstances would be the word "vindicated," and some translations use that word interchangeably. The point is that the work that Abraham did in sacrificing Isaac was a vindication of the gift of faith and a vindication of the fact that that gift of faith had been truly operating within him. James goes on to say in verse 25: *And in the same way was not Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

Now, James ends chapter 2 with what on the surface might seem to be a very strange comparison. He's comparing the faith of Abraham, the father of the faith, to the faith of Rahab, a prostitute. Now, one part of the comparison is very easy to see. We know that God is no respecter of persons. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whether you are at the top of the social strata like Abraham was or at the very bottom like Rahab was makes no

difference. We all know that what makes the difference is the gift of faith. Jesus said to the religious authorities in Matthew 21:31: *"Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."*

Now, it's a remarkably wonderful grace and a testimony to God's graciousness that Rahab the prostitute is included in the genealogy of Jesus, but I have to confess to you that I, myself, first time I read this, and many, many other times having read this, I had a problem with James' comparison. It wasn't the social standing of Abraham compared to Rahab that bothered me; rather it was the nature of the works that both of them had done. I mean, Abraham's work was a profoundly difficult earthly picture of the agony that the father went through in sacrificing Jesus. I mean, Isaac was his son. His only son. And God had promised to fill the earth with Abraham's progeny and now God is asking that the source of that progeny be cut off. You know, many of us, many of us have had opportunities to exercise faith but seldom are those opportunities so stark and so demanding. For Abraham it was all or nothing. His hopes, his dreams, his future, and the future of the nation, they were all bound up in Isaac; and Abraham's obedience was so profound

that he was willing to trust God even in this. Hebrews 11 says:
By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Now Rahab, on the other hand, to my way of thinking had a faith that was rooted in her own self-preservation. Let me give you Rahab's story briefly. This is from Joshua 2, starting at verse 1. It says: *And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, "Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land." Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." Rahab lied to the king and then hid the spies on her roof. But before she hid them, she had this to say to them.*

She said: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you will also deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."

Well, we all know what happened to Jericho. Joshua won the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down. I mean, the city and everything in it was completely and utterly destroyed except, except for Rahab the harlot and her family. So how does this entitle Rahab to be spoken of in the same breath as Abraham for the work of faith that she did? Well, once again, I think we need to take a step backwards. You see, it's very easy to look at Abraham's work of faith and compare it to Rahab's, and just say well, Abraham, you had a 9.9; Rahab, you barely got a 1.1 at best.

Abraham's work was completely selfless, it put him at great risk of losing everything. Rahab's work of faith was at best self-serving. She was already greatly at risk of losing everything, and she knew that. The reputation of the Israelites had preceded them and she knew that her only hope lay in giving aid and comfort really to the enemy. That's hardly a ringing endorsement for an act of faith. It is also a fundamental misunderstanding of what James is after right here, a misunderstanding that I had fallen prey to. You see, Paul has emphasized that faith is what is counted as righteousness. James is emphasizing that all saving faith will result in works. What is being examined here is that the faith that moved Abraham to act is the very same faith that moved Rahab to act, and that's what James is focused on.

You see, there were thousands of people in Jericho, all of whom knew the impending threat of the Israelites, but there was only one Rahab. There was only one Rahab in that city who had been chosen of God to be gifted with the following insight. She said this: *For the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.* Rahab was a prostitute. She was the ultimate outsider, privy to no natural insight as to how to respond to the imminent threat of an Israeli attack. She was, however, chosen of God to receive his mercy. She never could have known that she would have been part of the line that would produce the Savior, but

she was, and God chose her to receive the gift of faith. That gift produced the work of faith that resulted in her hiding the spies. And so she, too, was vindicated, justified by her works. In other words, she didn't say to the spies, "Be warmed, be filled, be hidden." She took it upon herself to hide them. It was an act of courage and it had vindicated the faith that she had been given.

You see, when we only look at the quality of each faith response rather than just the fact that both Rahab and Abraham justified themselves by their works, then all we're really doing is what the proud doers were doing; we are indirectly making the claim that we are saved by the quality of the work of faith rather than vindicated by the one who is the author of that faith. Abraham had a spectacular work of faith; Rahab not so much. But for neither Abraham nor Rahab was the bottom line ever about the quality of their faith; it was always about the object of their faith.

You know, if I invite you to go on a hundred-mile journey with me and I give you two different scenarios to choose from, you tell me which one you'd want to choose. In the first scenario, I had this worn out set of tires and the cord is coming through, there's a couple screws in the sidewall, but I have tremendous faith in these tires because I've been driving them for 50,000 miles. The other scenario, I have a brand new set of Michelin tires, but I'm an

incredible worrywart and I don't trust anything including this brand new set of tires. Which one do you want to travel with? The one with great faith and lousy tires or the one with lousy faith and great tires? It's obvious. You see, what matters most is not the quality of our faith, it is the object of our faith. Great faith in a false god is no match for even weak faith in a real God. Abraham had great faith in a great God. His was a 9.9. Rahab had a self-serving faith that came in at about a 1.1, but it, too, was faith in the very same great God. It was Rahab who said, *"The LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above, and on the earth beneath."* You see, that statement was supernaturally provoked by the grace of God. That gift of faith is what drove the desire to obey, that drove the work of faith, that caused James to ask in verse 25: *And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is he dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

Okay. So what does all this mean to me? See, if I am truly a child of God, I am traveling that middle path of obedient faith, the path between faithless works and workless faith. I may not obey perfectly, but when I disobey, when I disobey, God's spirit within me will convict me and always be moving me towards obedience, just like he did with Abraham and Rahab. Now, that

process of conviction might be painful and it might be difficult, but it is the genuine sign of life. And all James is saying here is that all genuine faith will produce real flesh and blood works. So all we have to do is honestly ask ourselves, is my faith justified; is my faith vindicated by my works? You see, if James was to examine yourself looking for signs that your faith was real, he wouldn't be looking for words, no matter how lovely or noble they might be. Instead he'd be looking for deeds, he'd be looking for actions, he'd be looking for works, not proud works, not terrified works, not phony empty works, but genuinely obedient works. If you can find them in your life, rejoice. Rejoice and give glory to God. But if you can't honestly find them and God is convicting you of that simple fact, then just confess your sin and repent. Turn around and pursue God and his kingdom by pursuing simple obedience. And rejoice that the same God who pursued both Abraham and Rahab is now pursuing you. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you, we praise you for your word, we thank you and we praise you for James and the admonition that he gives to us about works and faith and the necessity of works to prove that faith is real. Father, I pray that we would each look at our lives, that we would examine those lives to see if there are works that vindicate the faith that is already there. Give us the grace, give us the ability, give us the convicting spirit of your Holy

Spirit so that if we don't see those works, we will cry out to you,
we will respond to your spirit by repentance. I pray in Jesus'
name. Amen.