



# Message Transcript

## Vital Signs

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Pastor Jeff:

Our Father in heaven, you are such a good God. We thank you so much for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, whom you sent to die on the cross for all our sins, to be raised from the dead in victory. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who indwells all of us who believe in your Son. And Father, we thank you for your living and active word because we believe as a people that every time that your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that you speak. So our prayer to you today is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear.

Lord, I pray that you be helpful to me today and helpful to us that we can clearly hear you. And so now for all those who have gathered today who desire to hear the Lord speak directly to you, who will believe what he tells you and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word amen. Amen. When you or a loved one go to visit a doctor or go to the emergency room, one of the first things that they do is gather your vitals.

They're called vital signs. They'll take your temperature. They'll potentially take your blood pressure. They'll check your pulse. They'll look at your respiratory rate, because they have metrics based upon those four areas to see how are you doing. Is your temperature too high? Is it too low? Are you going the right way? It's to help keep you alive. Even when you go to the doctor's office and nothing is an acute problem, they check these things out just to make sure that you're on the right track to health.

God and his word from time to time does those very things. He gives us some

vital signs that we can check to see how's your faith doing? Is it alive or is it dead? Where are you on that spectrum and how can you respond to what God wants you to know? And I think it's important and I'm so grateful to our God that he gives us these signs so that we can know. Because too often what we want to do is when it comes to our faith and wanting to know if we're saved or not, we like to go ask somebody else.

We like to ask, am I really saved? Did I do it right? Did I pray the right prayer? Am I doing the right things? How do I know for sure? Some of us who are younger don't think about our death that much, and that's good. Some of us who are older think about it all the time. That's not so good. But inevitably, all of us know inherently that we're going to die and stand before the Lord. And so inside of our hearts, God has set eternity in our hearts, wouldn't it be good to know what those vital signs are?

Wouldn't it be good to know if God gives you a spiritual checkup and says, "You're doing well?" Wouldn't it be good to know if God gave you a spiritual checkup and said, "You're not doing so well?" When a doctor comes back and gives us a report that's good, we're thankful that it's good, but we're not thanking the doctor for making it good. He's just reporting back to us what he's found. If the doctor comes back and says, "It's not looking good," we don't blame the doctor. We recognize it's us that is the problem.

We want his therapy for what could be helpful to us going forward. The word of God is the same way. And so today, I want to talk to you about your vital signs, your spiritual vital signs. How can you know that you're on the right track with God? How can you know that you're spiritually healthy? And if you want to know how your faith is

doing, I believe God has a word for you today. I want to invite you to open up your Bibles to James 2 starting in verse 14. James 2 starting in verse 14.

God has something to tell us today through his servant James that we need to pay careful attention to, and here's what he says. He says, what use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food and one of you says to them, "Go in peace. Be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so, faith if it has no works is dead being by itself.

But someone may say, "You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without the works and I will show you my faith by my works." You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe in shudder, but are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works. And as a result of the works, faith was perfected and the scripture was fulfilled which says, and Abraham believed God.

And it was reckoned to him as righteousness. And he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. And here in these short verses God is telling us what

spiritual vitality looks like, what the vital signs in our life look like.

And I can tell you this, by studying this passage this week, I'm gripped by the fact that this is a message that doesn't get preached often in our churches in North America. This is a message that is set down or set aside or washed over and excused rather than fully proclaimed. But one of the reasons I love being your pastor at Brave is that you want to hear the fullness of God's word, and that you want to hear the whole council of God's word. And it's my pleasure to bring it today.

I mean, if I had to title this sermon, I mean, this sermon is so shocking, I almost entitled this message why most Americans who claim to be Christians are going to hell. That's what I want to title it. I mean, this is really asking, is your faith dead or is it alive? And listen, as you're hearing this message, although you may want to give it to somebody else, listen to it for yourself first. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you first about your own vital signs before you go passing it around to others.

And we're going to talk about four spiritual vital signs that you need to pay attention to. And the first is this, pay attention to pointless professions. Pointless professions. Notice what he says. He starts this text with two questions. He says, what use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith and no works? Second question, can that faith save him? He asked the question, what benefit is it, brothers and sisters, if someone says they have faith but no works? And then the second question is like it, can a faith like that save a person?

Now, sometimes we can learn a little bit about the original language in Greek.

This is one of those times. Oftentimes the word in Greek means the same thing as the word in English and it's just people pontificating to show you they're smart. But the way questions get asked in the Greek, they get asked in such a way if you use a certain particle, they always expect a positive answer. And if you use a certain particle, it's always expecting a negative answer. It's kind of like the Brits, the way Brits talk.

They always make statements with questions, don't they? This is lovely, isn't it? I mean, that's how they talk and they're always expecting a positive or a negative answer, but it's rhetorical. What he is asking here is he says, what is the benefit of someone who says that they have faith but there's no evidence of works in their life? He says this, a faith like that is not able to save a person, can it? And the answer is no, it cannot. Now, he's going to spell out why, but the first reason he's talking about is pointless professions.

Just because you profess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord does not mean that you are saved. So let me give you some scriptural background before all of you get up and leave the church this morning. Okay? Let's take a look at what Jesus says first of all. I want to let the word of God just wash over you. Just listen to what Jesus says. Stop thinking about all your theological convictions and where you fall on a spectrum of Arminianism and Calvinism. All that stuff's pointless because the word of God is what's going to stand forever.

So listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount. He tells you to beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. And here's how he says you'll know them. You will know them by

their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Of course, not. So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Jesus says good trees, good fruit. Bad trees, bad fruit. If there's bad fruit, it's a bad tree. If there's good fruit, it's a good tree. Notices what he goes on to say. This is Jesus talking. He says this, so then you will know them by their fruits. Now, why is it important to know them by their fruits? Because we ask simple questions sometimes of people, of acquaintances they have, of people that work with them, of people that go to their school, of someone they know that died, and we'll ask a question like this, are they a Christian or were they a Christian?

And oftentimes the response goes something like this, I don't know. I mean, it's hard to tell, right? It's hard to know if they were Christian because the Lord knows those who are his, but it's presumptuous of me to make a judgment about whether they were a Christian or not. According to the Bible, you'll know them by the fruits. You'll know. Is there any fruit in their life at all that represents the righteousness of Christ? Well, no. I mean, they were abusive to their spouse. They didn't walk with the Lord.

They didn't have a hunger for God. They didn't read their Bible. Then they're not Christian according to Jesus, according to Jesus. That's what he says. Notice what he goes on to say. As if that's not enough, he says, not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven. Just professing that Jesus is Lord is not enough to get you in, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter.

He who is walking out the faith will enter, not who says with their mouth that.

Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles? Didn't we do your work?" And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you who what? Practice lawlessness. You're not producing righteousness because you're not of me. Because if you were of me, you would produce righteousness. We went over the Parable of the Soils last week. Jesus said, "If you don't get this parable, how are you going to get any of them?"

Sower goes out to sow seed. That's the word of God. Some fell upon hard soil. The devil comes and snatches that away. They have a hard heart, doesn't get in. Second soil is just like it. It's rocky soil. It appears to spring up for a while, but it never takes root and it too withers and dies when trials and tribulation come. Then there's that third that's the thorny soil and the thorny soil appears with joy, but the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of wealth, all the things this world choke it out and it's unfruitful.

The first three soils produce no fruit. But when it falls on good soil, what does it produce? A harvest of 30, 60, or even 100 fold. He says this, "He who has ears let him hear." Jesus is saying, "I'm the word. And when I'm implanted in you, I will produce a harvest. If I'm in there, it's automatic that I will produce a harvest because there's nothing wrong with me. But if you don't have a heart for me, if you have a hard heart, a rocky heart, a weedy heart, I can't produce anything in you." And don't fool yourself.



Don't fool yourself into thinking that you're a Christian just because you prayed some prayer or made some profession or filled out a card or walked an aisle or raised your hand or did something. That is not evidence that you know the Lord. That's not saving faith. This is Jesus talking, by the way. What else does he talk about? In John 8:31-32 he says, if, and let's assume for the sake of argument, if you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

How? If I'm continuing in the word, if I'm continuing with Jesus. He says the same thing in John 14. How do you know if someone loves Jesus? How do you know if you love Jesus? Jesus is going to tell you. These are his words. Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words. And the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father who sent me."

How do you know if you love Jesus? You keep his word. You do what he says. How do you know that you don't love Jesus? You don't keep his word. You don't do what he says. That's how Jesus says, that's how I know whether you love me or not. You keep my word, I know you love me. You don't keep my word, I know you don't love me. It's that simple. We ask people, do you love God? Here's what they say, "Yeah, of course," even people that don't keep his word. Now, the Bible makes it clear.

If you're not keeping his word, you really don't love the Jesus of the Bible. You're loving some false idea of God that doesn't exist. Or how about John 15? Just that I am

the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, what does he do? He bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. You abide in Jesus, you will bear fruit. Every single Christian bears fruit. Every single believer has evidence in their life of fruitfulness, of good works. That's according to Jesus and we don't have to stop there, but because of time we do today.

It's all throughout the New Testament. John says the same thing. John says it this way in 1 John 3:7-10. How clear is this? Just let the word of God wash over you. Little children, that's us, make sure no one deceives you. The one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He, Jesus, is righteous. When you see people practicing righteousness, you know that they're righteous because it's God working through them.

The one who practices sin, that's the one who goes and continues to sin over and over and over and over again with no remorse and no repentance, the one who practices sin is of the devil, for the devil is sin from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose to destroy the works of the devil. Why did Jesus appear? So you wouldn't keep sinning anymore. That's why he came. So if you're practicing righteousness, you're righteous because you're of the Lord. If you're practicing sin, your father is the devil, according to John.

No one who is born of God practices sin. No one who is born of God makes a habit of sinning. No one who is born of God wants to continue to sin. That's what the Bible says. Because his seed, that's Jesus, abides in him and he cannot sin because he's born of God. Now, how clear is this in verse 10? By this, the children of God and

the children of the devil are obvious. John says, you can know who the children of God are and who the devil are. It's so obvious. Anybody can see this.

Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God nor the one who does not love his brother. You don't practice righteousness and you don't love people, you're not of the Lord no matter what you say. That's according to God. That's what God says. That's a litmus test that Jesus is saying it. John is saying it. It's all over. Do you know Peter says the same thing too? Peter says it like this in 1 Peter 2:15. Here's what he says. 1 Peter 2:15. For such is the will of God that, by what, doing good or doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Good works. Well, what about the Apostle Paul? Man, he taught grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We're getting there. But then why does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 13:5 examine yourselves to make sure you're in the faith? Why'd he say that? Why wouldn't he just say, make a profession, raise your hand, walk the aisle, come forward, tell people you're a Christian. If you do that... No, you better examine yourself. You better take a good long hard work to see if your life represents the God that you say that you serve.

Make sure you're in the faith. Who's he talking to? A church, Christians. Those who call yourself Christians. You better examine yourself to make sure you're in the faith. Why? Because your whole eternity is banking on it. Where you spend your eternity is essential to what you do with what we're talking about today. Now, we read in Romans that it's the kindness of the Lord that leads us to repentance in Romans 2:4.

But notice what else he says.

He says, but because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to each person according to his deeds. What are you going to be judged on? Your deeds. I thought I was just judged. You're judged on your deeds. Now, I know what some of you are thinking. I'm out of here. I feel like I'm at a Catholic service where we have to work for my salvation. No, you don't.

Let me be crystal clear on what the Bible teaches and let's put all this together. If you turn your Bible to Ephesians 2:8-9, and some of you're taking a deep breath right now, like whew, here's what it says. It says, for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and it is what? It is not your own doing, it is a gift of God, not by works so that no one can boast. Wait, wait, wait, wait, you said it was works. No. The gospel is this, it's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

That's the gospel. Now, listen, listen, listen. But like Martin Luther said, but your faith is never alone because genuine saving faith is always accompanied by good works. And if you've truly been saved by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone, there will be evidence that you've been saved by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone for your good works. First by grace you've been saved through faith. It's not your own doing. It's the gift of God. It's not by work so that no one should boast.

What's the next verse say, Ephesians 2:10? For we are his workmanship created

in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we'd walk in them. So there's nowhere in the Bible that says, just pray this prayer, just ask me into your heart, just do this religious activity, and then live however you want. It's if you really want to be saved, you cannot save yourself. You can't do good works to get to heaven because Isaiah 64:6 says that your best works are like filthy rags.

You can't be good enough to get to heaven. You can't be American enough to get to heaven. You can't keep the 10 Commandments good enough to get to heaven. There's nothing you can do to get to heaven. Jesus Christ came to demonstrate you can't make it from here to there. He died on the cross for all your sins. There's nothing you can do to get right with God. The only thing you can do is repent of your sin, turn from your sin and turn to Christ who can save you to the full.

But I want to tell you something, and if you do that and you have genuine saving faith, good works will always accompany that. To say, "Well, I'm definitely saved," but there's no good works, if you haven't been genuinely saved. You just haven't. I knew I was saved when I was 18 because God gave me a love for people I would've never hung out with before. My little clique and my group that I hung out with, my life started expanding and I started to have compassion for and loving people that I didn't have compassion for and love before.

And I remember what was going on inside of me. It was God. He was changing my life. And here's the truth, for all of you who are genuinely born again, you know that from the moment you trusted Christ, your life's changing a little bit differently. And here's what the Bible makes clear. You're not going to be perfect from the moment you

trust Christ. There's nobody perfect in the Bible except Jesus. This is not about, hey, be perfect and live for God and then he'll accept you.

No, this is you can't be perfect and God's still willing to accept you through repentance and faith. But if you do, it's Christ in you, the hope of glory, that will work out your salvation and good works will accompany your faith that you say that you have. There is no such thing as saving faith without changing faith. No such thing. It doesn't exist. Ask somebody. Well, was your dad a Christian? Was your mom a Christian? I think so. I remember they prayed a prayer like 20 years ago to trust Christ.

What evidence did you see in their life that showed that they had changed? None. That wasn't saving faith. Anybody can say with their lips that Jesus is Lord without a change of heart. Saving faith is a change of heart. Saving faith is Christ, come in and change me. I need you. I want you. You are my Lord. Take over my life. That's saving faith and saving faith is always accompanied by good works. That's the fact. Pointless professions, and I'm not against having people stand to their feet in response to the gospel.

We've done it here. And I'm not against people walking an aisle and getting right with the Lord. We've done that here. I'm just saying walking an aisle and raising your hand or standing to your feet does not save you. Christ saves you. It's Jesus that does all the work. Amen? And because there's nothing we can do to get to God, there's going to be nobody in heaven that's bragging about their good works. We're not going

to get to heaven like, "I'm here. Look at all I did." There's nobody.

All of us are dead in our transgressions and sins and God is the one through his Spirit that has to make us alive and it's not something we do. But if we genuinely have faith that has called out to the Lord and said, "Change me, God," over time your life will change. You will not be the same. You're a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. Another way of saying it, you're not saved by your works, but you are for sure saved for good works. Let me say it again so I can be crystal clear.

You are not saved by doing good works. You can't save yourself by doing good works. If you could, Jesus Christ didn't need to die for you. You are only saved by grace through faith in Christ. That's it. But if you have been saved by grace through faith in Christ, your life will reflect good works, which is the righteousness of Christ coming through you. Not perfectly, but increasingly. And if you don't see that in your life, it should be a warning blinking light on the dashboard of your spiritual life saying, "I don't think I'm saved."

It's interesting for me when I talk to parents and I ask them, is your kid saved, every one of them says yes. It's hard for us to look at our children and be like, I don't know. I don't see righteousness. I don't know. I don't know that they're walking it. I don't know that I see it, but that's the evidence that God wants to see. If somebody's been genuinely saved, they change in that moment. They're a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come. Pointless professions don't do that.

And we have scores of people across our land that have prayed a prayer or

been to an evangelistic crusade or felt their heart strangely warm or sensed God in a service or sang a worship song or will say, "God's near me. I know he is," who have never experienced the saving faith of Christ who's come into their life and transformed them. How is it that God of the universe could come into your life and you stay the same? It's impossible according to the word of God. So here's a question, do you have a faith in Christ or do you have a pointless profession?

Because a faith that's a pointless profession, it cannot save you. It can't save you. If there's no righteousness to accompany the faith that you say that you have, you're just mincing words. Be careful. This is a vital sign. Pointless professions, pay attention to that. Also, pay attention to this. Pay attention to careless compassions. Careless compassions. Notice what he says next.

He says, if a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and be filled, and yet do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Now listen to this. This is the first of four times he's going to say this. Even so, faith if it has no works, is dead being by itself. He's saying this, if you've truly been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ and you see someone in need and you're unwilling to help them, then Christ isn't in you.

Now here's what people are going to say, "Well, who do I help then? I mean, where do I stop?" The truth is everybody's needy. I'm needy and you're needy. Everywhere you go there's someone in need. And oftentimes the Lord lights up your eyes to say, "You can help. You could do something." But here's what he says, religious people don't do that. Religious people don't help.



Someone comes to a religious person, they're hungry, they're starving, they don't have any clothes, their family's in need, and you're like, "You know what? Let's have a Bible study. Let's open our Bible to Philippians 4:19. Here's what it says, and my God will meet all of your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus. Isn't that good to know today, that God is going to provide for you? Let's have a prayer time. Dear Jesus, provide for them in every way. Amen. Now, get out. Best of luck."

That's not the heart of God. The heart of God is when it's in your ability to help another person who's in need. Everything in you wants to help. And it doesn't mean there's not a discernment button. It doesn't mean there aren't times where somebody seemingly needs help, but maybe they're playing you or doing something. I mean, I get all that, but I'm talking the genuine heart of God is when you see other people and you see a need would be, I want to help if I can. I can't help everybody, but I might be able to help here.

And there's myriads of ways that that happens in your life. And what you should see if you're a Christian is a growing desire to help people. Careless compassions is religion like, I'll do what I'm supposed to do because that's religious and God will be pleased. That's what the Pharisees did. They tithed 10%. They did all the religious expectations. But you know what they didn't do? They didn't care about people. They went through all the religious motions.

They were the people that would say, "I went to church today. I sang all three songs. I listened to the message. I even underlined it in my Bible. I did, but I could care

less about the people." Friends, let me tell you something, how you treat other people is your theology. How you treat other people is who your God is. It is a defining moment of who you say you believe your God is. You can't say I believe this and act differently. They're never incongruent. What you do demonstrates what you believe.

If you love your spouse, it will be demonstrable. If you love your kids, it will be demonstrable. If you love your neighbor, it will be demonstrable. There'll be evidence in your life, not because you have to, but because you're compelled to. That Christ's love compels me. I'm changing. I love differently. It's not a careless compassion. When I see the need, I do it. And isn't that interesting what Jesus said at the end of Matthew 25, where he gathers the sheep and the goats and he said, "When I was in prison, you didn't visit me. When I was sick, you didn't come from me."

And they're like, "Well, Lord, when did we see you? I mean, we never saw you sick. We never saw you in prison." He's like, "Yeah, whatever you did to the least of these, you were doing to me." When Saul was on the road to Damascus and he was apprehended by Christ and he heard the words, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He's like, "Who are you, Lord?" Why would Jesus say, why are you persecuting me? Saul would've said, "I'm not persecuting you. It's these Christians."

He's like, "Whatever you do to them, you're doing to me." Do you have careless compassion? Do you just go through the religious motions, just looking religious so it looks like you're helpful to people, or do you genuinely care about the people of God? Do you genuinely care about every single person he created because God created everyone, Christ died for all people, and because Christ is in you, you love and you let

him love through you the way Christ would if he were still on the earth?

That's evidence that you've been born again, not perfectly, but increasingly.

Amen? That's evidence. Pointless professions. Careless compassions. He says, even so, man, if you have faith and no works, it's dead. Dead faith. That's no faith. That's useless faith. What about this third one? What about empty expressions? Empty expressions. He says this, but someone may well say, here comes the objector. This is some of you here this morning. But someone may well say, "You have faith. I have works," so it's the person that's sitting here today like, okay, great. Yeah, I hear you. I hear you.

I have faith. You're talking about all this work stuff. I don't need to talk about works. I have faith. I believe in Jesus. I have faith. I don't need the works." Somebody's saying that, so he's going to answer you. Here's what he's going to say. But someone may well say, you have faith and I have works, show me your faith without the works and I'll show you my faith by my works. Here's what he's saying. You can't show your faith without works. I have faith. To do what? To be what? To become what?

What's your faith if it is not evidenced by Christ's righteousness? What use is your faith? I'll show you my faith by how I live righteously. I'll show you my faith by how I treat my wife and my kids. I'll show you my faith by what I do for a living. I'll show you my faith by how I treat my neighbor. I'll show you my faith by how I live in the world. You watch me. You look at me. You study me. Jesus said, "Follow me. I'll make you

fishers of men." Paul said, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Watch me. I'll show you what faith looks like."

That is what it is, and that's different than what we like to say. We like to use empty expressions. I'm a believer. I got saved when I was this. I did this. I got this. Once saved, always... I mean, we throw stuff around that has absolutely no significance. Notice what he goes on to say. Because somebody's like, yeah, but I believe in Jesus, so I don't even need to listen to this. You believe that God is one, you do well. You believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross, you do well. You believe Jesus rose from the dead, you do well.

Even the demons believe that and shudder. Even the demons know Jesus Christ is Lord. Even the demons know he died on the cross. Even the demons know he rose from the dead. Even the demons know that Jesus Christ is coming back. And you know what they do? They're terrified. They're scared. Here's what the text is saying. And if that's your faith, you should be terrified too. If that dashboard is blinking with your useless expressions that you make about why you're a Christian with no evidence to back it, well, I believe in Jesus...

Here's what I say. I believe George Washington was the first President of the United States of America. I do. I believe Abraham Lincoln was the 16th President of the United States of America. But here's what I'm not saying when I say I believe that. What I'm not saying is I believe George Washington lives inside of me. I believe he's alive when we talk every day about America and how I should live. And it's really not even me talking, it's George Washington talking through me right now.

I'm not saying that. I'm saying I believe facts of when he lived and what he did. When I say I believe in Jesus, I'm saying that Jesus had died on the cross and the one that rose from the dead and the one who's coming back dwells in me. He's alive as he's ever been. He's speaking through me. He loves you. He loves me, and he's changed my whole life. That's what I believe. And that's different. Amen? So when we talk about empty expressions, I mean, we know so much Christianese to tell people anything we want to tell people. "Yeah, I'm saved. I'm born again. I'm this. I'm that."

If there's nothing in your life to indicate that there's change, I mean, woopity doo that you know all the facts about scripture. The Pharisees watched Jesus die on the cross. Roman soldiers watched Jesus die on the cross. The world that was there at the time watched him die. People knew he rose. Knowing facts about Jesus is not saving faith. Hell is full of people that know the gospel. It's turning toward the gospel and asking God to save you and come into your life and change who you are.

That's the gospel. He says in verse 20 this way, but are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow? That's biblical terminology for you stubborn hardhearted idiot. Are you willing to recognize this? Are you willing to pay attention to this? That faith without works is useless? That's the second time he said it. I mean, when things get repeated in the Bible, pay attention. When he's making a case, pay attention. Verse 17. Even so, faith if it has no works is dead being by itself. The verse I just read.

But are you willing to recognize that faith without works is useless? Do you see that? Well, I don't need faith. I'm a Protestant. We don't need works. We just get

saved by Jesus. Yeah, I get it. You get saved by Jesus. But if you're truly saved, you will have works at a company that salvation. It'll be evident to you and everyone around you that you're a different creation now. Amen? Don't live on empty expressions. Now, I know what some of you are saying right now. I mean, you're using this mental gymnastic and you're like, what about the thief on the cross?

He believed in Jesus. He died within an hour or two. I mean, he didn't do anything. What about the thief on the cross? Everyone always wants to go to the thief on the cross. Everybody wants to go to the lowest common denominator of what we can do and still get saved. So let's talk about the thief on the cross. You can read about this in the gospels. I mean, John 19 or Luke 23 I think is a great place to go. When you go there and read, here's what you'll see.

In the morning that Jesus was crucified at 9:00 in the morning, on one side of him and on the other side of him, on his right and on his left were two criminals. And while everybody was shouting, "Crucifying him," and while everybody was shouting, "You said, you said you could save others. You can't even save yourself," while everybody was saying all the horrible things about Jesus, these two criminals were joining in the fun. But something changed in the heart of one over time.

Because later in the afternoon, the one criminal began to say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on here?" And he starts rebuking the criminal on the other side of Jesus. "Why are you talking to him that way? He's done nothing wrong. We deserve everything we're getting. We knew what was wrong and we broke it. Jesus did nothing wrong." And then he says this, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your

kingdom." In order to have a kingdom, what do you have to be? You have to be a king.

So just hang with me. This thief on the cross that "had no good works," here's what his no good works were. He rebuked people that were against Jesus. He had his heart changed. He asked Jesus for mercy and called him king. And when did he do it? Publicly in front of the whole world that was hostile. You've been a Christian for how long? When's the last time you went public in a hostile crowd and told people how much you love Jesus? The thief on the cross did it before he died, right?

And then Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I tell you the truth, today you'll be with me in paradise." I mean, that guy died within an hour or two. I mean, after Jesus died, they broke their legs and he died. So presumably he was in heaven. Well, he didn't do many good works. He did a lot more good works than we give him credit for, because everybody that's born again does those things. Everybody that's born again stands with Jesus. Everybody that's born again is rebuking others. Everybody that's born again is giving public testimony to how awesome Jesus is.

That's part of the righteousness of Christ coming through him even when the guy is pinned to the cross. I mean, there's no evidence of anybody going to heaven that is not accompanied by righteous works. Not anywhere in the Bible will you see it, which leads to this final one. If you're thinking about pointless professions and careless confessions and empty expressions, how about this one? Don't make careless confessions. Careless confessions. People go to Romans 10:9 and say something like this.

Well, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Don't you believe that, Pastor Jeff? I believe every word of the Bible. I believe it's all true, but let's take a look at the context. In the context of that's being written, the emperor is Lord. Caesar is Lord. If you don't say Caesar is Lord, they might cut your head off. If you're not giving allegiance to the government, they might kill you.

And in that context he's saying, but if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, not Caesar, and you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, even though you might lose your head, even though they might kill you, you will be saved. That's the context. It's not some silly confession like, well, I'll just pray this prayer. I'll just do this thing. It's not a religious activity. It's a relationship with the living God that you want to take over your life. That's what it means. And so let's give some careful consideration here to some of these careless confessions that we have.

Notice he's going to give us two examples that are both extreme. He says this. Was not Abraham our father justified by what? Works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar. You see that faith was working with his works. And as a result of the works, faith was perfected and the scripture was fulfilled which said, and Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness and he was called the friend of God. You see this verse 24. Third time he's saying it. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

How much clearer can this get? I mean, it's pretty clear. You either have to throw



out James 2 or you have to believe that God's telling you the truth. So what's he saying? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. When did that happen? If you go back in your Bibles, you'll notice that that happened in Genesis 15. God made him a promise and he believed. And when he believed, it was reckoned to him as righteousness. He looked forward to the day that Jesus Christ was going to come as the Messiah.

Jesus said in John 8:58, "Abraham saw my day and rejoiced at this day." Everybody in the Old Testament looked forward to what Christ was going to do. They were saved by grace through faith in Christ. Every Old Testament saint, how are they saved in the New Testament? We look back and we're saved by grace through faith in Christ. It's the same gospel, right? It's always through Christ. And when did he receive his faith? In Genesis 15. He believed that God was going to use him to be the leader of a great nation.

He believed. It's not until Genesis 22 that he offers up Isaac on the altar. So his faith in Christ, his faith in God preceded his works that we're going to read about. It always goes that way, right? Your faith in Christ always precedes your good works. Now, I love this story about Abraham. He's the father of a nation. He's all this stuff. God promised him a son. He needed a son to continue to pro generate the race, right? But what happened? He married a woman that was barren. He couldn't have one.

So what did he do? He told his wife, worked with his wife, "Hey, Hagar, she's a servant girl. We can bring the child that way." So what'd he do? He had relations outside of his marriage. Is that God honoring? In no way is it. It's called adultery. So

Abraham thought, "I'll do it my way. I'll use adultery to get God's work done." Does God ever have us take shortcuts to get his work done? No. But what does this tell you? It's not about how good you are. Abraham wasn't good. He slept with a servant girl to bring in God's promise.

That's not good. But what happened? Over time God continued to work on his heart. And by the time we get to Genesis 22, after the promise has come, which has been miraculous because his 90-year-old wife gives birth when he's 100 years old, and now he has Isaac and Isaac is grown up now. So prior to Isaac being born, he believed. Now Isaac's going to be sacrificed, so he's at least a teenager. So it's probably been at least 15 to 20 years since he believed. And now God tells him, "Sacrifice your son."

And what's he say? Whatever you want, God. My heart's in a place that if you tell me to do something, even if I don't understand it, I'm going to do it your way. And he doesn't just hear it and go do it. He continues to listen to God. And as he's getting ready to take his son up the hill, what happens? He tells the servants, "Hey, we're going to go up and worship. We'll come back." Somehow, some way, God's going to do something. Isaac his son asked him, "Dad, where's the sacrifice?"

And what does he say? The Lord will provide. Now, he didn't even know how. He has to strap his son on an altar, tie him up, which had to be a big scene. He has to pull out his knife. He's getting ready to plunge the knife into his son, when he hears the word from the Lord, "Don't lay a finger on that boy." He's like, okay, drops the knife.

That's when he heard the ram in a thicket. That was like the quietest ram in the history of the world, wasn't it? I mean, isn't it true that when we take steps of faith, that's when God shows up with his provision?

It wasn't like God said, "I got a ram in a thicket. So go on up. And when you get there, just take the ram." That's not faith. Faith is you do what I say and I'll provide. And he goes and does it, and God provides. And then what do we have? We have his faith combined with his works and it's perfected and scripture's fulfilled. Because when God saves, God provides righteous works in a person. Not because Abraham's a good guy, not because he did everything God wanted. Let me be clear again just so you don't walk out of here.

You're not saved by your good works. You're only saved by Christ. But if you are saved by the Christ of the Bible, good works will accompany the salvation that you have. You will be prompted to continue to take steps of faith. You'll be challenged to grow in the grace of God. Your life will become different, not perfectly, just increasingly. Amen? So he's going to use Abraham, the father of a nation. You say, "Well, I'm nothing like that." Neither am I. So then he's going to pick somebody else.

Notice what he does. I mean, for the third time he says, you see? I'm telling you, a man that is justified by works and not by faith alone. Notice this in verse 25. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot? So we're going with Abraham, the father of the nation, and a prostitute now. Rahab the harlot, Rahab the prostitute also justified. Was she not justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? And now the fourth time, for just as the body without the spirit is dead,

so also faith without works is dead.

Four times in this section. Faith without works is dead. Faith without works is useless. Don't kid yourself, you foolish fellow, to believe that works don't matter. Righteous works are evident that Christ is in you. I'm telling you the truth because I love you. Do not pass from this life to the next one without Christ on the inside. Don't do it. I love you too much. So he talks about Rahab. Well, what did Rahab do? You remember after the 40-year camping trip the Israelites had and God calls Joshua to take the people in?

And he sends in two spies not to see what they think, but they go on a three-day journey instead of a 40-day one just to spy it out because we're going in no matter what they say, but we want to get a lay of the land. They end up at a prostitute's place named Rahab, and she gives a testimony. Because she said, "All our people know who you are. We've heard about what your God did. We're terrified. I believe that your God is the real God." And she had faith in the God of the universe.

But then she evidenced that faith by what? Protecting the spies. Do you know how she protected the spies? She lied. She's a liar. That doesn't sound like good works, does it? What was she doing? She was protecting God's people. She wasn't being religiously pious or moral. And when people came and said, "Where are the guys?" "Well, they're upstairs. I just want to be a good Christian." No, she lied. She said, "They went another way. They're not even here." She spared the lives of them.

They said, "Okay, here's the deal. You hang a scarlet thread out the window.

You bring your family in. When all the walls come tumbling down, we'll spare your life." And that's exactly what she did. She acted in faith. She acted in faith so well, she even made it into the genealogical line of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't that awesome? It means God can use adulterers and God can use liars and God can use all sorts of people. He's not giving examples of perfect people because there's no perfect people with perfect examples.

There's only Jesus. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. But if we are, we're going to increasingly grow in our desire for righteousness. We're going to hunger for it more. We're going to thirst for it more. We're going to have a desire for it more because we love the God who lives in us. And that's what he's talking about. And unfortunately, this isn't taught too often in our culture. And there may be some of you who say, "I'm never coming back to Brave again." I want to tell you something.

You don't have to, but you're held accountable for what you heard today for all eternity. I'm just telling you the truth because I love you. I'm pleading with some of you. I don't even know who you are, but the ones who would say, "Well, I know I'm a Christian because I..." Is there evidence in your life if you were convicted for righteousness, is there any evidence that people could convict you? And not your righteousness, but Christ working through you? Not that you've been perfect, but Christ has done a work in your life.

This is what we're talking about because we live in a world where people make pointless professions all the time. Athletes point to this guy. Artists talk about their relationship with God. Several of them that talk that way don't have one with this God,

but they talk about it. We have empty expressions as to why we're religious and what we do. We have careless confessions. We think we can just mouth words and that changes everything. That is not the gospel. God loved you so much, he didn't send you a message, he sent you a son.

God loved you so much, he didn't just tell you that he loved you, he demonstrated that he loved you by allowing his son to be slaughtered on the cross. Jesus Christ gave his body. Jesus Christ gave his blood. Jesus Christ breathed his last breath and died. Jesus Christ allowed God to pour all of his wrath on him and take all of your sin. Jesus Christ was buried in the grave. And I want to tell you something, Jesus Christ got out of that grave three days later and he's alive as he's ever been. Amen?

And I'm here to tell you on the authority of the word of God that only through grace alone, by faith alone and Christ alone will anybody ever be saved. And if you've trusted in the saving work of Christ, not just mouthing words about religion, not just making professions, not just filling out a card, not just giving mind-numbing casual thoughts in your head, but truly want Christ to come and live in you, he will come and live in you.

And if you're here today and your dashboard is flickering with, "I'm not a Christian. I know I'm not a Christian. Based upon what I just heard, I'm not a Christian," here's what God wants you to know, he'll make you one right now. He will save your life right now if you're willing to turn from your sin and turn to him. And if you do, he'll make you a new creation in this moment. He will make his home with you. He will grow

with you. You don't have to be perfect, but you'll have a desire to grow in the holiness of Christ.

I don't want to end this service without you knowing that, because we're about ready to take communion on all our campuses. We're going to sing a song called In Christ Alone. I want you to think about where you are with Christ, because one day you're going to stand before me and you're going to hear one of two things.

You're going to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant, because you turned from your sin and you trusted Christ and God did a work through you," or you're going to hear these awful words that are going to ring in your ear for eternity, "Depart from me, you worker of iniquity. I never knew you. I tried to know you. I tried to grow with you. I sent my son to die for you, and you turned away from him. You didn't want him." Don't ever let that be you. This supper we're about ready to celebrate is for anybody who has turned from their sin and turned to Christ.

It doesn't matter who you think you are. It doesn't matter the level of sin you brought in this place today. If you'll turn from your sin and turn to Christ, you're welcome to receive this meal. If you don't have Christ, repent and receive Christ. But don't drink judgment on yourself. This is not just a religious activity to get you right with God. This is for people that have been made right with God through Christ who want to thank God and celebrate the fact that this reason and this reason only is why they have life.

So let me pray for you. Then as you hear this song either sung over you or you

want to stand or you want to remain seated, let the Holy Spirit speak to you about where you are and let Christ be the Lord of your life. Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor, and praise for who you are. Lord, we don't believe we're saved by our good works, but we do believe that we're saved for good works. And our works are evidence of the fact that you're living in and through us.

If you're here today and you say, "I don't have righteous works in my life. I haven't changed any since that time I made that profession. I've been saved like three times and nothing's ever worked," it's because you're not saved. Make today the day of salvation. Turn from your sin and pray like this. Jesus, come into my life in the fullness of who you are. Lord, I want to turn from my sin and I want to trust you to be my Lord. Come in and save me right now. Change my heart, my mind, my soul. Make me like you.

Do your work in and through me. Lord, I'm done trying to be good. I want you to live your life through me. And for those of you that know the Lord, be grateful and thankful for everything he showed you today. Rejoice in who he's making you. Rejoice in what he's done in you. We give you all the praise. And Lord, as we get ready to celebrate this supper on all our campuses, do a work in us as you prepare our heart with this song, In Christ Alone. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen and amen.