

Faith and good deeds from one source



14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? **15** Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. **16** If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? **17** In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. **18** But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. **19** You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. **20** You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? **21** Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. **23** And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. **24** You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. **25** In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? **26** As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

When Jesus Christ said, "I am the vine and you are the branches..." everything was so clear. Jesus' parable shows us: Jesus is at the center, and we live and grow from his life and his strength. And that is the crucial thing! The experience of being in Jesus and living from him sets us free. Through Jesus, we can draw from God's riches and do not have to look at our imperfect lives with worry and sorrow. Likewise, we do not need to force ourselves and others to do what they cannot achieve anyway through rigid legalism. We can experience all of this from Jesus. But without Jesus, one can only sigh with James: "What good is it... if I have faith but no works!" Or with Paul: "What good is it... if I give all my possessions to the poor and do not have love?" Oh, how quickly we repeatedly distance ourselves from Jesus! Then suddenly nothing is clear and nothing is obvious anymore. Suddenly the question arises: "Have I done enough for my faith?" Or "Do I still believe at all?" Or even the question: "Is faith real, or just an illusion?" We realize that James is about faith in a very practical way in everyday life. Is faith in Jesus Christ real and applicable for everyday life? Even today? These questions lead to the center of Christianity. The center in Jesus. Is Jesus really alive? Is he also real in my life? And if Jesus is real, what consequences does that have for my life? Today the letter of James invites us to rediscover this center in Jesus. It invites us to find faith and the good works we do in Jesus Christ, so that they are no longer opposites coming from two different sources, but are a unity coming from one source. The message that God became man. And the fact that God died in Jesus Christ and rose for us, totally transformed first-generation Christians personally and socially. Faith in Jesus touched them in their practical lives, so that love for their neighbor and good works came naturally. No one had to urge others to do good. It happened naturally. And people around them could recognize this. But a few years had passed. The church had had its first experiences with faith. They could no longer ask Jesus directly, but relied on the Holy Spirit, who worked through the testimony of the apostles. But some didn't rely solely on that and therefore wondered where Jesus Christ really was and why he wasn't coming back. This doubt also

affected everyday life. As a result, some had forgotten what it meant to be a Christian. One group actually believed that Jesus and his work of salvation on the cross couldn't be enough to save us humans. People had to do something else as well in addition. Paul vehemently contradicted this opinion and made it clear in the Epistle to the Romans: *"Therefore we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."* However, there was a group of people who took the opposite view: They believed that good works were irrelevant because Christ had died for all their sins. Faith alone opened the way to heaven, and apart from that, people could live as they pleased. Paul had to fight against the idea that people had to add something to Jesus' work of salvation, while James had to argue against the attitude that people don't have to do anything good as long as they have faith. James had to remind the people of that time, and us, that there is faith that is not connected to Jesus. He even says: The demons believe that there is a God. Yes Faith always exists. Even atheism is a faith. But there is faith without Jesus. And a faith that even leads us away from this Jesus. And this is the key issue. Especially in our time, the pressure to abandon this faith in Jesus Christ in particular is massive. In our society, we are urged to venerate almost every faith in the world that exists, as long as it isn't faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ is branded as archaic and, due to the mistakes of past generations, even evil, while all other faiths are canonized, no matter what they do. Meanwhile, it is said that Christianity is intolerant because it proposes only one path to salvation. But God's path to us humans is inherently unique and not at all comparable to any religion or philosophical movement. God came through a specific person, at a specific time. And this same person also rose from the dead in a specific place, and the message of his resurrection was written down by very specific people who were inspired by God's Spirit. And we are united with this one Jesus through baptism, and there is no salvation apart from him. It is a catastrophe that salvation in Christ is relativized so that people like to believe faith in Jesus is not necessary and you can believe in anything you like to believe in. The result is that faith itself becomes irrelevant. And thus we remain alone without Christ. Without Christ, only our own activism can help us out of this misery. This activism takes on all sorts of nuances. Most of the time, activism itself isn't bad. It just lacks the source! For example: Scientists warn us that we must change our behavior so that our children still have space and air to live in. This call from scientists is good and right. It is good that we protect our environment for future generations. But we can do so in the certainty that it is God who gives space and life in the first place and also preserves it every day. Without God, all that remains is empty activism that overwhelms us and everyone else and leads to nothingness. Living from the source of faith means doing everything we can to save the world. Even if it is absolutely clear that the world would burn up tomorrow, we would do what is necessary to protect it today. We do all this out of that same belief that it is God who created the world and sustains it every day. But there is another school of thought that has similarly abandoned the source in Jesus Christ. In their opinion, faith is a private matter and one doesn't have to do anything anymore. Faith in Jesus Christ has been transformed into a Western cultural asset that no longer has any meaning for daily life. This faith no longer has anything to do with Jesus. From this perspective, it only matters to complete the necessary rituals, such as baptism, confirmation, marriage, and burial. Otherwise, a person just doesn't have to attract negative attention, and then they'll somehow be okay with the dear Father in heaven. James must wake us up today. Do you think it's enough to post a few nice Bible verses on Telegram and Facebook? Do you think that alone makes you a Christian? Or do you think that the baptismal certificate are like a kind of driver's license for heaven? James must wake us up. Faith is not just a ritual or a bureaucratic act alone. Faith is part of our new identity. In Jesus, we are a new creation,

and from this new creation, we live. We have become a new tree that bears new fruit in Jesus. And this isn't just visible to us. The whole world recognizes something of the new life in Jesus Christ within us! That's why it's completely impossible to be a Christian only in private. The Persian saying, "Whoever rides a camel in the desert no longer needs to hide," is always true for Christians. Since a Christian is visible to all anyway, and only visible because life in Jesus has changed him there is no reason to hide your faith. James cites two examples from the Old Testament that clearly illustrate the connection between faith and works. Abraham is the father of faith! He believed in God, and his faith led to action when he was willing to sacrifice his own son. Rahab, the prostitute, also risked her own life and saved the men of God. To this day, there are many Christians whose faith leads them to risk their own lives or to be imprisoned. And yet, it is not works themselves that give faith its power and legitimacy. Faith and works are dead on their own. What we need is the Spirit of God who gives life. What we need is Jesus. And Jesus alone brings faith and works together so that they become a beautiful bouquet of flowers to the glory and honour of God. From Jesus and his power, the world was created. From him and his power, faith and good works are both the most natural things there can be. Amen