

February 9, 2014  
Authentic Christianity

*Authentic Christianity Sacrifices*  
James 2:14-26

**Opening words:** Kierkegaard once wrote: I went into church and sat on the velvet pew. I watched as the sun came shining through the stained glass windows. The minister, dressed in a velvet robe, opened the golden gilded Bible, marked it with a silk bookmark and said, "If any man will be my disciple, said Jesus, let him deny himself, take up his cross, sell what he has, give it to the poor, and follow me." If that quote makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

This is sermon number four in my seven-part sermon series on James, *Authentic Christianity*. Each one of these messages revolves around a different character that must be present in true discipleship. In our scripture for today, James brings up the topic of Christian authenticity itself. Your Christian witness must include both good words and deeds. We are looking at three examples that underscore this point. Last week, I developed the point that authentic Christianity must take a risk occasionally. This week, we will develop the point that authentic Christianity must sacrifice occasionally. Next week, we will develop the point that authentic Christianity must respond to basic human needs regularly. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, James 2:14-26. Today's message is called *Authentic Christianity Sacrifices*.

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**James 2:14-26** What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

<sup>20</sup> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

<sup>25</sup> 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? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

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Years ago, Millard Fuller of Habitat for Humanity addressed the National Press Club on public radio, on which he recalled a workshop he conducted at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary with 200 pastors in attendance. The assembled pastors quickly pointed toward greed and selfishness as the reason the church never had enough money to accomplish its mission in the world. Millard then asked this seemingly innocent question: "Is it possible for a person to build a house so large that it's sinful in the eyes of God? Raise your hand if you think so." All 200 pastors raised their hands. "Okay," said Millard, "then can you tell me at exactly what size, the precise square footage, a certain house becomes sinful to occupy?" Silence from the pastors. You could have heard a pin drop. Finally, a small, quiet voice spoke up from the back of the room, "When it is bigger than mine." Can anyone here relate to that story? How much are you willing to sacrifice for God? If that story makes you a little uncomfortable, say, **"Amen!"**

These words will sound familiar because last week's scripture lesson and today's scripture are the same. We are at the end of the second chapter of James. The topic is authenticity. James reminds us how important it is for us to be genuine in our faith. We find genuine faith when we combine the right words with the right deeds. In other words, you are supposed to be able to tell people what Jesus means to you. You are supposed to be able to tell people what Jesus has done for you. You are supposed to be acting in a way that demonstrates to the world your appreciation for this great gift of salvation. James says simple words are not enough. After all, talk is cheap. James says good behavior is not enough. After all, you can't earn your salvation. Words and deeds must go hand in hand. Verse 14 says it clearly, *what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?*

James underscores this point with three examples. In verses fifteen through seventeen, we are told authentic Christian faith responds to basic human need. We will look at that next week. In verses twenty-five and twenty six we are told authentic Christianity involves an occasional risk. We looked at that last week. Today, we are going to look at verses twenty-one through twenty-four. In those verses, we are told that authentic Christianity requires a certain amount of sacrifice. We understand the basic concept of sacrifice, because sacrificing is part of life. How many sacrifices have you made in your life?

I have never met a parent who never sacrificed for their children. There is a website called [spotonlist.com](http://spotonlist.com). They have a list of ten things that every parent sacrifices for their children. Can you relate to any of these?

1. **Personal expenses** – How much money do you spend on yourself? How much money do you spend on your children?
2. **Personal choices** – How many meals have you eaten you didn't enjoy because the children picked out the menu?
3. **Personal happiness** – How many people have stayed in a bad marriage for the sake of the children?

4. **Sleep** – How many parents have stayed up late waiting for their teenager to come home?
5. **Personal preference** – How many parents take their youngsters to McDonald's because they like it?
6. **Their future** – How many parents sacrificed their education so their children could get an education?
7. **Social life** – How many parents have come home early to tuck someone in bed?
8. **Time with spouse** – How many husbands are jealous of their own children because they get all of her time?
9. **Lifestyle** – How many parents' extra time revolves around their children's activities?
10. **Career** – How many mothers sacrificed their career to raise a decent human being?

Sacrificing and parenthood go hand in hand. However, I have never met a parent who wouldn't do all that sacrificing again. Why? We never mind sacrificing for the ones we love. Oscar Wilde once wrote, "*Sacrificing your happiness for the one you love, is by far, the truest type of love.*" If you can agree with that statement, say, "**Amen!**"

Last week, during the President's State of the Union Address, the crowd was divided. Some were always standing up and cheering at his words. Others were always sitting on their hands. It was easy to identify the 'red' people from the 'blue' people. It was easy to identify the liberals from the conservatives. The President was unable to unite the crowd, but one man did, Army Ranger Cory Remsburg. Did you see him sitting next to the first lady? I don't know how you could have missed him. The thirty-year-old man needed help standing up. The wounds he received in Afghanistan will never completely heal. He sacrificed so much for our country. How can we question his patriotism? How can we question the patriotism of the people who sacrificed their lives serving our country? Listen to what I am about to say. Yet, the text for today is not about sacrificing for family. The text for today is not about sacrificing for country.

The text for today is about sacrificing for God. James draws us back to the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. It is the story of Abraham. Do you remember his story? It begins in the 12th chapter of Genesis. In those days his name was Abram. It means "the father of many". God promises Abram he is going to be the father of a great nation. The problem is, the father of many has no children. He has no children through his wife, Sarai, when God changes his name to Abraham, the "father of the multitude". It seemed like a cruel joke, until Sarah give birth to her first child, Isaac. You have to tip your hat to Abraham. He was 100 years old when Isaac was born. (Genesis 21:5) It is safe to say that Abraham and Sarah cherished their son. He brightened every dark corner of their lives. There was going to be a happy ending, then it happened. In the twenty-second chapter God calls Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. It was a test we would have failed, but Abraham passed. In the original Hebrew the point is clear.

Abraham has already said, "Good-bye" to Isaac. When all hope is gone, God supplies another sacrifice, a ram. It is a difficult story for our modern ears to understand, but the point is clear. We must be willing to sacrifice for God. Abraham set the standard high. He was willing to sacrifice his son at God's request. In the story, it was God who set the stand for sacrifice. What are you willing to sacrifice to God?

Do you remember the story of the rich young ruler? (Luke 18:19-29) The title of the story says it all. He has no earthly limitations. He is a man, so he is not limited by his gender. His was a time of great sexism. He is not limited economically. He is rich, so he can buy anything he desires. He is not limited by age. He is young, so he is not limited by health issues. He is not limited by power, because he has influence. He is a ruler. It appears on the surface he has everything, yet at closer examination he has nothing. However, he lacks the one thing money can't buy, salvation. He goes to Jesus and asks him the question we have all asked, "*What must I do inherit eternal life?*" After discovering the man is a good man, Jesus gets to the topic of sacrifice. Jesus said to him, "*Sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*" The rich young ruler exits the scene depressed because he can't do it. There are limits to what he would sacrifice. I have never liked that Bible story because the rich young ruler looks so much like me. We struggle with the story of Abraham and Isaac because Abraham would sacrifice anything for God. We relate to the rich young ruler because we too have limits on what we will sacrifice.

Anyone who has ever taken a leadership position in the life of the church knows the simple truth that people limit how much they will sacrifice for God. If you have ever tried to organize Vacation Bible School, you know it is true. "The children can't come because a family member is visiting." If you have ever tried to help the needy in the inner city, you know it is true. "I can't help because they smell bad." If you have ever tried to find a reader at a worship service, you know it is true. "I am afraid to stand up in front of people." If you have ever tried to organize a musical program, you know it is true. "I don't really care for that kind of music." If you have ever worked on the annual stewardship drive, you know it is true. I don't care how many facts we give. I don't care how many charts we show. People have set their own limits to what they give, and excuse their cheapness because they are "on fixed incomes". I wonder how many vacationers in Florida this morning are on a fixed income. Every day we play the part of the rich young ruler. We have limits on what we will sacrifice for God. How much are you willing to sacrifice for God? Abraham was willing to sacrifice the most valuable thing in his life, his son, Isaac. Put yourself in the story. Would you be willing to sacrifice a loved one for God? I hope he never asks me to sacrifice someone I love. If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

The topic is authentic Christianity. James says our good words are not enough. James says our good deeds are not enough. Authentic Christianity requires both, good words and good deeds. What you are willing to sacrifice to God says a great deal about your faith.

In verse 14 James says, it clearly, "*what good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?*" The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 12:1 : "*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.*" How much are you willing to sacrifice for God?

In the winter of 1943, the SS Dorchester was the temporary home of 904 soldiers and four chaplains. World War II was in full bloom. The Dorchester was crossing the North Atlantic. Those were dangerous waters because they were filled with German U-boats. At 12:00 on the morning of February 3, a German torpedo ripped into the ship. Everyone knew it was only a matter of time before the Dorchester would sink. Each one grabbed their life jacket. A young GI crept up to one of the chaplains. "I've lost my life jacket," he said. "Take this," the chaplain said, handing the soldier his jacket. Before the ship sank, each chaplain gave his life jacket to another man. The heroic chaplains then linked arms and lifted their voices in prayer as the Dorchester went down. Each one of the chaplains died. For their sacrifice, they were awarded posthumously the Distinguished Service Cross. I challenge you to tell me that both words and deeds don't matter. It is a true sign of authentic Christianity. How much are you willing to sacrifice for God?

Will you pray with me?