

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **JAMES LESSON 2** **(Chapter 2)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. This is the second lesson in our study of the Book of James. In this lesson we are going to be looking at wrong ways of salvation. The Bible talks extensively about false doctrine and false teaching. In fact, 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 4 talk about false teachers. Because of false teachers, there will be a lot of false teaching. And because of false teaching, there are a lot of people who believe they are saved. There are many people who believe that they have obtained salvation, but sadly they are going about it in the wrong way. They have not obtained salvation in the manner in which the Bible says we must obtain salvation. We are going to be looking at some of these wrong ways. Then, at the end of the lesson we will be looking at the only right way to be saved. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said that there is only one road that leads to Heaven. People will tell you that there are many paths or roads that lead to Heaven, and that they all end up at the same place. But Jesus did not say that. He said that there is one road, that that road is very narrow, and that there will be few who find it. I want you to really pay attention in this lesson so that you can make sure that you have not been involved in a wrong way of salvation.

In James 2:14 James asked, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" The idea of "faith only" is one of the most popular false views about how to gain salvation. Sadly, this doctrine has led to many other false beliefs. I want us to first look at this false doctrine, this wrong way of salvation, called "faith only." "Faith only" is the view which states that if you want to be saved, if you want to have salvation, and if you want to become a Christian, all you have to do is believe. If you have some sort of mental belief in God, and you say that you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and you believe that, that's all you have to do. The Bible teaches otherwise. The Bible says that is not all you have to do. In James 2:24 notices what James says about faith only. James wrote, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Read that again. "A man is justified by works, and **not** by faith only." The only time that the words "faith" and "only" are found together in the Bible is when James says that faith only is **not** how a man is justified. There is no way we can say that a person can be justified **only** by faith. Why? Because the Bible says that one is **not** justified only by faith. In James 1:21-25 James talked about how it is the implanted Word that saves us, and that we must receive it with meekness. He talks about the perfect law of liberty. Sometimes people treat the Bible like a book that they read and study in order to know what to do to be saved, yet they then walk away and never do it. James compared this to a man who observed his face in a mirror. Maybe he saw something that he needed to fix on his face, but instead of fixing it he goes along and never changes anything. James says that's the same thing as if we go to the Bible and say, "I know what the Bible has to say. I know what's in it, and I know it's true. I know it's inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And I believe all of that." But if that's **all** a person does, the Bible says that such "faith only" is not enough. That is not a right way of salvation, but is a wrong way.

In Ezekiel 33:30-33 we find the same idea of people who hear what's going on, but who are not willing to do what is right.

"As for you, son of man, the children of your people are talking about you beside the walls and in the doors of the houses; and they speak to one another, everyone saying to his brother, 'Please come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord.'"

The Bible says that there are a lot of people who are talking about it and who believe it. They are excited, and are talking to everyone about it, saying, "Let's go and hear what the Word of God has to say." Verses 31 through 33 go on say,

"So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. And when this comes to pass—surely it will come—then they will know that a prophet has been among them."

What was the problem? There were a lot of people who were talking. They were inviting everyone to hear God's Word. They would come, sit down, and listen to the Word being taught. They would receive the Word. But they would not **do** what the Word had to say. This is an Old Testament case of "faith-only" salvation being condemned. Some people today are happy because they say, "We have so many people coming to church. We have hundreds or thousands of people here." Today we have mega-denominations where there are literally thirty, forty, or fifty thousand people in stadiums. They preach, and they have lots of people. But they are there only to pursue their own gain. They are not there to pursue what the Word of God has to say. They are not there to do what the Bible says. They are there to hear it—and then go out and do whatever they want to. "Faith only" is a doctrine that is contrary to the Bible, and we need to stay far away from it.

In James 2:19 we read, "Even the demons believe and tremble." Satan himself believes that Jesus is the Son of God. Did you know that? Satan believes that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact, he believes it so much that he tried to stop it. That is why he has done everything in the past to try to stop it, which he couldn't. Now he is trying to persuade people in other ways. Satan himself believes that Jesus is the Son of God. That's faith—but it is "faith only." If we claim that all we do is believe, we are no different than Satan. We are not different than the demons. In James 2:20-23 James goes on to talk further about this point. He says,

"But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?"

How was faith made perfect? By works. "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God." It was not until after Abraham had obeyed that it "was accounted to him for righteousness." I want us to now look at Genesis 22:1-14. Notice Abraham's obedient faith—his works. He had such a strong faith that it led to obedience, not just faith alone. "Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.'" Abraham was there, and he was ready to do what God said and to be obedient. "Then God said, 'Take now 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.'" Abraham had been waiting to have a son. He waited for years and years and years. Finally he has a son. Then the Lord said, "I want you to go up to the mountain that I will show you, and I want you to offer your son Isaac

as an offering.” Did Abraham say, “I believe it and I have faith in you, but I’m not willing to do that”? No. He was willing to do what God said. “So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him” (verse 3). How many questions did Abraham ask God when God told him to do this? Did Abraham say, “God, I don’t want to do that; that’s taking it too far; I don’t know if I have enough faith to do that”? He didn’t ask a single question. He did exactly what God commanded him to do. We read that he went and did what God had told him to do. He starts to sacrifice his son Isaac, but right before he sacrifices him the Bible says in Genesis 22:9, “So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.” Abraham had been fully obedient to God. Then it goes on to say,

“And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me’” (verses 10-13).

Does that sound like “faith only”? Does it sound like Abraham “simply believed” and was OK? No. It was because he was willing to be obedient to God. In Hebrews 11 we find that Abraham already had it in his mind that he was going to follow through with the action, but the angel of the Lord stopped him. He was going to sacrifice his son. He was going to be obedient. Why? Because he loved God that much. In James 2:23 it says that Abraham was “the friend of God.” In John 15:14 Jesus said, “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” I was driving down the road one day and saw a billboard that said, “You are My friend. (signed) Jesus” (John 15:14). What’s the sad part about that? They left out the last part of what Jesus said: “You are My friends **if** you do whatever I command you.” It’s no wonder that Abraham was called the friend of God—because he did exactly what God had commanded him to do. James 2:26 says, “Faith without works is dead.” So, the first wrong way of salvation is “faith only.”

The next wrong way to determine how a person gets to Heaven is the idea of “I’ll just follow the majority.” In Exodus 23:2 the Bible says, “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice.” What does that verse say? It says, “Do **not** follow a crowd to do evil.” Many people today say, “I know I’m saved and that I’m going to Heaven because everyone else is doing the same thing I’m doing. I’m just following the majority. If the majority is doing it, that’s what I’m going to do.” The Bible says that we must not follow the majority. In fact, God people have always been in the minority, and have never been in the majority. Luke 9:17-20 says,

“So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them. And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” So they answered and said, ‘John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said, ‘The Christ of God.’”

Peter was in the minority because not many people believed that Christ was the Son of God. The majority was saying the wrong thing. We can never rely on the majority to tell us how to get to Heaven. In 1 Peter 3:20 Peter refers back to the ark during the days of the Flood, and notes that only a few were saved at that time. Noah had preached more than a hundred years, trying to warn people of the destruction that was to come to the Earth. But what happened? Only a few were obedient. Only Noah and his family were

saved. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us that only a few are going to go to Heaven. One way of looking at how **not** to have salvation is to make sure to ask, "Am I one of the few doing this?" If the world thinks and does something, more than likely it's not right. In Matthew 9:37 Jesus said, "Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.'" According to Revelation 3:4, many people in one of the Lord's congregations had already fallen away (Gal. 5:4). But Jesus said that there were "a few" in Sardis who were still faithful. How many? Only a few. Even among God's people there were only a few who had remained true to God's Word. We cannot adhere to the idea that says, "Everyone else says it's OK, and everyone else is doing it, so that's the way I'm going to go." That is the wrong way of salvation.

Another wrong way of salvation is the idea, "I 'think' I'm OK." Why does a person view himself as "OK"? It is because he "thinks" he is. What we think doesn't always mean that we agree with the Bible. In 2 Kings 5 we read of Naaman, who had leprosy. He thought that he was going to go to Elisha, who then would come out his house, wave his hands over Naaman's leprosy, and the leprosy would disappear. But instead Elisha told Naaman that he had to go and dip in the River Jordan seven times. That was when Naaman said, "I thought..." There are a lot of people who "think" they are OK. But just like Naaman, just because they "think" they are OK does not mean that they are. Naaman was wrong because he thought something different than what God had told him. In Acts 8 we see how Simon "thought" that the gift of God could be purchased. But just because he thought something did not mean that it was true. People say, "I 'think' I'm saved." But how does a person **know** that he is saved? He must go to the Bible. Simply saying, "I 'think' I'm saved," does not mean that a person **is** saved. That's a wrong way of salvation.

Another popular way of salvation has to do with "the sinner's prayer." This is the belief that under the New Testament, if a person wants to become a Christian, all that person has to do is "say the sinner's prayer" and he will receive salvation and go to Heaven. Did you know that there is no such thing as a "sinner's prayer" in the Bible when it comes to an alien sinner who is outside of Christ receiving salvation? I have talked with several people who said that they were saved by reciting the sinner's prayer. I asked them, "Where is that found in the Bible?" They said, "It's not. My preacher told me what to say." I said, "Shouldn't you be relying, not on your preacher, but on what the Bible has to say?" I want to challenge you: If you think that you have been saved through the sinner's prayer, where is it found in the Bible? Was it your preacher who told you to say a sinner's prayer? Was it your family who said, "Just recite this prayer and you'll be OK because Christ will come into your heart"? The Bible never says that. Such a concept is nowhere found in the Word of God. But we do find the exact opposite. In Isaiah 59:1-2 we read,

"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

It is not that God cannot hear a person, since He is all-powerful. But if you are separated from Him, the way to obtain salvation is not to pray for salvation. The Bible does not say that we are to pray for salvation. The Bible says the exact opposite. We need to make sure that we are not following the view of the sinner's prayer. In Proverbs 28:9 we read, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." When people claim that all they have to do under the New Law to receive salvation, that is an abomination to God. In such instances, people are not willing to seek God's law, but instead are seeking what men have to say (such as the sinner's prayer, which is not found in the Word of God). In Psalm 66:18 we read, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear." We cannot receive salvation by praying for it. That is a wrong way of salvation.

Another wrong way of salvation is trying to buy your way into Heaven. Heaven is one of the few places where people who have money will not be able to buy their way into it. Perhaps you've seen celebrities who get away with just about anything because they can buy their way into or out of things. Maybe one of them got a ticket for drunk driving. All they have to do is pay people off so that their reputation isn't harmed. Or, perhaps a celebrity carried out a terrible crime and was going to go to jail for it. Instead, he buys his way out of it. Or perhaps there is someplace a celebrity really wants to go, but does not have a right to be there. So, he pulls out his checkbook and writes a check. When it comes to jobs, some people buy their way into them. People think that if they have money, they can do anything. But when it comes to Heaven, it does not matter how rich you may be physically. It only matters how rich you are spiritually. We cannot buy salvation. We cannot buy our way into Heaven. In Acts 8:20 when Simon wanted to buy with money the gift of God, Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" There are many people today who think that the gift of God can be bought. Even preachers today say, "All you have to do is send \$500. If you do that, you will be saved and will go to Heaven." We here at The Gospel of Christ will never ask you to send us money. We will not tell you, "You are not a Christian, so send us some money and you will be saved." The Bible does not teach that. You might see some programs that say, "All you have to do is send us a check for \$100 and you will be saved." You will never hear me say that because that is not what the Bible says. We are not after your money. Rather, we want to tell you what the Bible has to say in order to save your soul. After you die, it is too late for someone to "buy you out of" torment. In 1 Corinthians 5:10 and Luke 16:26 we are told that once we die we will be either rewarded or punished for the things we've done in the flesh. It is not a matter of someone dying and us saying, "Well, that person died in a lost state, so I'll pay someone who can pray for him and save his soul." That is not what the Bible teaches. Luke 16:26 says that a great gulf separates the righteous from the unrighteous. We cannot buy our way into Heaven. That is a wrong way of salvation.

Another wrong way of salvation is the idea which suggests that if a person is ignorant, then he will be saved. Some people seem to think that they will gain salvation through ignorance. Even under the Old Law this idea was not true. In Leviticus 5:15 we learn that sacrifices had to be made even for "ignorant sins." People were held accountable for sins that they had committed in ignorance. That concept, in fact, is found throughout the Book of Leviticus. Sacrifices had to be made even when someone had sinned unintentionally. Acts 17:30 (under the New Law) tells us that there was some ignorance that God once overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent in order to be saved. If "all men everywhere" are to repent, who does that leave out? No one. It includes everyone. The idea which suggests that the more ignorant a person is, the better chance he has to go to Heaven, is not found in the Bible. Being ignorant is not a way to receive salvation.

But what about someone who is a good, moral person? Can a person go to Heaven simply because he or she is "a good, moral person"? Suppose someone doesn't cheat on his spouse, murder, or steal. He's a "good" person—a good father, a good grandfather, etc. Everyone knows him as a good person. But being "a good person" will not get us into Heaven. Mark 10:17-22 tells us the story of the rich younger ruler. He was a "good person" who asked, "What must I do to go to Heaven?" Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." Jesus then named off four or five, and the ruler said, "I've done those things from my youth." So Jesus said, "There is only one thing you lack. You have riches that are coming between you and God. Because of that, you have to repent." He was "a good, moral person," but he was lost. There will be a lot of "good, moral people" in Hell because they did not do what the Bible has to say. In Matthew 7:21 we read, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,'

shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Just being a "good, moral person" does not mean that someone will obtain salvation. We must be good, moral people. But that by itself is not enough. We also must do the will of God.

Another wrong way of salvation is the idea that says, "I've always done it that way." In Mark 7:9 Jesus condemns traditions just for the sake of traditions. Just because we've always done something a certain way does not mean that it is right. In Acts 26:27-28 we read where King Agrippa told Paul, "Almost you persuade me to become a Christian." People sometimes believe that because they've "always done it that way," that's the way to salvation. But the Bible condemns that outlook, which is a wrong way to salvation.

In this lesson we have looked at several wrong ways to salvation. Maybe you have been thinking the entire time that you are saved when, in reality, you realize today, according to the Scriptures, that you are not saved because the Scriptures teach against the way you thought you were saved. What, then, is the **right** way of salvation? Salvation comes only through Christ. John 14:6 says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 3:16 tells us that Christ died and shed His blood so that we could come in contact with that blood and have our sins washed away. What was the whole point of Jesus dying on the cross? It was so that we could receive that blood. We needed that blood in order to have our sins washed away. Revelation 5:9 and Ephesians 1:7 speak of how we must come in contact with Christ's blood because without doing so, we cannot have forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:14 says, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." We can have forgiveness and redemption only through the blood of Jesus. How do we receive that blood? We must hear what the Bible has to say. We must believe in Christ as God's Son. We must repent of our past sins. We must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (and not by some sort of "sinner's prayer"). Then we must come in contact with the blood of Christ if we want salvation. How do we do that? Revelation 1:5 says that Christians are "washed in the blood." How are we washed in the blood? We are washed in the blood by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of sins. Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:21, and Romans 6:3-4 all teach that this is how we come in contact with the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the only right way of salvation. If you have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ, we pray that you will obey it today.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 2 (CHAPTER 2)

1. What did Jesus say in Matthew 7:13-14?
2. What two important questions (related to salvation) did James ask in James 2:14?
3. What does James 2:24 have to say about “faith-only” salvation?
4. What did James say in James 1:22?
5. In the first part of Ezekiel 33:31, what did the prophet say was happening amidst the Israelites?
6. In the second part of Ezekiel 33:31, what did the prophet say was happening amidst the Israelites?
7. If “faith-only salvation” is correct, what would that mean in light of James 2:19?
8. According to James 2:22, what is it that, combined with faith, makes faith “perfect”?
9. What principle is found in Exodus 23:2 that applies to us today?
10. What did Jesus say in John 15:14?
11. Please give the book, chapter, and verse in the Bible where “the sinner’s prayer” (that is, a prayer that leads to salvation for an alien sinner) is found.
12. What impact does Isaiah 59:1-2 have on the idea of an alien sinner praying to God for salvation?
13. What impact does Psalm 66:18 have on the idea of an alien sinner praying to God for salvation?
14. What does Acts 17:30 say about ignorance as it relates to a person’s salvation?
15. What important point did Jesus make in Matthew 7:21?
16. According to Luke 16:26, in the Hadean realm what separates the righteous from the unrighteous?
17. In Acts 26:28 what did King Agrippa say to Paul after hearing the apostle speak about the Gospel of Christ?
18. What terrible mistake did King Agrippa make when he said what he did to Paul in Acts 26:28?
19. In Mark 7:9, what did Jesus condemn?
20. According to the Bible, what must a person do to be saved from his or her sins?