

JAMES 2:20-26

USELESS FAITH

“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”¹

Faith is vital to religious practise. Every religious group urges adherents to “have faith.” Some urge faith in the denomination or the religious group itself. Some urge faith in the words of the spokesmen of the group. Others urge faith in what is done. Still others, especially in recent years among some self-described evangelicals, urge faith in faith. The Word of God calls us to faith in the Living Son of God; and if we indeed possess such faith, it will be evident through how we live.

James informs us that faith is vital. One must believe Christ Jesus the Lord. However, believing Christ leads us to believe the truths that He has presented. Believing Him, we also believe the truths that He taught, and thus we arrange our life to align with those timeless truths. As we have seen in recent studies, faith is useless if the life of the one claiming to believe remains unchanged. It will be beneficial for us to review such useless faith, learning what should be evident as we live out the Faith of Christ the Lord.

THE PRINCIPLE STATED — “Faith apart from works is useless.” This is the principle of the Faith that is too often neglected in contemporary churches. We have redefined success in pursuing the Lord’s work to mean larger crowds at a service, increasing membership, expanded budgets, approval and adulation from the adoring masses—everything except changed lives. However, the Word of God anticipates that those who are born from above will reveal that new condition through daring to live holy lives.

Review in your mind what James has said to this point concerning faith. He began by pointing out that faith is impartial [vv. 1-7]. Real faith receives each individual whom the Lord sends to us—both to be blessed by their presence and to bless them through providing strength and hope as we serve together. In fact, those who are least capable of repaying our ministries are often those who prove to be the greatest blessing to us as individuals and as a congregation.

In that context, James has stressed the need to see that we are responsible to see the Law, not as a series of restrictions to steal our joy, but as a revelation of what is pleasing to the Lord [vv. 8-11]. Therefore, through applying the Law without prejudice—both among ourselves and in the greater society—we honour the Lord, encourage the saints and attract those seeking the truth. This lifestyle reflects, not a slavish adhesion to minutiae that are difficult to remember; rather such lifestyle reveals an understanding of the great mercy we have already received [vv. 12, 13]. Through demonstrating mercy, we may anticipate mercy.

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The unspoken assumption in what James has written is that the Spirit of God is at work in the life of the believer urging her to a holy life. The believer's desire for righteousness arises in great measure because she has received mercy. Indeed, God is "compassionate and merciful" [JAMES 5:11], and those who claim to know Him are expected to demonstrate that same mercy. It is perhaps significant that one of the Names Paul gives to the Lord God is "the Father of Mercy" [2 CORINTHIANS 1:3].

We should anticipate that the redeemed child of God will increasingly express the character of the Father, and that character is distinguished by mercy. This is the reason for the beatitude, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" [MATTHEW 5:7]. This is the reason that the Master needed to remind the Pharisees of the divine assertion recorded by Hosea, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" [MATTHEW 9:13]. A failure to show mercy invites divine judgement [see MATTHEW 18:33-35]. Indeed, the child of God has received the divine command, "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" [LUKE 6:36].

James has also stressed that the mercy, growing out of faith as it does, will be applied across the spectrum of humanity, but especially will it be applied to caring for the needs of the saints [vv. 14-17]. The individual possessing genuine faith understands that God blesses so that in turn he may prove to be a blessing to others. The individual who walks by faith sees his possessions, to say nothing of the spiritual gifts which God has given him, as a stewardship. Thus, the believer who understands the divine work God has performed is concerned to ensure that the needy among the assembly are cared for.

Because this truth has been seriously distorted through the lens of modernity, I must take a moment to address an issue of significance. There persists the assumption that the people of God are responsible first to care for the needy of society at large. The biblical principle is that our first responsibility is to the congregation wherein God has placed us, and then to the broader community of faith, and only in tertiary fashion are we to be concerned for the broader society. James uses the example of "a brother or sister" who is in need [JAMES 2:15, 16]; he does not speak merely of a person. Jesus will hold those who live through the Tribulation period accountable for how they minister to His brothers [MATTHEW 25:40]. Though there are multiple examples of the apostolic Christians responding to disaster [e.g. ACTS 11:28-30; 24:17; ROMANS 15:26], in each instance the response is to relieve the immediate need of fellow believers. There are no examples of the church sending money to relieve need within a populace at large.

The first responsibility for benevolence among the people of God is to the brotherhood of believers. When we have cared for our own people, and when we have shown compassion to fellow Christians in need, then with what is left over we should be compassionate toward the greater world about us. Liberal Christianity has cheapened the message of the Word by attempting to find an easy way to fulfil the law of love. They taught that if we would do acts of mercy—essentially giving money for benevolent causes—that was all that was required as God's holy people. However, the Word of God calls us to get our hands dirty with those we know and love. Consequently, if we have no needy people among us and if there are no needy people among the faithful, then we should be reaching out to win those needy people about us to faith. Then, having brought them to the knowledge of Christ the Lord, we can minister to them as James is teaching in this chapter.

Before we arrived at this portion of the letter we are considering today, James pointedly confronted individuals who say that we cannot judge their belief by the life they live [vv. 18, 19]. James, however, turns the tables by pointing out that the demons believe God is one; but their belief is of no consequence. Thus, faith apart from works is useless.

Earlier, James stated that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” [v. 17]. James now says that faith apart from works is useless. The principle is that faith must have an impact on the conduct of our lives. Practically speaking, faith that fails to transform is of no value in the sight of God, and certainly such faith of no value before the watching world. The problem for many people is that they contrast what James says in this passage with what Paul has said in his writings, and they conclude that these represent opposing views.

Paul said, “If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God” [ROMANS 4:2]. In the Letter to the Churches of Galatia, the Apostle wrote, “We know that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ” [GALATIANS 2:16]. On the surface, these verses appear to be at odds with James when he writes, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar” [v. 21]? When James weighs the life of Rahab, he contends, “Was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way” [v. 25]? It is the bold contention of v. 24, however, that truly appears to be utterly contrary to Paul. There, James writes, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

Consider the context. An old saying reminds the child of God that any text out of context is pretext. Thus, context is vital. Paul is speaking of salvation when he uses the example of Abraham’s faith in ROMANS 4. His contention was that Abraham would have nothing of which to boast concerning salvation, for he was not justified before God by what he did. Likewise, in Galatians, and more particularly in the portion of Galatians cited, Paul is again speaking of salvation. He strongly presents the truth that an individual is justified through faith in Jesus Christ. Before God, we have our righteous standing because of faith in Jesus the Son of God.

James, on the other hand, is focused on the life of one who claims to be justified before God without being transformed. Whereas Paul is speaking of the means of justification, James is focused on the evidence of justification as seen by impartial observers. The brother of our Lord contends that it is an impossibility to be saved if the life does not reflect the reality of salvation. One does not work in order to be saved; but those who are saved will work. The evidence of salvation is the life one lives out before the watching world. Profession without possession is meaningless. Rather than being in conflict, James and Paul are in concert in this instance.

THE PRINCIPLE ILLUSTRATED — “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

To illustrate the point that saved people are transformed people, James reaches back into Old Testament history. He presents two individuals, either of whom made a great sacrifice as evidence that they had made a decision to follow the Lord. He reaches back to Abraham, a name that would have been immediately recognised by any observant Jew, and certainly would have been readily known to his readers. He also names Rahab the prostitute. Though she may have been less readily recognised by some individuals, he was likely confident that his readers would be familiar with the account of her brief moment in the history of the Faith. She was, after all, in the lineage of the Messiah [MATTHEW 1:5].

We who hold to this most holy Faith need to ensure that we are familiar with these two stalwarts of the Faith. The accounts of Abraham and Rahab are found in the early pages of the history of Israel, and they also appear in the catalogue of heroes of the Faith named by the author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians. Listen to a portion of that great faith chapter in Hebrews. “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore” [HEBREWS 11:8-12].

God’s call to Abram is recorded in **GENESIS 12:1-9**, which is the event referred to in the passage read from Hebrews. When called by God, Abram obeyed. Faith propels the believer to obedience. Despite many trials and disappointments, Abram continued to walk with God. Though he had no children, yet God promised, “Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I will give it to you” [GENESIS 13:14-17].

Though no children were born to Abram, yet God’s promise stood. Abram’s faith was not perfect; he questioned God. God is big enough to withstand our fears and our doubts, and He received Abram’s questions and repeatedly assured him that all that was promised would be fulfilled in God’s time. “The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.’ But Abram said, ‘O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” Then follows one of the seminal verses of the entire Bible: Abram “believed the LORD, and [God] counted it to [Abram] as righteousness” [GENESIS 15:1-6].

“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” [ROMANS 4:3], as Paul observes and as James also observes in our text. However, the chapters that follow make it obvious that Abram’s faith was no mere acknowledgement that God was right. And that is James’ point. Faith that fails to energise us to obey is no faith at all. Faith that is mere acknowledgement of God’s veracity is useless. There is no practical purpose in agreeing with God if that agreement fails to change the one who believes.

Abram was transformed by his faith and he acted on what he had believed. The divine promise of a son was iterated, as was the promise that his descendants would inherit the land to which God had brought him. Despite missteps and times of weak faith, Abram persisted in following God. At eighty-six, he succumbed to Sarai’s attempt to “fix” God’s delay with the result that Ishmael was born to Hagar [GENESIS 16:16]. Despite the evident weakness in his faith, Abram followed God, receiving the covenant of circumcision when he was ninety-nine years old [GENESIS 17:9-14], and God again promised that Sarah would bear a son whom Abraham was to name Isaac [GENESIS 17:16-19].

At last the day came when Isaac was born, just as God had promised [see GENESIS 21:1-7]. Abraham had followed God for years without any evidence that God would fulfil His promise. Yet, God did do what He promised. James compels us to look at Abraham as an example of one who reveals the reality of his faith through a life of obedience. In fact, had Abraham simply continued his life in Ur of the Chaldeans without acting on God's command, we would never have heard his name and he would have accomplished nothing for the cause of the Faith. Only when he obeyed God do we witness his faith. Moreover, it was the obedience to God's command that demonstrated that his faith was genuine and not a sham.

The author of the Hebrews Letter again looks at Abraham, giving an example of his faith. The incident recorded there is an iteration of the account to which James points to demonstrate the impact of genuine faith in Abraham's life. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back" [HEBREWS 11:17-19].

God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son. Having waited decades for God to fulfil his promise, we can only imagine the difficulty in obeying this command. Nevertheless, Abraham was obedient to the call of God [see GENESIS 22:1-19]. Arriving at the place designated for the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham was questioned about the absence of a sacrificial lamb. His answer demonstrates his faith, referred to in VERSE NINETEEN of the account in Hebrews. Abraham answered Isaac, saying, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" [GENESIS 22:8]. Indeed, the Angel of the LORD restrained Abraham and provided a ram for the burnt offering. What is vital to our understanding is that Abraham was obedience; it was his obedience to God's command that revealed his faith.

As result of Abraham's obedience, God again announced His blessing on this man of faith. "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice" [GENESIS 22:16-18]. God pointed to Abraham's enduring obedience over the course of his life. "*Because you have done this* ... I will surely bless you... [I]n your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, *because you have obeyed My voice*." Obedience to God reveals the quality of faith; and saving faith produces works.

Both James and the author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians also take note of Rahab. "By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies" [HEBREWS 11:31]. Perhaps you would be tempted to consider this woman a minor character, but biblical writers saw her as a woman of character.

Before they had crossed over the Jordan, Joshua sent spies into the land. Those spies happened to come to the house of a prostitute living in the city of Jericho. That prostitute, Rahab, secreted the men under stalks of flax drying on her roof. The account makes it apparent that she knew that they would be recognised as foreigners, and especially that they would be recognised as Israelites. The people of Jericho knew that the Israelites had arrived and even then stood ready to invade the land. Moreover, the people of Jericho were fearful of the Hebrews because they had heard how they had conquered the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, seizing their land for themselves. When the spies presented themselves, Rahab saw this as an opportunity to reveal her nascent faith.

Having sent away the men dispatched by the King of Jericho to seize the spies, Rahab came up to the roof and spoke to the Israelite spies. “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.’ And the men said to her, ‘Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.’

“Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. And she said to them, ‘Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.’ The men said to her, ‘We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father’s household. Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.’ And she said, ‘According to your words, so be it.’ Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window” [JOSHUA 2:9-21].

Notice that her faith had begun to take root when she says, “I know that the LORD has given you the land.” Her recitation of the fear of the people made it evident that all Jericho knew that the LORD had given Israel the land. The difference between Rahab and the remainder of the inhabitants of the city is that her faith compelled her to take a stand with the Lord’s people.

To be certain, her pedigree was not sterling; she was a prostitute. Some commentators, especially in an earlier day, tried to soften her past by referring to her as an “inn keeper.” However, the Hebrew is precise and she is presented without apology as a prostitute. If ever an individual’s past disqualified her from being blessed by God, or from being held up as an example of righteousness, it was Rahab. However, she is held up as an example of one who had faith; and moreover, her faith is seen as an example to be emulated because it impelled her to act, aligning herself with the people of God and following hard after the Lord. Had Rahab simply believed, without acting on her belief, we would never have heard of her. She would have been killed along with all the inhabitants of Jericho.

The reason Rahab is presented as an example of a woman possessing genuine faith is that she decisively took a stand with God’s people when opportunity was given to do so. She not only aligned herself with Israel by hiding the spies, but she also extracted the promise that she and her family would be spared harm when the city was delivered into the hand of Israel. You may be certain that as the day of attack neared, she was careful to affix a scarlet cord in the window of her home that looked out over the wall of the city. As Israel marched around the city for six days, she could not have known the precise details of what they were doing, but she nevertheless was careful to keep her family with her in the house as she awaited deliverance.

Her faith, had she not acted on it, would have been useless before the armies of the Lord. Only as she acted upon it and as she openly allied herself with God's people was her faith useful. James uses this illustration to demonstrate that mere profession without possession is useless. In fact, at another point he has said such faith is dead [JAMES 2:17]. Faith that is alive is active and vibrant, impelling the possessor to act upon what is known to be true.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED — “As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” James iterates what he has said previously [see JAMES 2:17, 20], having bolstered his argument with the two examples we have just explored. Death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Similarly, faith that fails to produce works is dead. There is no life in such faith. Take careful note that James speaks of works (plural) and not of work (singular). His example of Abraham, especially, has stressed a lifetime of works rather than some specific action. Salvation does not depend upon a work, but salvation produces works.

James insists that saving faith is practical faith. When he speaks of faith that is useless, he implicitly suggests that sometimes what is called faith is impractical. It seems apparent that this practical faith is also living faith, for faith that fails to transform is said to be dead. Therefore, the faith that results in life before God is living faith. The faith that we are able to witness is practical faith. It is this practical faith that the Word urges upon the people of God.

At the risk of sounding pedantic, I must stress that I do urge each person listening to or reading this message to ensure that he or she believes the message of life. However, I am equally adamant in insisting that if your faith has not changed you, you need to change your faith. If your Christian Faith consists of seeking what is “fun” or “convenient” with no regard to service, there is a problem with what you have believed. If the only gift you claim to possess is warming a pew, you need to check what you have believed. Many professing Christians will claim to have believed; God alone is judge of whether they have believed with the result that they have received the forgiveness of sin and the new birth into eternal life. However, it is greatly to be feared that there are a host of lost people within professing Christendom today, if the evidence for salvation is how they live.

James is looking for living faith among those to whom he is writing. He is seeking practical faith for the sake of the Saviour and for the sake of those who are yet unsaved. Therefore, we, also, must encourage practical faith among the people of God; we must encourage one another to serve Christ, seeking His will and doing what pleases Him, as together we build this Body. If our faith is not practical, then we need to know that it is useless.

Practical faith results in obedience. There is a myth that has insinuated itself among our churches despite the Word of God. This myth states that salvation consists of believing Jesus; but there is no transformation envisioned as the Spirit works in the life of the individual, no obedience is expected of the one believing, nothing changes—except that the one believing now has a fire insurance policy exempted him from judgement. This myth teaches that agreement with a set of doctrinal positions saves.

Anyone who has followed my ministry knows that I believe strongly in sound doctrine. However, it is possible to be as straight as a gun barrel theologically, and just as empty. Many people profess to believe correct doctrine, and may even become quite exercised at what they consider to be deviation from sound doctrine. Yet, the faith professed makes no practical difference in their life, and in fact, they can become decidedly eclectic concerning which doctrines they will hold dear. However, saving faith impels the child of God constantly to ask how what is believed honours the Lord, and they seek to know His will and to do that will.

To be certain, in order to be born from above, a lost individual needs but to believe that Jesus died because of his or her sin and that He was raised for justification of the one believing. However, having been born again, faith will be revealed as genuine and alive through how the one believing responds to the commands of God.

Does Christ call us to identify with Him openly? The believing child of God will seek to identify with the Master. Frankly, I have serious doubts about the individual who claims salvation but wants nothing to do with God's people and refuses to obey the command to be baptised. Does Christ call us to be righteous? The believing child of God will make every effort to walk in the same way in which the Lord walked. Does Christ call us to live a life of love? The believing child of God will work to love from the heart the brotherhood of believers. Practical faith results in obedience to the Master. This is but a restatement of John's teaching.

"Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother" [1 JOHN 3:4-10].

Practical faith is expressed through action. Closely allied to the thought of obedience as an expression of faith is the concept that faith is active. Saving faith is not passive—it is vibrant and active, if it is real. It is not that the child of God struggles to do those works that honour the Father; the child of God wants to be engaged in the Master's work. Jesus promised that the water He would give "will become in [the one believing] a spring of water welling up to eternal life" [JOHN 4:14]. The believing child of God cannot help but do good works.

How many people profess to have believed at some point in the past, and yet are unable to point to any significant transformation in their life since their believed! They have few thoughts concerning how to please the Lord; their thoughts are almost totally consumed on their own interests. Should we agree that such people are likely saved? Should we look to such people for leadership in the realm of the Spirit? To do so will only lead the Body of Christ further from a life pleasing to the Master. To continue to promote self-serving individuals as godly examples only entrenches Diotrephes [see 3 JOHN 9-11], Alexander [see 2 TIMOTHY 2:14] and Hymenaeus [see 1 TIMOTHY 1:20] as powerbrokers among the people of God, enervating God's holy people and rendering the congregation ineffective in her labours.

There is need to encourage one another to excel in service to the fellowship of believers and in service before the Lord. There is need to hold one another accountable to be the church rather than being content to be a people known for going to church. There is need to seek vibrant, scintillating faith within the life of each member of the Body. This faith begins with a call to believe the message of life.

Christ died because of our sin, and was raised for our justification. Therefore, the Word of God calls us to believe this message, committing ourselves to Him as Master over each life. We are called to "confess with [our] mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' believing in [our] heart that God has raised Him from the dead." We do this because we know that it is "with the heart one believes, resulting in justification, and with the mouth that one confesses, resulting in salvation."

The Word concludes with this call to each individual willing to receive this life of which we speak: “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13**]. And that is my prayer for you. Have you believed this message? Is the evidence of salvation more and more evident in your life? If not, take time now to seek the Lord that you may have the forgiveness of sin and so that you will receive the life that He promises. Amen.