

A man walks into the doctor and says, “Doc, I got a problem, I’ve been tripping, running into things, and stubbing my toe on all sorts of stuff.” The doctor thought this was curious, as most of his patients who struggled with balance and motion were older, this man couldn’t have been older than 40! The doctor investigated, asking, “When primarily does this happen?”

The man replied, “At night, I’ll be walking through the living room on the way to the kitchen and I’ll trip over an ottoman. I’ll walk through the hall on the way to the bathroom and hit my head on an open door. I’ll go through the playroom and step on a Lego.”

The doctor proceeded cautiously, “This may be a dumb question, but do you turn on the lights in the middle of the night?”

The man responded indignant, “Doc, do you have any idea what it’s like to live in a household with five kids? My place is a mess! Why would I turn on the lights, I don’t want to have to look at that pigsty any minute longer than I have to!”

We are about to embark on a four-week sermon series on the Epistle of James, and perhaps if you know something about this letter of the Bible, you can feel that same caution and nervousness that the doctor felt approaching the man about his falling problem.

James writes, “**So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**” Therein lies the issue, we as Lutheran Christians proclaim that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone, and so this passage seems to contradict that teaching.

Let’s back up a few steps, what we’re going to learn today is **THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US FAITH TO LIVE WITHIN THE LAW**. What we first need to understand is I. We are born in the dark about God's law.

What James has an overwhelming concern about in his letter is being able to walk the walk, and not just talk the talk. In chapter 1 he writes, “**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**” He wants Christians who live upright and moral lives. And the point is that there isn’t just my morality and your morality, there is just morality.

Navigating these right and wrong decisions is like walking through your living room. And the thing about your living room is that it has a definite shape and layout. There is a couch in the corner, an ottoman by the recliner, and a coffee table in the middle.

God has given mankind a limited ability to know the general outline of right and wrong. The law is written on each human’s heart, so even an atheist can do things that are moral. But this is a *limited* ability. It’s like walking through your living room in the middle of the night. Yes, it is your house, so you remember where the furniture is. But all of us can surprise ourselves with how bad we are at walking around in the dark. Maybe you fall flat on your face as you trip over the coffee table.

There is objective morality, but it's like walking through the living room in the dark. Sometimes when people spend so much time in the dark, they start to blame their surroundings. So we have a culture that says things like: "If people weren't so foolish, I wouldn't be so angry." "I'm entitled to sleep with any consenting adult without consequences." "My business ethic is simply whether or not it's legal, and if anybody is exploited in the process that's their fault." We see even Christians say things like this.

This is the whole point of my analogy, if you trip over a coffee table in the dark, is it your fault or the coffee table's? Our sinful human nature wants to blame the coffee table rather than our own carelessness. But God's moral law is fixed in place; the coffee table is nailed to the floor. As long as you keep going that way, you're going to keep on tripping over the table, yet we live in a society that curses the coffee table instead of considering walking around it.

And James writes telling us this needs to stop. He shows us a better way. II. The Holy Spirit enlightens us with saving faith. The Psalmist writes, "**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**" Hearing, reading, and inwardly digesting God's Holy Word serves as an antidote to this Christian hypocrisy. If living a moral life is like walking through your living room, God's Law turns on the lights so you can see where things are. Maybe suddenly you see that the coffee table isn't where you remember it was, or the ottoman was slightly to the left of where it usually is. God's Word of law shows us how things are.

It shows us that we haven't always been walking the walk that we should as Christians. It shows us that we often fail to keep God's Holy Law. It leads us to confess that we often have been the partial ones, the ones fearing the rich and powerful rather than the Lord who is the God of both the rich and the poor. It shows us that we have been the hypocrites, talking the talk, but not walking the walk.

James writes, "**My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.**" As we hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, we can take hope because we know that there was one who was able to navigate the demands of God's law perfectly. Jesus walked through the living room without stubbing his toe, without tripping, or falling. He became poor so that we might become rich. He became the least of all so that we might become great.

And this is the point of James' Epistle, living faith is never just idle knowledge. He later goes on to say, "**You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!**" Demons have faith in God, but it's not saving faith. When we as Christians say that we are saved by faith alone, it doesn't mean there's just going to be a Bible trivia quiz when we stand at the pearly gates.

Saving faith is a living active faith that trusts our Triune God in all things. Saving faith trusts in Jesus as the Savior. Saving faith trusts in God’s Law to be wise, and the right way to live one’s life.

To keep using the living room analogy, when the lights turn on, saving faith believes what the light of God’s Law shows him. Yes, the ottoman is in front of the couch and not the recliner. Yes, somebody left their toys on the floor that you’ll have to walk around. What this means is that God’s Law may show you things in your life that you don’t like to see or hear, but saving faith says, “If that’s how it’s got to be, then so be it.” Saving faith looks to the one who crossed the living room flawlessly and perfectly for us, namely, Jesus Christ.

III. A saving faith strives to walk in good works. All of this comes by the Holy Spirit, who works through the Word of God and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper to create, sustain, and enliven faith. The Holy Spirit is the one who delivers the faith, and He is the one who enables good works.

Thus, we never go alone. The Holy Spirit walks alongside us and guides us through this life. He helps navigate us around the ottoman. He picks us up when we slip on a toy car. He empowers us to live a moral life which can not only say “**Go in peace, be warmed and filled,**” but also give clothing and food to the brothers and sisters who are struggling.

If you’re a college student here today, I think we need to acknowledge that you’ve been transported to a whole new world. There’s a different layout of the college living room, so to speak, and there’s going to be plenty of opportunities to trip and fall. For the first time, you can drink what you want, there’s beautiful young men and women who also want to try new things, and mom isn’t knocking on your door Sunday morning for you to get dressed for Church.

If you remember nothing else from this sermon, remember that the Church is a hospital for sinners. Whether you’re a college student or not—this applies to everybody—the Church is the place to be after you’ve fallen and sinned. It’s a place to receive care from Jesus, the Great Physician of body and soul, and get bandaged up to go back out into the world. Saving faith is not necessarily about sinning less than the person next door, but saving faith means that when you face bumps and bruises, trips and falls, you know the place to receive healing and forgiveness. Church is the place for those navigating across the living room of this life.

James reminds us that “**hold[ing] the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**” means talking the talk and walking the walk. The Holy Spirit shows us that things are never going to be perfect, and even in the brightest of rooms we will still trip and fall, but the point was never to get it perfect this side of heaven. God wants Christians with saving faith who strive to follow their Savior, often fail, ask for forgiveness, and keep on going because that’s the path that leads to eternal life.