



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Faith On Display

James 2.14-26

Introduction

1. A few years ago, my wife and I were in middle Tennessee where I was to teach some lessons on James. She had grown up in the area and while we were in town, we had dinner in the home of a woman Carlynn had known all her life. Upon learning I was teaching James, our hostess said, "Oh, I *love* the book of James." Carlynn replied, "I don't!"
2. Both were right but they were saying different things.
 - a. Our hostess was thinking about how practical and relatively straightforward James is; unlike Romans, for example, James makes no elaborate doctrinal argument.
 - b. Carlynn was thinking of how James gets in your face. He *is* practical—and *convicting*.
3. As we conclude our study of *Faith That Works*, we'll focus on both as we explore the third component of faith seen in 2.14-26 — the action that should follow knowledge and trust.

Body

- I. Two traits of James we need to know.
 - A. A sense of urgency.
 1. James used 54 imperative verbs in 108 verses (1748 words); that works out to one every other verse (and 14.6% of all the verbs in James).
 2. Imperative verbs are not unusual in the New Testament, but James uses them about three times more frequently than the New Testament as a whole.
 3. As one writer said, "James is a 'Do this! Do that!' book . . ." (Hughes, 16).
 - B. We see that in James's emphasis on works and doing.
 - a) The word for "faith" (πίστις; *pistis*) appears sixteen times; "work" (ἔργον; *ergon*) appears fifteen times, and, like *pistis*, most are in 2.14-26 (12 times; see also 1.4, 25; 3.13).
 2. The verb "to do or make" (12) and noun "doer" (4)¹ also appear sixteen times; only once in 2.14-26 (see 2.8, 12, 19; 3.12, 18; 4.13, 15, 17; 5.15 / 1.22-23, 25; 4.11).

¹ The verb is ποιέω; *poiēō*; the noun is ποιητής; *poiētēs*.

II. James's two ways—friend or enemy.

- A. Like the Old Testament and intertestamental Judaism, James emphasized “the two tendencies” that characterize people: evil versus good (cf. 1.14-15; 4.2) (McCartney, 73).²
1. Twice, James warned against being “double-minded” (δίψυχος; *dipsuchos*) (1.8; 4.8).
 2. He warned against compromise with “the world” (κόσμος; *kosmos*) (1.27; 2.5; 3.6; 4.4).
 3. He sharply distinguished between unrighteous anger, moral filth, and prevalent evil and “the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (1.19-21 NIV).
 4. In the context of distinguishing between human wisdom that is “earthly, unspiritual, [and] demonic” and “the wisdom that comes down from above” (3.13-18), he chastised them for quarrels, fights, murder, covetousness, self-centered passions, slander, and being judgmental (4.1-3, 11-12).
- B. To overcome their double-mindedness (4.8), he commanded them to:
1. Submit to God (4.6-7).
 2. Actively resist the devil and draw near to God (4.7-8).
 3. Cleanse their hands, purify their hearts, mourn their sin, and “humble [them]selves before the Lord” (4.8-10).
- C. The key verse—perhaps for the entire letter—is 4.4.
1. Would they be friends with the world?
 - a) If so, like Israel of old, they would be “adulterous people” (see Ezek 16.38; 23.45; Hos 2.13; 9.1; Jer 3; Isa 1.21; 50.1; 54.1-6; 57.3).
 - b) Thus, they would be at “enmity with God” (4.4).
 2. The alternative—a definitive either-or—would be to imitate the faith of Abraham and be “a friend of God” (2.23).
 3. To show which side they were choosing, they would need to activate their profession of faith and demonstrate their trust by taking God at his word (2.14-26).

III. James's appeal: total-life friendship with God.

- A. The friendship to which we are called is all-encompassing.
1. Speech—James confronts our unbridled and unruly tongue, calling it “a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (3.8; cf. 1.19-20, 26; 3.1-12; 4.15-16; 5.12-13).
 2. Resources—James has tough words for the rich and challenges their oppressive, self-absorbed, and neglectful ways (1.9-11, 26-27; 2.1-13; 4.2-4; 5.1-11).
 3. Time—Our schedules are not really ours; all our plans depend on God and should be submitted to his reign (4.13-17).
 4. Endurance—Living by faith is neither a part-time commitment nor a short-term sprint; it entails a call to continue working, be willing to endure trials, and completely surrender to God's wisdom (1.2-4, 12; 3.13-18; 5.7-11).
- B. Since friendship with God will “dynamically affect our lives on every level,” it is a relationship that will never allow us to remain as we are (Hughes, 16).

² For examples in the Old Testament, see Deut 11.26; 30.15; Jer 21.8; Ps 1; and Prov 2.1-4.

Conclusion

1. The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, concerned over the lack of authentic Christian faith in his time, once told a parable about Duckland.

It was Sunday morning, and all the ducks dutifully came to church, waddling through the doors and down the aisle into their pews where they comfortably squatted. When all were well-settled, and the hymns were sung, the duck minister waddled to his pulpit, opened the Duck Bible and read: "Ducks! You have wings, and with wings you can fly like eagles. You can soar into the sky! Use your wings!" It was a marvelous, elevating duck scripture, and thus all the ducks quacked their assent with a hearty "Amen!"—and then they plopped down from their pews and waddled home (Hughes, 115).³

2. James would say that if we really believe we can "fly," we certainly should not be "waddling"! Do you have real faith, or just say you do? Think about that and what your response to Jesus should be.

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Works Cited

R. Kent Hughes. *James: Faith That Works*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991.

Dan G. McCartney. *James*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.

³ Hughes cited the story from Gary Vanderet, *Discovery Papers Number 3989* (May 25, 1986), "The Skill of Genuine Faith."