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A. Introduction

1. Words or Works?

- a. was the title of our last message from James 2:14-17 –
- b. 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.
- c. in those verses, James, in describing this first, unnamed 'someone,' tells of the deadness of a mere verbal blessing of those in need, as though that would be of comfort to a person starving and shivering in the cold; words that are not backed up by action do not work
- d. in like fashion, words claiming faith, that are not backed up by action, simply do not work
- e. now James proceeds with ...

2. An Illustrative Confrontation

- a. of the man claiming faith in those verses now takes place
- b. as James uses a Jewish method of argument, along with well-known Jewish illustrations to show further that faith, to be real, must have a substance that goes beyond mere words and mere intellect
- c. faith must have an inner vitality in a person that goes out from them in the form of actions, and specifically, in works of service both to God and to man by the practising believer

B. Declared Faith. 2:18

1. But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'

- a. James sets out this speech, in the mouth of a second 'someone,' to throw into contrast the two claims of faith
- b. the second 'someone' contrasts himself with the first 'someone,' who claims faith, while the speaker in turn claims works –not that this means he does not have faith:

2. The First Declares Faith by Words

- a. like the person who pronounced a blessing of words upon the needy without lifting a hand to help them
- b. so, the declaration of faith, along with which there are no like actions
- c. this is unproven faith; this is unprovable faith
- d. at the point it is left an open question whether it really exists or not
- e. on the other hand, ...

3. The Second Declares Faith by Works

- a. he can point to concrete results that have emanated from his faith
- b. this is demonstrable faith, because it has fruit
- c. this is a faith that involves him personally, has taken hold of his life
- d. but note that the faith here precedes the works, and is its cause
- e. that is not the case with the unfruitful, non-saving, ...

C. Demon Faith. 2:19

1. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

2. Creedal Faith

- a. 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!' (Deuteronomy 6:4) was the first and great statement of the orthodox among the children of Israel – it became a proud statement of what distinguished them as Jews from the pagan nations all round them
- b. May today will repeat the Apostles creed which begins, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord, ...', and believe that what they are saying is true – but is that statement sufficient to save?
- c. well, Martin Luther had a word to say on the subject: One kind of belief is to believe things about God. He said there are some things we can affirm about God that we can also say about the Turks, the devil, or hell. These are facts: encyclopaedic knowledge. This is belief. Luther then talked about another kind of faith. Not only do we believe in God, but we begin to put our trust in him. We risk our lives on the

truth that there is a God. We even begin to give him our money because we really do believe this business. We surrender to him. We follow him. We believe that he is with us, and nothing can separate us from his love.—{2}.

d. creedal faith can be dead and ...

3. Damning Orthodoxy

- a. is the kind of faith possessed by the angels who fell from heaven along with Satan, commonly called demons in the Bible
- b. but such faith is of no spiritual good to them
- c. rather, it causes them to shudder, a response of fear
- d. the Greek word means 'bristle' and was used in the classics to describe that terror which makes a person's hair 'stand on end' – even though this is applied to immaterial, spiritual beings, it well conveys that fear
- e. when demons met Jesus, they recognized Him, but it did not bring to them peace and salvation: quite the opposite as we see in Luke 4:33-34: 'In the synagogue there was a man possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Let us alone! What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!'
- f. the claiming of an orthodox, mental assent to the truth, can give no assurance of salvation; we could describe such faith as a ...

D. Desert Faith 2:20

- 1. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (or, dead)
- 2. Useless or Dead?
 - a. The last word of that verse can be, as I just read it, either 'useless' or 'dead' and the arguments for both on the evidence of the manuscripts of the Bible are just about equal
 - b. the first, 'useless,' is more in keeping with the verses immediately surrounding this verse, for it literally means, 'unworked'

- (A) originally it was the word that was used to describe a piece of land that had not been worked, that is, ploughed and planted so as to produce crops
- (B) so 'faith without works' in this picture, is a faith that has been left to lie fallow, without producing the crops or fruit intended for it
- c. the second rendering, 'dead', is more in keeping with the more remote context of verses 17 and 26, both of which state that faith without works is dead
 - (A) the picture there is of a faith that has no life, no inner vitality
 - (B) this is the faith, in Christ's parable of the soils, associated with the stony ground, where the seed of the word was received joyfully, and sprung up but then quickly withered because it had no root
- d. whichever version we choose, the picture is pretty much the same: this kind of faith, faith unaccompanied by works, is a faith akin to a barren desert which is unproductive in sustaining life and activity

3. Are You Willing?

- a. the question in this verse is not whether at some future time the reader will know or recognize the truth of this distinction
- b. the question is rather, is the reader willing to know; is his heart and mind open to accepting the truth the Holy Spirit has written here?
- c. the acquisition of spiritual truth is not dependent upon intellectual capacity, but upon the surrender of one's will to God and to the truth
- d. Jesus said, 'If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.' (John 7:17)

4. Filling an Empty Head

- a. the reader who disagrees with this truth is addressed, 'O empty man!'
- b. his head is empty of spiritual truth and spiritual perception
- c. what are the reasons that even a Christian can be so described?
- d. one has already been touched upon – there must be a willingness to accept that truth and to apply it
- e. another is falling into one of Satan's traps, being proud in one's own eyes of knowing the truth, instead

of the being a humble learner

f. so it one will be willing, to humble oneself to learn, James now gives us examples of ...

E. Demonstrated Faith

1. by Abraham... 2:21-24

a. 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

b. Justified by Works, verses 21 and 24

- (A) we have already noted that James has identified that the word faith can be used to describe two distinctly different things
- (B) justify is a legal term which means 'to declare righteous'; it is never used of making a person righteous; that is sanctification, the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer
- (C) examining the Scriptures throughout, you will discover that the word 'justify,' the 'declaring righteous,' is found in two contexts; Paul in Romans and Galatians uses one; James here uses the other
- (D) Paul is speaking of justification in the sight of God; James, in the sight of our fellow man
- (E) Paul speaks of the justification of the ungodly in relation to their acceptance by God; James, of that of the godly in relation to their approval by God
- (F) these are the works of faith, of which John records in Revelation 14:13, the heavenly voice saying, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' and the Spirit adding, 'Yes, so that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow with them.'

c. Faith Perfected, verse 22

- (A) it is not the strength or perfection of our faith that saves us: it is the object of our faith: in the case of Abraham that object was God who had revealed Himself in calling Abraham; for us, with the fuller revelation of the New Testament, that object is Jesus Christ, dying for our sin, and rising

again for our justification

- (B) so in what sense was Abraham's faith perfected, made complete?
- (C) it is faith that works works; it is not works that work faith
- (D) when we read this account in Genesis 22, we asked the question, 'Did God need proof of Abraham's faith?'; the answer was 'no'
- (E) by this act, Abraham proved to himself, to others, that he really, really trusted in God; he really, really believed God's promises
- (F) 'it looked as though by the offering up of Isaac he would for ever make it impossible for the promises to be fulfilled, but, because they were the promises of God, on which Abraham's faith rested, they encouraged him to proceed with that crowning act of obedience to God'^{3} – the fruit of a tree complete or perfect its purpose as a tree; the works complete or perfect the purpose of faith

d. Scripture Fulfilled, verse 23

- (A) what Scripture? ... well you have to turn back to Genesis 15:6
- (B) the Lord had just told the aging Abraham that his descendants would be innumerable, just as one cannot number the stars
- (C) 'Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.'
- (D) this took place long before Isaac (or Ishmael, for that matter) was born; about 30 years before offering Isaac up on Mount Moriah
- (E) so note that faith takes precedence – faith comes first
- (F) how fulfilled? ... not in the sense of prophetic fulfillment; rather the sense 'filling up full' – what Abraham did in Genesis 22 was the filling up of the faith that is described in chapter 15
- (G) Abraham acted, as what he had become through faith, a friend of God; one who knew God so well, he obeyed unquestioningly
- (H) Hebrews 11:17-19 explains it in these words, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, "In Isaac your descendants shall be called." He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.'

2. by Rahab.. 2:25
a. In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

b. Different from Abraham in Every Way

- (A) he was a man; she a woman
- (B) he was a worshipper of the one, true God; she, a pagan idolater
- (C) he walked with God; she was a common prostitute

c. Except One

- (A) but she was not empty-headed
- (B) she had observed the working of the Lord on behalf and in the midst of the people of Israel, and she desired to align herself with that Lord and with that people
- (C) James doesn't mention her faith – that is quite evident in her history as you read it in Joshua 2 – but the works that proved it
- (D) Hebrews 11:31 informs us, 'By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.'
- (E) so she became part of God's people, a mother in Israel, and an ancestress of King David and of Jesus Christ Himself

F. Dead Faith. 2:26

1. For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

2. Hebrew and Greek both use the same word for spirit and breath

- a. so there is the emphasis of a double meaning here
- b. when the spirit of life departs the human body
- c. when the body ceases to breath; then it is indeed but a corpse
- d. and faith, that has not the evidence of works, is likewise dead

G. Conclusion

1. The Parable of the Ducks (by Soren Kierkegaard)

- a. There is a town called Duckland, a place where only ducks live. And in this perfect little Duckland, every Sunday, the ducks waddle out of their houses and waddle down the main street to their church. They then waddle into the sanctuary and waddle down the aisle, and then, squat down in their proper pews. The duck choir waddles in and leads the duck congregation in singing, and then the duck pastor waddles up to the podium and reads from the duck bible.
- b. He encourages them, 'My dearly beloved ducks, God has given you some very special gifts and abilities – he has given you wings! And with these wings you can fly!' And all the ducks say 'Amen.'
- c. The preacher continues. 'God has given you these wings so you can rise up and soar like eagles! No walls can confine you, no fences can hold you in. You have wings and you can soar like eagles!' All the ducks shout 'Amen.'
- d. And then they sang a song and it was over and all the ducks got up from their pews, and waddled out of the sanctuary, and waddled down Main St. They waddled past the stores and restaurants and then waddled all the way home. ^{-{4}}.

2. How will you go home today? will it be by the wings of faith that works?

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. Adapted from '*Two Kinds of Believing*,' by Roger Lovette in *The Minister's Manual* 1993, New York: Harper, 1992, p. 201.
3. NICNT, *in loc*
4. Source: www.fmbcdallas.org, Forest Meadow Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas