

Route 66

James: Faith That Works

Part 59 – June 12, 2011



Early church history records that James was hurled from the temple roof in 62^{AD} by Jewish rulers. This was just eight years before the temple itself was hurled from the mount in 70^{AD} by Roman soldiers.



James had refused to renounce his brother, technically his *half-brother*, and instead had boldly proclaimed Him as the Son of God! James' journey to that rooftop is an intriguing story. Jesus had four brothers and *at least* two sisters.

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of **James, Joseph, Judas** and **Simon**? Aren't his **sisters** here with us? – *Mark 6:3 NIV*

Jesus' family loved Him ... but they thought He was nuts! And when He appoints twelve "equally delusional" followers as apostles, his mortified brothers stage an intervention. (*Mark 3:13-20*)

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind." – *Mark 3:21 NIV*

But Paul writes that after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His disciples, He staged a little intervention of His own.

Then he appeared to James ... – *1 Corinthians 15:5-7 NIV*



What do you suppose He said? "Hey bro, missed ya at the cross. I had to ask one of my "delusional" friends to take care'a mom." In the upper room in the days before Pentecost ...

[The Apostles] joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and **with his brothers**. – *Acts 1:14 NIV*

James devotes his life *and death* to the Gospel. And in Galatians 2:9, Paul refers to him as a pillar of the church; but *this* brother of Jesus refers to *himself* only as a servant of Christ.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes **[i.e. Jews]** scattered among the nations ... – James 1:1 NIV



Damascus Gate, Jerusalem, c1900

He's writing to *converted* Jews who fled persecution in Jerusalem from *conventional* Jews (like Paul, prior to *his* intervention on the road to Damascus), and are dispersed far from home.

So, as head of the church in Jerusalem, James exhorts and encourages his scattered flock to live the faith in the midst of their struggles.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials ... because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. - James 1:2-3 NIV



How soft and spineless and sad we'd be without trials, like a confined lion with no room to run.

The jungle is dangerous and unpredictable; but there's a joy in the jungle that you can't acquire in a cage!



Imagine your favorite movie; and right when the story conflict is introduced, someone steps in and fixes it: "Have some money!" Would you say: "That was so awesome how fast things got fixed and how easy they had it!" or would you feel ripped off? Why? We want to feel the joy that comes from enduring and developing.

- We're called to be over-comers not under-getters.

Our struggles will drive our faith to depths, possible no other way; but, *only if we trust* that God has our eternal best in mind and we turn to Him for the wisdom and enablement to persevere.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God ... But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. - James 1:5-8 NIV

When he asks for wisdom "he must believe and not doubt" what? God's promises and principles in the face of the storm. A "double-minded man" is an unstable *believer*, driven and tossed by emotions and circumstance into violating God's revealed will.

"I'm going to drown in debt; I should rig my 1040!"

"My marriage is foundering; I should look for a new mate!"

If you're obedient when it's convenient, and you jump ship when it gets rough, the only thing you'll receive is an emotional storm.



Faith isn't blind trust; it's a determination to trust what you know to be true, in spite of how you feel in the moment. A leap of faith is not like jumping off a cliff in the dark and hoping for the best. It's like bungee jumping. After examining the apparatus and getting firmly strapped in, it still requires courage to trust what you know to be true, and to take that leap of faith.



And, it helps to have a friend for support.

James is saying, "You've examined and embraced God's love and grace. Now live courageously according to what you know to be true. Don't calibrate your convictions about God by your circumstances, but by the cross.

James is often compared to Proverbs, because he offers such a variety of practical teachings in these short-burst statements. But, it's all one big challenge to examine our faith and confirm that it's authentic, or confess that it's artificial.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? ... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. - *James 14a, 17b NIV*

If you call yourself a bungee jumper, but you've never actually *jumped* ... you can't really call yourself a bungee jumper.

Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? - *James 2:21 NAS*

This sounds so contradictory to what Paul wrote in Galatians.

... a man is **not justified by the works** of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus ... - *Galatians 2:16b NAS*

Paul's point is that works can't save us or add to what Jesus has done. James agrees, but points out that a genuine, faithful commitment to Christ will reveal itself in our words and actions. Even Jesus had said ...

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. - *Matthew 7:21 NIV*

If faith was merely a matter of intellectual recognition and not gratitude-motivated obedience, the devil himself would be saved!

... show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. - *James 2:18-19 NAS*

The devil is many things, but he's not an atheist!

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he cleared up any confusion.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works ... - *Ephesians 2:8a, 10a NIV*



We're saved "by grace", "through faith", "to do good works". Paul was describing the root; whereas James was describing the fruit. Salvation is like a tree that Jesus wants to plant in our heart. We can only accept it as a free gift because He simply won't sell it. And once planted, it begins to grow the fruit of His Spirit. The fruit doesn't produce the tree; but the tree produces the fruit.

A faith that embraces God's gift of salvation produces grateful, fruitful obedience. And the book of James is a thorough checklist of what should be *growing* on each of our trees.

In five short chapters, he covers: boasting, hoarding, swearing, grumbling, peacemaking, quarreling, coveting, confession, pride, ambition, purity, temptation, patience, benevolence, integrity, generosity, transparency, envy, slander, prayer, and more! At times, he can't seem to pound the checklist out fast enough.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all **pure**; then **peace-loving**, **considerate**, **submissive**, **full of mercy** and good fruit, **impartial** and **sincere**. - *James 3:17 NIV*

And if you *really* want to see your faith for what it is, James says to look no further than the toxic fruit below your nose.

[The Tongue] is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ... Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. ... My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? - *James 3:10a, 12a NIV*

Our tongues bear whatever fruit is hiding in our heart. So, what does *your* tongue say about your faith? Is it vibrant and growing or vicious and dying?

James warns us not to use our tongue to slander.

Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. ... There is only one Lawgiver and Judge ... - *James 4:11b-12a NIV*

James learned this lesson the hardest way possible. He "spoke against his [half-]brother" and "judged him", and He turned out to be the one true, eternal, "Lawgiver and Judge"!

According to James, talk is cheap (and usually destructive). But each choice we make to do what's right in spite of emotion or circumstance, will demonstrate a deep love and trust in God. We can't talk our way to Heaven; we'll have to walk!