

The World According to Jim “Like PB&J” James 2:14-26

Introduction

- On June 19th at [KeySpan Park](#), Coney Island, a pitcher-batter, cat and mouse game occurred for the baseball ages. For those of you needing to brush up on your baseball strategy, left hand hitters frequently have a harder time hitting left handed pitchers than righties. And vice versa. Right handed hitters have a harder time hitting right handed pitchers. So, in order to gain the upper hand against a batter a manager will often times put in a relief pitcher to exploit a righty against righty or lefty against lefty matchup. Thus the backdrop to the cat and mouse saga that unfolded at KeySpan Park that Thursday night.
- It was the bottom of the ninth inning and the [Staten Island Yankees](#) led the [Brooklyn Cyclones](#) 7-2, when 22-year old Yankees pitcher [Pat Venditte](#) made his professional debut. What makes Venditte unique is that he’s a switch pitcher. He’s ambidextrous and can pitch both left handed and right handed. He even wears a special six fingered glove that he can be worn on either hand depending on the situation. Venditte entered the game that night pitching right handed and retired the first two batters he faced. He then allowed a single before facing Cyclone designated hitter [Ralph Henriquez](#).
- In the words of the *New York Times* article about the game, “as Henriquez walked to the plate, Venditte, assuming Henriquez would bat left-handed, stood behind the pitching rubber with his glove on his right hand and the ball in his left. Henriquez, looking out at Venditte, then stepped across the batter’s box, determined to hit right-handed and gain a righty-lefty advantage. Seeing this, Venditte quickly switched his custom-made glove to his left hand and put the ball in his right, hoping to gain a righty-on-righty advantage.
- Henriquez stepped out and began asking the home-plate umpire, [Shaylor Smith](#), to lay out his options, then summoned his third-base coach. With the matter unresolved, Henriquez again stepped across the batter’s box in an attempt to bat left-handed. Again, Venditte switched glove and ball. The cat-and-mouse game reached full comedic gear when Henriquez again strolled across the batter’s box to hit right-handed, and Venditte responded with the old switcheroo, setting up as a righty.”¹ After a seven-minute delay, the home-plate ump ordered the batter to step into the box as a right-handed hitter, and Venditte, now pitching right-handed, struck him out.
- You probably already know where I’m headed with this. There’s a perceived cat and mouse game going on in James 2:14-26. Not between pitcher and batter but between faith and deeds. Believing in God—faith. Doing for God—deeds. Which is better? Which is more important? Can you have one without the other? Can you be a “faith” Christian while someone else is a deeds Christian? Back and forth, back and forth these two go in this passage.

Transition

But James says that if these two things, faith and deeds, are pitted against each other in a cat and mouse game the result is everyone strikes out. [[Slide #2](#)] James’s point in this section is that...

¹ “Double-Barreled Pitcher Provides Shot of Confusion,” by Vincent M. Mallozzi, *New York Times*, June 19, 2008.

Proposition

- **True biblical faith and deeds are an inseparable duo**
- In February 2004 the Mattel toy company announced that Ken and Barbie were splitting after 43 years. Unlike Ken and Barbie faith and deeds are inseparable. They're like peanut butter and jelly. Like Laurel and Hardy. Tom and Jerry. Fred and Ginger. Bill and Ted. Pinky and The Brain. The Lone Ranger and Tonto. Itchy and Scratchy. Ben and Jerry. Kermit and Ms. Piggy. Romeo and Juliet. Ren and Stimpy. Ali and Frazier. Mork and Mindy. Dolce and Gabana. Lucy and Desi. Bonny and Clyde. Batman and Robin. Abbot and Costello. Starsky and Hutch. You get the picture. Faith and deeds go together. **They are an inseparable duo.**
- At issue for James here is this artificial bifurcation—this separation between faith and deeds. Some of the people James wrote to apparently believed they could simply believe without putting their so called faith into action. They could be hearers of the word without doing the word.

Transition

[Slide #3] So what does James do? He gives us in [verses 14-26](#) two conclusions...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two conclusions concerning the perceived cat and mouse battle between faith and deeds**

Setting

- Before we get to James's two conclusions I want you to notice how James repeats this inseparable nature of faith and deeds. Look at verses 17, 20, and 26. Three times in this passage he goes out of his way to make the point that genuine biblical faith and deeds are an inseparable duo. [Verse 17](#). *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* They have to go together. [Verse 20](#). *You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? One without the other is useless.* [Verse 26](#). *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.* In the World According to Jim faith and deeds can't be separated. They're an inseparable duo.

Transition

[Slide #4] With this as his premise James gives us his [first conclusion](#) in [verses 14-19](#) concerning this perceived cat and mouse battle between faith and deeds. Look at the text. His conclusion? **"Faith" without deeds is asinine.** It's an absurd idea. Listen again to James's words. *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

Main Points

- James's goal here is to answer the two questions he poses in [verse 14](#). *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?* Is it possible to have a faith that saves but at the same time have no deeds, no actions, no works to go along with that faith? In other words, is it possible to come to church your whole life, to sit and listen to sermons, to say I believe in God, to confess the creeds, to say the prayers, to

participate in the liturgy, to sing the songs, to take the Lord's Supper but do nothing else and still find your way to heaven? Is that possible? And James's answer is an emphatic "no." That's asinine. Impossible. Ludicrous. **Faith without deeds is asinine.**

- And then James explains why by telling a ludicrous what if story—a hypothetical scenario in which two Christians meet and exchange a few words. Something that would never happen because it's too ridiculous. The story goes something like this. Sally Christian shows up at church one Sunday but hasn't had breakfast. In fact, she doesn't know where lunch or dinner's coming from. **Verse 15.** *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.* She's without food for the day. And on top of it, she's in need of clothing. Her clothes are threadbare and worn out. The need is right there out in the open for everybody to see. She's got a big neon sign above her head that says, "help me, help me. Do something about my situation."
- And so Joe Christian walks up to Sally during greeting time. "How you doing Sally?" And she answers honestly. "Joe, thanks for asking. I'm hungry. I haven't had a meal yet today and I don't know what I'm going to do about lunch or dinner. I just don't have the money." And Joe says to her in return, "I'm glad you shared Sally. I'll pray for you." He even throws in a little orthodox theology to boot. "God will provide, Sally. Jehovah Jireh. I'm confident God will take care of you." Or as James says, *"Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed."* Joe then gives Sally a hug and turns and greets someone else.
- James says that the so called "faith" of Joe Christian, despite how much he knows, despite how many verses he's memorized, despite how frequently he's attended church over the years, despite how many church committees he has chaired, despite the volume of pious words that might spill from his mouth, James says that kind of "faith" is absolutely worthless. It's asinine to think that kind of so called "faith" is worth anything.
- James's question. *What good is it?* What good is that kind of faith? It's no good. That kind of faith is a good for nothing faith. It's a faith that, in the end, can't and won't save. As one commentator suggests, "a faith which is purely doctrinal and does not result in pious action is a dead sham, totally useless for salvation."² James says that this kind of so called "faith," a faith without deeds, is utterly asinine. It's not really faith at all. At least it's not a faith that saves. It's not biblical faith. It's an imposter faith.
- A wise man once said, "your behavior is a reflection of what you truly believe."³ If you claim to be a Christian and yet don't do anything Christian that's like saying you are fisherman but you don't fish, a skydiver but you don't skydive, a chef but you don't cook.⁴ **Faith without deeds is asinine.** It's inconceivable. James's point here is that faith and deeds are an inseparable duo. There's no such thing as a faith Christian and a deeds Christian. There's really no cat and mouse battle going on. Faith and deeds, they're like PB&J. If you really have faith in Christ then that faith will naturally, effervescently bubble up into deeds and actions that prove the genuineness of that faith.
- This whole passage really gets at the core of what it really means to have faith in God. From James's perspective, there's a major difference between belief and faith. Simply believing in

² Davids, p. 119.

³ Hyrum W. Smith, [The 10 Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management](#), chairman and CEO of Franklin Covey Company.

⁴ Baker and Ellsworth, p. 68.

something is not the equivalent of true biblical faith. William Baker and Thomas Ellsworth in a simple illustration explain the difference. They write, “you may believe the parachute will save you if the plane is going down, but this is not faith until you trust the chute enough to jump out into thin air. You may believe the surgeon can heal you, but this is not faith until you trust the surgeon enough to lie down on the operating table and start counting backwards. You may believe your true love's proposal for marriage, but it is not faith until you trust your beloved enough to walk down the aisle and say, 'I do.'”⁵

- Believing the right stuff, orthodox theology alone doesn't make you a Christian; that won't save you. James says the demons are orthodox in their theology.⁶ They believe the right stuff. **Verse 18.** *18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.* As Don Carson puts it, “The kind of faith that merely believes that certain propositions are true is the kind of ‘faith’ that the demons themselves demonstrate. But that kind of faith is not faith at all in any sense that James recognizes. James is not arguing that deeds must be added to some such ‘faith’ as the demons have; his argument, rather, is that genuine faith inevitably entails works.”⁷ **They're an inseparable duo.** “Genuine faith is never alone.”⁸ It is always accompanied by deeds, actions, works for God.

Transition

The two go hand in hand. [Slide #5] Which brings us to **verses 20-26** and James's **second conclusion** concerning this perceived cat and mouse battle between faith and deeds. He says that **faith and deeds are synergistic—as an inseparable duo they work together.** *You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

- To prove his point about the synergy between true biblical faith and deeds James pulls two stories from the Old Testament to illustrate his point. The story of Abraham and Isaac. And the story of Rahab the prostitute. For the sake of time I have to assume you have some familiarity with these stories. If not you can read them in Genesis 22 and Joshua 2.
- The key thing for both stories is to notice how Abraham and Rahab both exhibited actions which were extensions of their belief in God. Abraham believed God; he had faith that God would provide a suitable sacrifice to place on the altar. His faith reached its intended goal when he did what God was asking him to do.⁹ Or as James puts it in **verse 22**, *You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.* Faith and works together.

⁵ Baker and Ellsworth, p. 77.

⁶ Moo, p. 131.

⁷ Commentary on New Testament Use of the Old Testament, p. 1003.

⁸ CNTUOT, p. 1005.

⁹ CNTUOT, p. 1003.

- Then, Rahab. Although Joshua 2 doesn't say, the story there presupposes Rahab to have a prior faith in the God of Israel—before the spies even show up. She says to the spies in Joshua 2 “I know” and “We have heard” and “the Lord your God is God.” This prior faith led her to do what she did. She gave lodging to the spies. Her faith reached its intended goal when she did what God was asking her to do. James's point with both stories is simply that genuine faith necessarily produces actions. “Works do not animate faith; but faith produces works, and works perfect faith.”¹⁰ Faith and deeds, they're two sides of the same coin. They're an inseparable duo. They work together.
- The hard part of these verses is not what James says about the interaction of faith and deeds but how James uses the Abraham story. He seems to disagree with what Paul says in his letter to the Romans. James says in [verse 24](#), *You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone*. In other words, works, what one does, deeds are what justify us, make us righteous before God. Whereas Paul says in Romans 3:28, *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law*.¹¹ Paul seems to say the opposite; that a person is justified, made righteous before God, by faith and not by works or deeds. Who's right? They're both right. Remember, this is a perceived cat and mouse battle. Paul and James aren't in conflict with each other. “Both Paul and James would agree with the statement, ‘faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.’”¹²
- The difference between the two is accounted for by their perspective on justification. Don't be thrown by the term. Justification is nothing more than a fancy word to describe how a person is declared innocent before God. The difference from Paul's perspective comes from his focus on initial justification. In other words, Paul answers the question as to how a person is saved from their sins to begin with. Are they saved by doing good things? The answer is no. As sinful human beings there is no amount of good things we could do that would satisfy God's desire for righteousness. The gap is too large. He demands perfection and we're not perfect so he can't declare us innocent. The opposite is in fact true. If you'll remember from last week James 2:10 *for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it*. From God's perspective we are all condemned lawbreakers.
- The good news of the bible is that God knows this. He knows we can't fix ourselves. And so He freely, with no strings attached, justifies all who would place their faith in Christ. Christ's death on the cross is pivotal because it satisfies God's demand for justice. Christ receives our punishment for sin while we receive a righteousness not inherently belonging to us; Christ's perfect righteousness. That's why Paul can say in Ephesians *for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast*.
- James wouldn't disagree. However, James' perspective here is not on what saves a person initially but on final justification. His focus is on the life of deeds that, in the end, prove the initial faith to be genuine. James is not saying faith is unnecessary. To say that is to miss the whole point of this passage. Faith is completely necessary. Faith is what saves. But James would add if you really have a faith that saves you'll end up acting on that faith like Abraham and Rahab. So justification in Paul refers to how a person gets into relationship with God,

¹⁰ Reinecker, p. 731.

¹¹ See also Galatians 2:15-16, Galatians 3:11-12

¹² Wallace, p. 219.

while in James it has to do with what that relationship must ultimately look like to receive God's final approval."¹³ Faith and deeds are an inseparable duo.

- In his preface to his commentary on Romans [Martin Luther](#) says this about the interaction between faith and deeds. "It is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever."¹⁴ To this both Paul and James would say "Amen."

Conclusion

- My old pastor [Kent Hughes](#) of College Church in Wheaton once told the true story of [Jean Jacques Rousseau](#), the famous French philosopher of the 1700s. In Hughes words, "Rousseau was the first intellectual to repeatedly proclaim himself the friend of all mankind. He said he was a man born to love and in fact taught the doctrine of love more persistently than most preachers of the day. How did he actually relate to humanity? His father though ill-tempered meant nothing to him but an inheritance. His only concern for his long-lost brother was to certify him dead so he could get the family money. All five of his children were unnamed and were placed immediately after birth in a hospital for infants where two thirds of all babies died in the first year. None of his children survived. Rousseau, the self-proclaimed lover of humanity, did not even record the dates of his children's births."¹⁵
- Rousseau's life and James's words here force us to ask ourselves to ask some hard questions. Has your faith bubbled up into deeds that prove your faith to be genuine? Jesus said in Matthew 7:15-20 that a tree is recognizable by its fruit. Does the fruit of your life prove your faith to be genuine? Or have you settled for a so called Christian "faith" that doesn't require anything of you? You say you believe. Good. But what does that really mean?
- [[Video](#)]

¹³ Moo, p. 134

¹⁴ Cited in Moo, p. 144.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *James, Faith that Works* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991), p. 109.