

October 16th Sermon

Faith that Works - Session 3

Obvious Faith - James 2

Introduction

How does our society judge people? What are the outward and inward characteristics that we value? Partiality is particularly hurtful when we use things like race, gender, religion, appearance, power, status, or wealth—things that we have little control over— as our standards.

None of us likes to be judged by others, especially if we fall short.

We spend an inordinate amount of time worried about what others think of us. We often feel that we are treated unjustly because people cannot see our heart. But then we turn around and allow similar prejudices to color our decisions about whom we accept, whom we befriend, and whom we serve.

This week's lesson delves deep into the soul. It exposes some of the motives behind how we treat others and shows us what God expects of us. It shows us how to use what is inside our hearts to change the way we view the outside of others and how we act toward them.

Say a short prayer asking God to show you the truth about how you evaluate the worth of others and how you can show His love to everyone.

Favoritism

Is it human nature to have favorites? Is it God's nature to have favorites? Does favoritism matter? Favoritism is defined as the act of paying special attention or giving preference to or discriminating against a person or group of people based upon status, wealth, power, class, race, education, religion, gender, etc.

Read James 2:1-7.

- Share an example of favoritism that you have personally witnessed. When are you most likely to show favoritism? How does a society tend to show favoritism?



- List the ways people in our culture show favoritism. Circle the one that is hardest for you to avoid.
- What's the problem with favoritism? Why is James so vehemently against it? What strong statement does James make about it in verse 2:4?
- What does the Bible say about how God treats and evaluates people? See 1 Samuel 16:7, Job 34:19, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, 1 Peter 1:17.
- What do other writers in the Bible say about how we should evaluate and treat people? Check out Leviticus 19:15-16, John 7:24, 1 Timothy 5:21.
- What does Paul say in Galatians 3:26-28 that should inform our attitude and treatment of others?

The Royal Law

James' emphasis on not showing favoritism is based on both the Old Testament Law and Jesus' words.

Read James 2:8-11.

- Read Leviticus 19:18. State the royal law in your own words.
- Read Mark 12:28-34. How does Jesus use a story to drive home the core meaning of the Royal Law and its connection to favoritism?
- According to James 2:8 what is the danger of partiality?
- In Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:13-15, and Galatians 6:7-10 Paul shows how our actions demonstrate our commitment to the Royal Law. Explain how the actions of Christians might or might not follow the Royal Law.

Mercy and Judgment

"We may be slipshod in our obedience to the royal law, but the knowledge that we will be accountable to the Lord for the way that we relate to other people ought to have a profound effect on the way we speak and act toward them." Van Wick in *Evidence of Faith*.

Read James 2:12-13.

The word for mercy in Greek is *eleos* which means compassion or tender mercy. The word for mercy in Hebrew is *checed* which comes from a root word that means kindness. *Checed* is translated favor, good deed, kindly, lovingkindness, or merciful depending upon the context.

Assign one or two of these verses to each member of your group. Have each person state the main message of their verse. 1 Chronicles 16:34, Nehemiah 9:31, Psalm 40:11, Psalm 51:1-2, Proverbs 28:13, Isaiah 55:7, Micah 6:8, Matthew 9:13, Romans 12:1, Ephesians 2:4-5, Titus 3:5, Hebrews 4:16.

- How do these verses expand your understanding of James 2:13?
- How can mercy help you avoid favoritism?

Faith and Works

Read James 2:14-26.

Faith and works are sometimes explained as two sides of a coin. If one side is blank, the coin is a fraud, a lie, a deceit. Is your faith a fraud? Are your works a deceit? In verse 20 of the reading the word foolish literally means *empty*. As you answer these questions, think about how you can keep your faith from becoming empty.

- Give an example of faith without works. Give an example of works without faith. Explain why both examples are incomplete.
- If you were in court being accused of being a Christian, what evidence would the prosecution use to prove their case?
- The *Serendipity* Bible study series states that "Intellectual faith cannot save one from judgment when one has not been merciful." How does that connect with both James 2:13 and 2:16?
- In verse 2:17, James declares that faith without works is dead. The word for dead literally translates as a corpse in Greek (*nekros*). How do these verses support his view? Matthew 5:16, Matthew 7:15-21, Romans 2:6, Romans 14:12, 1 Corinthians 3:8, 2 Corinthians 5:10.
- How does Jesus explain how a person demonstrates sincere faith in Matthew 7:21-27? What is the danger of believing intellectually in God but not allowing Him to use us to do His will in our actions? See also Romans 1:21.
- Compare Ephesians 2:8-9 to James 2:14-18. Van Wick states that they are not contradictory but complementary. "Paul identified the **root** of genuine faith...while James identified the **fruit** of genuine faith." Explain what she meant by that statement.
- What kinds of works are consistent with our faith? See Titus 3:14. What are some of the characteristics exhibited by the works of believers? See Matthew 5:16, Colossians 1:10, Titus 2:14, Titus 3:8, Hebrews 10:24.
- How are the actions of Abraham and Rahab a testimony to their faith? Would their faith have been considered an example without those actions? (Abraham - Genesis 11-25, Rahab - Joshua 2)

Commitment

This week I will put my faith into action by taking the following steps to prevent my faith from becoming empty:
