

ACTIVE MERCY

(James 2:1-26)

DAY ONE READING AND QUESTIONS:

¹My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

- 1. What is favoritism? Why might we favor the rich over the poor?*
- 2. Have you ever seen favoritism in the church? What form did it take?*

3. *Does God favor the poor according to this passage? Why or why not?*

DAY TWO READING AND QUESTIONS:

⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹²Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

1. *What is the royal law? Why is it called "royal"?*
2. *How does the law give freedom? What law is he talking about?*
3. *Give specific examples of times you have needed mercy from God and from others. Do we give the same mercy to others? Do we show mercy to those who are discriminated against by others?*

DAY THREE READING AND QUESTIONS:

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If 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? ¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸But 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.

¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

1. *What specific deeds or acts of faith are mentioned here?*
2. *How do we show we have faith?*
3. *What do demons believe about God? Do demons have saving faith? Why is it not enough to believe in God?*

DAY FOUR READING AND QUESTIONS:

²⁰You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

²⁵In 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? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

1. *How did Abraham show his faith? Do we have that much faith?*

2. *Do our good deeds save or justify us? What does it mean that we are not justified by faith alone?*
3. *Why do you think Rahab is given as an example here, alongside of Abraham?*

DAY FIVE READING AND QUESTIONS:

Go back and read the entire passage.

1. *What does it mean to love our neighbor? How do we show that love?*
2. *Is there a contradiction between Paul who says one is saved by faith without works (see Romans 3:27-4:3) and James who clearly says faith without works cannot save?*
3. *How does showing mercy relate to an active faith?*

MEDITATION ON JAMES 2:1-26

Are you ever tempted to do the right thing? You know how it is. You see the fellow with sign on the side of the road, "Will work for food." Or you see the woman with a child holding out her cup on the street and asking for spare change. You feel for them. You want their lives to be better. But you're in a hurry, and there are too many asking for help, and what good would a few dollars do them.

But you feel genuine compassion for them.

No you don't. James makes it clear that true compassion is not a feeling but an action. If you only feel for them, what good does that do them?

So what would be the right thing to do? Do we always give money? Does that always help? Do we find a job for them? Take them to the social services office? Bring them into our homes? Feed them from the church pantry?

I don't know. We don't always know how best to help those in need. But one thing is for sure, we must do something for them. Otherwise, our "faith" is a sham. What we must not do is feel sorry for them and move on. What we must not do is to judge others by their outward appearance.

To claim faith is to claim relation to God. And our God shows no favoritism. He chooses the poor to be rich in faith. He not only feels sorry for us, but he does something. He gives his own Son for us.

Such giving love is the law of the King, the royal law. Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the law that judges us. We dare not love in word alone, but in action.

"God of love, your compassion is boundless. You show your love to us in countless ways. May we do more than speak your love. May we live it toward others this day."