



Faith and Favoritism

James 2:13 |

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SUMMARY

"Mercy triumphs over judgment," James says, but he also reminds us to, "speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful."

So which is it? Does mercy triumph over judgment or do all those "judgey Judgersons" (that's the technical Greek term for "those who judge without mercy") get what they have coming? What's going on here?

Tim Keller helps us out,

*"In Matthew 25, we're told Jesus on the last day will judge the sheep from the goats. Do you know what the sheep and the goats are? **This is not the pagans and the Christians.** These are true Christians from false Christians, people who really believe in Jesus and are saved and people who simply thought they were Christians but weren't or claimed to be Christians but weren't. In Matthew 25, how does Jesus judge between the sheep and the goats? If you go to Matthew 25, he says, "Hey, you say you're Christians, but I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn't give me to drink. I was homeless, and you didn't take me in. I was sick, and you didn't visit me. I was in prison, and you didn't come to me."*

Then the goats (the people who end up not being sheep) say, "When did we see you in that condition, Lord?" He says, "Because you didn't treat these like that, as you did to them, you did to me." Do you know what he is saying? He is saying on judgment day there will be no mercy for those who have shown no mercy. "Wait a minute!" somebody says. "Are you saying only the social workers will get into heaven?"

No. *Do you know the place where Jesus says you can judge a tree by its fruit? Think of that. What does the fruit have? What's the relationship of the fruit to the tree? The fruit does not impart life. Jesus is discerning life through the fruit. Jesus is judging whether the tree is alive through the fruit. He says you can judge the tree by its fruit. The fruit doesn't give the tree life. The fruit tells us the tree has life."*

Remember that James is teaching wisdom using Jesus' own teaching. Here, he's saying, "Look, it's true that mercy triumphs over judgment. Just look at the gospel! Jesus died in your place so that mercy might triumph over judgment, so that every time you've failed to show mercy, every time you judge another person you wouldn't be condemned in judgment." But he's also saying that the genuineness of our faith is demonstrated by living a life that is shaped by Micah 6:8, doing justice, loving hesed (mercy), and walking humbly with your God.

Take some time as a group to read through James 2:1-13 and then ask these questions:

1. What stood out to you as you read today?
2. What point does James seem to be making?
3. How does this portion of Scripture connect to what came before? How does it connect to what comes after?
4. What didn't make sense? What do you still wonder about?
5. Take a few minutes to read through Micah 6:8. Does this describe your life at present? What might need to change in order for your life to begin to reflect what God says demonstrates "true religion (faith)"?