

Winter 2021 Bible Study

Week 3 - James 2:14-26

This latter half of James 2 returns to themes from chapter 1: the measure of one's religion is the mercy one shows to the most vulnerable (1:27; 2:13-17); hearing alone is insufficient, and disciples must do the word (1:22-25; 2:8, 14-26). James emphasizes that fulfilling the law of love requires us to act when faced with desperate need. Before our discussion on Sunday, reread the stories given as examples of faith: Abraham (Genesis 15:1-21 and 22:1-19) and Rahab (Joshua 2:1-21 and 6:15-23).

Discussion

2:14-17

- Vv. 14-17: The CEB translation of verse 17 says, "faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity." What is faithful activity? What are some of the works of faith that you put into practice in your own life?
- Some commentators refer to this section as a warning against "all profession, no practice" or "all creed and no deed." (My grandmother might call this "all hat and no cattle.") Can you think of a time in your life when you might have been guilty of overemphasizing profession without the accompanying practice?
- James specifically calls us to meet physical needs such as clothing the naked and feeding the hungry. Our own congregation participates in these acts every year through our partnership with PACEM. But books such as *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert or *Toxic Charity* by Robert D. Lupton warn against creating unhealthy patterns of dependence when giving. Where do you draw the line in your own giving to avoid those pitfalls? Should we set limits on what we give to meet basic needs of others?

2:18-20

- We are all called to serve God with our unique gifts and talents. Are faith and works different gifts? Do some have more faith while others have more works?

2:21-26

- Why do you think that Abraham and Rahab are the two people who James uses to exemplify faith and works in unity together?
- Which came first - the chicken or the egg? The faith or the work? In Genesis 15:6, God makes a covenant with Abraham and Abraham's faith is acknowledged. Abraham later displays that faith in his actions to sacrifice Isaac. Rahab's faith story is different - she does her works first, protecting the Israelite spies without any assurance from God that she will be rewarded like Abraham was. How are the faithful works of Abraham and Rahab similar and how are they different?
- In Matthew 7:21-27 Jesus teaches about the importance of uniting hearing and doing. What will you take away from our discussion today about your own hearing and doing?