

Do You Really Believe

July 23, 2023

James 2:1-4

1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

James gives a moral exhortation about how faith requires righteous action. James is congruent with the Old Testament prophets and Jesus. Our relationship with God is dependent upon devotion to God and compassion for humanity. James addresses hypocrisy, judging, and righteous action. There is a fundamental contrast between confession of faith and action. Either you are a friend of the ways of the world or God. People in biblical times gave preferential treatment to the rich while ignoring the poor. James points out the hypocrisy of confessing a commitment to God and contradicting it with your action. James asks a very tough question. "Do you really believe?"

The Scripture for today is a lesson on judging. James strikes a nerve and gets into our feelings by asking "Do you really believe?" It is a challenging question. Many people confess their belief but James is like ... do you really? Let's take a look at the Scripture and investigate why he asks such a challenging question. The Scripture reveals James opinion is a lot like that of Jesus. Devotion is mandatory. He is adamant you have to live by the word. You have to have concern for the poor instead of favoritism towards the wealthy. James classifies the act of judging as evil. With your acts of favoritism, you make distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts. James condemns the hypocrisy of talking a good talk without walking a good walk. Faith without good deeds is useless. James questions it and challenges you if you claim to be a Christian and are not following the doctrine of Christ. James condemns the blatant discrimination of people failing to live by their convictions and treating the rich and poor differently.

James explains his position. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. They are heirs of the kingdom. God has promised this to those that love the Lord. When the rich oppress, the question is asked and the challenge is made. Do you really fulfill the law and the scriptures? If you love your neighbor as yourself then there can be no partiality. The law is the whole law. If you break one then you are a sinner. Judgment will be without mercy. What good is it if you have faith and it is not backed up with action? What good is your faith if the hungry are not supplied their needs? Faith by itself without action is dead. It is by our good deeds that we show our faith. Belief by itself is not enough. Even demons believe. Faith has to be active just as the body without the spirit is dead; faith without works is also dead.

The problems in scriptures are relevant today. The lesson is very much applicable within the realm of contemporary society, especially in regards to institutionalism. Organizations want money to keep the operations moving but the institution should be focused on care of the people. Today a congregation can talk a fine religion and confess a commitment to God but if they do not put faith into practice, they contradict it with action. Christianity is a way of living. God changes us to become children of God. We are to act like God's DNA is in our veins. People of faith should be easy to spot as they are revealed by who they are.

Some people question the fairness of God. Some people profess a Christian faith and conduct unsavory business practices while the obedient struggle. There are churches that flaunt their wealth and have less concern for the poor while some small churches are overworked and volunteers struggle. When a disciple questions Jesus about fairness, the response is “What is that to you? Follow me” (John 21:21-22). We fail to see how simple it is. It is the act of judging that is wrong. Instead of judging others, are to make sure that we are following Jesus.

James asks a tough and challenging question “Do you really believe?” Ideally, the question triggers a response from within the individual to where they come to terms with any disparity between the life they live and the faith that they profess. The fundamental contrast is between a verbal profession and physical action. You can be either a person that lives by the ways of the world, or a friend of God. It is God’s choice that the poor are rich in faith. People during biblical times gave preferential treatment to the rich while ignoring the poor. But Christianity is a way of living, God changes us, and we become children of God. We are to act like it God is our parent and we are God’s children. We are to act like we belong to God. People of faith should be easy to spot as your faith is revealed by the extent of your care. The challenge for the individual is to not conform to the world but to conform to the heavenly kingdom. Faith is not compatible with partiality. It is the world that discriminates. We are one blood and one body. God looks at the heart of the person, not outward appearances.