

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES
Study Guide
Lesson Four – James 2:14-26

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The Old Testament laws and ceremonies kept the people of Israel a unique people. The customs to which they adhered separated them from the rest of the world. For example, not buying or selling on the Sabbath, sacrificing animals as a payment for sins, and celebrating Passover set the Jewish people apart from other people groups. This would insure that the Jewish race would survive as God's chosen people through whom the Messiah would come.

God ordained the laws and ceremonies to teach them compassion, to protect them from the pain of sinful lifestyles, to keep them physically healthy, and to illustrate their need for the Messiah. Unfortunately, as the years went by, the Jews unique lifestyles became a source of arrogance and prejudice towards outsiders. Furthermore, in their pride, each new group of religious leaders would add stricter and stricter interpretations to the law to show how devout they were. These pious leaders imposed the stricter interpretations of the law on the Jewish people until the customs, animal sacrifices, and laws became more important than love for God and love for others. Their religion became an outward show of obedience without an inward morality.

As we saw last week, throughout Jesus' ministry He prepared the way for the cross. Over and over, Jesus preached compassion over the strict observations of the Jewish religious laws. Not only did Jesus preach that love is what God's original laws hang on, but He exhibited by His life that love supersedes harsh Jewish customs. For example, He healed on the Sabbath, He talked to a Samaritan woman (Samaritans and women were both looked down upon), and He ate with sinners. All of these things were against Jewish tradition. We see an illustration of Jesus' ministry in Matthew 9:10-13, *"Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, 'Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?' But when Jesus heard this, He said, 'It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE (referring to the OT animal sacrifices), for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'"*

Jesus death on the cross for our sins was the ultimate model of love. Jesus didn't just talk the talk; He walked the walk – carrying His own cross! Jesus' sacrifice on the cross meant that the Jews were free from the Old Testament laws and customs, including the need to sacrifice animals as payment for their sins. This truth was clearly pronounced through Jesus' ministry. In fact, before Jesus even officially began His public ministry, John the Baptist saw Him approaching and clearly proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

- 1) Last week we looked at the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11) which are the foundation of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7). Compare Matthew 9:10-13 which is listed above to Matthew 5:3. Remembering the lecture from last week, how does being "poor in spirit" relate to "those that are sick"?

James 2:14-26

- 2) Read James 2:14-17. Read Hebrews 11:1. Write down the definition of faith.

Note: The word “hope” in the Bible is to fully expect something. It is not wishful thinking, like saying, “I hope I find a parking spot by the front door.” It is a sure expectation. To say, “My hope is in Christ” means that I FULLY EXPECT that He is working for good in my life.

- a) Extra Credit! Read all of Hebrews 11. Note the action verbs as you read. Pick out one story and describe how their faith led to action before they saw the outcome.

 - b) Hebrews 12:1-3 is a continuation of thought from Hebrews 11. Who is the ultimate example of faith leading to action? What do you think it means that Jesus is the author and perfecter (some translations say finisher) of our faith?

 - c) Read 1 John 3:16-18. What do you think it means to lay down our lives for those in need?

 - d) From James 2:17, what does it mean that faith is dead if it has no works? (Also see the Grace side of the Grace/Legalism Chart.)
- 3) Read James 2:18-20. From verse 18, how do we show others our faith?

Note: Deut 6:4, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” is called the Shema. It is the central prayer in the Jewish prayer book and is often the first section of scripture that a Jewish child learns.
http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Scripture/Torah/The_Shema/the_shema.html

- a) In verse 19, James is probably referring to the Shema. According to James, who else believes this and what is their reaction?
 - i) Look up Luke 4:33-35. Who does the demon acknowledge that Jesus is? From verse 34, what does the demon recognize that Jesus has the power to do?

- b) Many people believe in God and believe in Christ, but they are not saved. Read John 13:34-35. What is the evidence of belonging to Christ?

- c) Verse 20 says that faith without works is useless. When we don't live out our faith in meaningful ways, how is this useless to God? How is it useless to others?
- 4) Read James 2:21-24. Then read Genesis 22:1-18. Isaac was the son that God had promised to Abraham and Sarah many years before. Abraham and Sarah were way past childbearing years when they conceived Isaac so his birth was a miracle. How do you think Abraham felt as he strapped Isaac on to the rock and picked up the knife to kill him? What gave him the courage to do this?

Note: MORIAH-[moh RYE uh] (Jehovah provides) - the name of two sites in the Old Testament: 1. A land to which God commanded Abraham to take his only son Isaac and to offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains. The mountains of this land were a three-day journey from Beersheba and were visible from a great distance (Gen 22:2,4). 2. The hill at Jerusalem where Solomon built "the house of the Lord," the Temple. Originally this was the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chron 3:1), also called Araunah the Jebusite (2 Sam 24:16-24), where God appeared to David. David purchased the threshing floor from Ornan (1 Chron 21:15-22:1), and built an altar on the site. It was left to David's son (Solomon) to build the Temple. The Jews believe the altar of burnt offering in the Temple at Jerusalem was situated on the exact site of the altar on which Abraham intended to sacrifice Isaac. To them the two Mount Moriahs mentioned in the Bible are identical. The Muslim mosque, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, presently is situated on this site. (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

- a) Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, having faith that the Lord would provide, is a foreshadowing, or picture, of God sacrificing His Son, Jesus Christ, to provide a way for us to be with Him forever. Abraham had no idea that this test would be a picture of the Messiah for generations to come. Is there anything in your life that you are not willing to surrender, having faith that God has a plan that is bigger than what you can see? Share with the group if you like.
- b) James 2:22 is used as our theme verse for this study. How is faith made perfect or complete (i.e. mature)?
- i) Stepping out in faith is sometimes scary. When we take that step, however, we will see God's blessings. Is there an area of your life that God is calling you to step out in faith without fear?

- c) In James 2:23, Abraham was considered righteous because of His belief in God, not because of his deeds. His belief produced good works because he had a special relationship with God. What was it? Do you have that kind of relationship with God?

Note: The word “justified” means to prove or show that you are just or right. We are justified before God simply by our faith in His Son, Jesus Christ who died for our sins. We are justified before others when they see our good works. God sees our heart, man sees our deeds.

- 5) Read James 2:25-26. The story of Rahab can be found in Joshua chapter 2 and chapter 6:17-25. Rahab the harlot had heard of the mighty things God had done for the sons of Israel and she knew that Israel was planning an attack. As you read through the passage, you see that everyone in Jericho was full of terror because of what God had done for the Israelites. There was an emotional belief in God and His power throughout the city, similar to the demons that believe and shudder. Out of the whole city, only Rahab put her faith into action. The difference between the rest of Jericho who perished and Rahab who was saved with her family is that she, like Abraham, was a friend of God. She was also a friend of His people. How did she protect the spies?
- a) Rahab lied to the king to protect the spies and yet she is commended in Hebrews 11:31. Lying is a sin and yet loving God and loving others supersedes any law. How did Rahab love God? How did she love God’s people? How did she love her family?
- b) Look up Matthew 1:5-6 and 16. What is the legacy that Rahab left behind?
- c) James 2:26 says that a body without a spirit is dead just like faith without works is dead. That must mean that faith and works are as intertwined as my spirit is to my body while I’m alive. How has your faith been put to work this week?
- d) Read Titus 2:11-14. In your own words and understanding, how does God purify us so we are zealous and eager for good deeds?