

### What Does Faith Look Like?

<sup>1</sup> *My brothers, have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without showing favoritism.* <sup>2</sup> *For example, suppose a man enters your worship assembly wearing gold rings and fine clothing, and a poor man also enters wearing filthy clothing.* <sup>3</sup> *If you look with favor on the man wearing fine clothing and say, "Sit here in this good place," but you tell the poor man, "Stand over there" or "Sit down here at my feet,"* <sup>4</sup> *have you not made a distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil opinions?* <sup>5</sup> *Listen, my dear brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him?*

... <sup>8</sup> *However, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* <sup>[e]</sup> *you are doing well.* <sup>9</sup> *But if you show favoritism, you are committing a sin, since you are convicted by this law as transgressors.*

<sup>10</sup> *In fact, whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it.*

... <sup>14</sup> *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says that he has faith but has no works? Such "faith" cannot save him, can it?* <sup>15</sup> *If a brother or sister needs clothes and lacks daily food* <sup>16</sup> *and one of you tells them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but does not give them what their body needs, what good is it?* <sup>17</sup> *So also, such "faith," if it is alone and has no works, is dead.* <sup>18</sup> *But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

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What does faith look like? We know what faith is. It is trust, but not just any kind of trust. I trust that aspirin will take away my headache, but that does nothing for eternal life. Faith is trust in Jesus as our Savior. It means that I will not perish but have everlasting life. Faith is so trusting that it is sure of what hope for and certain of what we do not see. That is what faith is. But what does it look like? We have some examples. Abraham showed us faith when he raised a knife to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, as God commanded him. He trusted God would keep his promises through this son even if he should die. We saw it in Peter. When Jesus came to the disciples who were stuck in a storm on the Sea of Galilee, he was walking on water. Peter asked if he could do the same and Jesus said yes. Peter trusted Jesus and started to walk on water.

Faith looks like that. It is complete trust. But faith can be seen in other ways. We have an example of that in our epistle reading for today. May the Holy Spirit guide us this morning as we pray for his gift of faith, a living faith that loves.

#### *I. Pray for a saving faith.*

In high school we had a science teacher who seated students according to the grades they received on the last test. Those who did the best sat in the back and those who did the worse sat up front. Can you imagine if we did that here? Those who give the most in offerings get the best seat in church which for Lutherans must be the back. And those who give the least have to sit right up here in front. Or how about this. Since we want to make a good impression on our livestream, only those who dress nicely can sit in church. If you came in jeans and a tee shirt, you must sit in the balcony or the narthex. Can we do the same with evangelism? We will invite only those who make over \$75,000 a year. We can't afford to have poor people join.

That was the problem James saw in his congregation. <sup>1</sup> *My brothers, have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without showing favoritism.* <sup>2</sup> *For example, suppose a man enters your worship assembly wearing gold rings and fine clothing, and a poor man also enters wearing filthy clothing.* <sup>3</sup> *If you look with favor on the man wearing fine clothing and say, "Sit here in this good place," but you tell the poor man, "Stand over there" or "Sit down here at my feet,"* <sup>4</sup> *have you not made a distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil opinions?"*

This may be a normal practice in the world. I mean, sports team recruit only the best. Fundraisers may send out a general mailing asking for a few bucks, but they will go and visit the big donor. Politicians use their colleagues and constituents like rungs on a ladder. This might make sense in the world, but it has no place in the church. <sup>5</sup> *Listen, my dear brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him?"* Note how James said they are judging *"...with evil opinions?"* If you invite the rich to church and not the poor, you are sinning because you are judging who should be saved and who should not be saved.

Favoritism isn't only judging. It is unloving. <sup>8</sup> *However, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"* <sup>[e]</sup> *you are doing well.* <sup>9</sup> *But if you show favoritism, you are committing a sin, since you are convicted by this law as transgressors."* Favoring the rich is unloving to the poor. But it is also unloving to the rich. You favor them not because you love them. You favor them because you can get something from them. You are using them. The poor has little or anything to offer. The rich guy has a lot. He may give you prestige because he joined your church. His offerings should be higher. He has connections. When you favor someone, you are not loving them. You want something from them. If a husband and wife

start to ask, "Hey, I am not getting as much out of this as I thought," they will get frustrated and probably stop loving the other. They are looking to get and not to give.

Why is James making such a big deal out of this? I mean, favoritism can't be as bad as murder right? Or adultery, right? "...<sup>10</sup> **In fact, whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it.**" Favoritism is just as sinful. Picture all of God's laws as a chain. How many links need to break before the chain becomes useless? One. Break one link and that two ton girder the crane is lifting up will fall and crash to the ground. Each sin is equally bad. And all it takes is one.

And this betrays a deeper problem. "...<sup>14</sup> **What good is it, my brothers, if someone says that he has faith but has no works? Such "faith" cannot save him, can it?**<sup>15</sup> **If a brother or sister needs clothes and lacks daily food<sup>16</sup> and one of you tells them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but does not give them what their body needs, what good is it?**<sup>17</sup> **So also, such "faith," if it is alone and has no works, is dead.**" Ever had a dead battery in your car? I have, many times. You go in and turn the key and nothing. Here was a congregation that boasted of their faith. They confessed that they believed in Jesus as their Savior. Good. But what happened when you turned the key? Nothing. They said they believed, but their actions said no.

It is good for us to stand before this text today. It is real easy and real dangerous to consider ourselves loving when there are many instances when we have not loved. Ok, so you didn't hate everyone. Society might consider you an OK person, but what is our reputation before a holy God? What if God treated us as we treat him? What if God showed favoritism, for example. You have to rewrite parts of the Bible. When it says, "God so loved the world," you have to change it to, "God loved some of the world." You have to change the passage that says, "God does not desire the death of the wicked," to, "God certainly wants some of you to perish." Can you imagine if you asked God, "Do you love me," and he responds with silence or some of the time?

But God shows no favoritism. He is impartial when it comes to the gospel. Jesus wanted his crucifiers to be saved as he begged for their forgiveness. And Jesus was on that cross to make it possible. Jesus died on the cross because he loves us that much. Remember, love is when you do something, not to get something in return but simply to give. Jesus would gain nothing if he saved us, but he did anyway. It wasn't about what he could get, but what he could give which is eternal life.

And he didn't just die for our sins. He lived for our holiness. After church I should go and make our bed. I didn't do it this morning. But guess what? It is made already. My wife made it. I failed to do it, but someone else did it for me. Jesus' holy life replaces our unholy life. We failed, so he did it for us.

## *II. Pray for a living faith.*

I found it interesting that James started this whole section with these words: "<sup>1</sup> **My brothers, have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without showing favoritism.**" James came down on his congregation. Yet, he started off by calling them his brothers. That is forgiveness. Even though we will sin again today and tomorrow, God's love is so deep and Christ's sacrifice so complete that our sins are forgiven and we are still brothers and sisters with Christ and children of God.

That is why we regard Jesus as glorious. But when we believe in him, something glorious happens to us. It changes the way we see the world. We no longer look at people the way we did before. We don't say, "What can I get out of this person?" We no longer look at people to see what we can get from them, but what we can give to them.

It changes the way we look at people as a congregation. It changes how husbands and wives look at each other, not what can I get, but what can I give. It changes the way parents see their children, and vice versa, or teachers and their students, or pastors and their congregations. God didn't show favoritism when it came to saving us. "**My brothers, have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.**" We know what impartiality feels like so we like to do the same for others.

And then people will begin to see your faith. Don't just say you believer. Let your faith be visible. People will see it when you don't worry or fret, when you are not afraid, when you want to live out your life but don't mind it if God calls you home sooner. Faith is trust, but also love when we don't show favoritism, when we treat and look at people for what we can give and not what we can get. In a world that doesn't understand what love us, let them see. Confess with your mouth about your glorious Savior. But let them see your faith in action, too. Amen.