

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



“Mercy at the Heart of the Law”

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): James/Jacob 2:9-13; Jas. 1:22, 25; 2:8; 1 Sam. 16:7; Lev. 19:15; Mt. 9:13; Hos. 6:6; Micah 6:8; Zech. 7:9-10

Most of us know what it feels like to walk into a room and immediately measure people. We may not say it out loud, but something inside begins to evaluate: Who matters here? Who can help me? Who makes me comfortable? Who makes me uncomfortable? Who looks respectable? Who looks like trouble? And if we are not careful, we begin receiving people “according to their face,” according to what is visible on the surface. But that is not how God sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but Adonai looks into the heart.

Jacob has already told us not merely to hear the Word, but to do it. He has pointed us to the perfect Torah, the Torah that gives freedom, and then he brings us to the royal law, the law of the Kingdom: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” This command is not peripheral. It is not a capillary somewhere out in the extremities of God’s instructions. It is the heart. And if we miss the heart, we can *appear* observant, pious, religious, and still miss what God is after.

1. FAVORITISM IS NOT A SMALL MISS — IT IS SIN

Jacob says plainly, “*But if you show favoritism, you are committing sin and are convicted by the Torah as transgressors*” (Jas. 2:9). Favoritism is not just poor manners. It is not just an unfortunate social habit. It is sin being worked out. It is a breach of faith because it is inconsistent with the character of God. To receive someone “according to their face,” according to what we can see on the surface, is not what God does, and it is not what we saw in Yeshua.

That means we cannot separate our faith in the glorious Lord Yeshua the Messiah from the way we treat people. We cannot say we hold the faith of Yeshua while also measuring people by wealth, status, appearance, usefulness, background, or even by whether their struggles make us comfortable. When we honor the impressive and demean the lowly, when we make the poor or broken feel as though they should sit “under our footstool,” the dialogue happening within us is evil. We have missed the mark, and Jacob wants us to see that this is no small deal.

2. SELECTIVE OBEDIENCE MISSES THE HEART OF THE WHOLE TORAH

Jacob continues, “*For whoever keeps the whole Torah but stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all*” (Jas. 2:10). He is not saying that every sin has the same earthly consequence. Scripture itself shows that different sins bring different kinds of damage. But he is confronting the self-delusion of selective obedience—the tendency to check off the things we find easier while ignoring the things that reveal the true condition of our

hearts. We can define our walk with God by what we do not do, while failing to be known by love, mercy, justice, humility, and kindness.

The whole Torah reflects the character of the One who gave it. It is not an abstract checklist of disconnected commands. The One who said, *“Do not commit adultery,”* also said, *“Do not murder.”* The unity of the Torah is personal because it comes from Him. So if we are meticulous about certain religious observances but harsh, partial, judgmental, or merciless toward people made in the image of God, we have missed the heart. Yeshua said, *“Mercy (Chesed, Love) I desire, and not sacrifice.”* The prophets kept calling God’s people back to the same center: practice justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

3. SPEAK AND ACT AS PEOPLE WHO WILL BE JUDGED BY THE LAW OF FREEDOM

Jacob says, *“So speak and act as those who will be judged according to a Torah that gives freedom”* (Jas. 2:12). There is to be integrity and wholeness between what we hear, what we say, and what we do. The Word that liberates us must shape not only our beliefs, but our speech, our actions, our posture toward others, and the judgments we make in our hearts. God’s instructions are whole, kingly, and liberating. He leads us out of slavery to sin and into the freedom of His own life-giving character.

Then Jacob gives the warning and the hope: *“For judgment is merciless to the one who does not show mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment”* (Jas. 2:13). The mercy here is not weak sentiment. It is the covenant love, compassion, and faithful kindness of God. The same mercy He has shown to us, He expects us to show to one another. This does not mean pretending sin is not destructive, and it does not mean forcing reconciliation where there has been no repentance. But it does mean that our hearts must remain yielded to God, refusing hatred, refusing contempt, refusing the kind of partiality that decides some sinners are more worthy of mercy than others.

CONCLUSION

This goes beyond favoritism toward the rich and against the poor. There is also a kind of “virtuistic” partiality, where we favor the people who avoid the sins our community finds especially degrading, while despising those whose sins make us uncomfortable. In Yeshua’s day, tax collectors and prostitutes were looked upon with disdain by the religious and respectable. Yet Yeshua showed them mercy. He allowed His own reputation to be tarnished among the righteous and the elite because He loved the poor in spirit. He did not affirm sin, but He moved toward sinners with mercy, truth, and the call to repentance.

The question before us is this: “Am I reflecting His character?” Lord, are You pleased with the way I treat people? Am I reflecting Your kindness, Your justice, Your righteousness, Your mercy, Your *chesed*? Today, we bring our hidden prejudices, our selective obedience, our harsh judgments, and our fear of what the religious may think, and we lay them before Yeshua. We ask Him to cleanse our hearts, to make us doers of the Word, and to teach us to walk in the mercy that triumphs over judgment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. James says that showing favoritism is sin. What are some ways favoritism can appear in a believing community that may not be obvious at first?
2. Why is “love your neighbor as yourself” not a secondary command, but the heart of God’s instructions?
3. Modern personal reflection: Who are the people or groups that make you most uncomfortable, and how might the Lord be asking you to examine your heart toward them?
4. Modern personal reflection: In what ways do believers today sometimes define faithfulness more by what we avoid than by how we love, show mercy, practice justice, and walk humbly?
5. What does it mean to “speak and act” as someone who will be judged by the Torah that gives freedom?

CLOSING PRAYER:

ADONAI, search our hearts and show us where we have received people according to appearances, status, usefulness, or comfort. Forgive us for the ways we have practiced favoritism and called it discernment, wisdom, or righteousness. Teach us to see people as You see them.

Lord, make us doers of Your Word. Let Your mercy reshape our speech, our actions, our judgments, and our relationships. Help us to practice justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with You. May Your hesed overflow from our hearts, and may mercy triumph over judgment in us.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.