

¹² *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,* ¹³ *because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

¹⁴ *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?* ¹⁵ *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.* ¹⁶ *If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?* ¹⁷ *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why do you think Jesus refers to giving to the needy as an “act of righteousness [or justice] (Matthew 6:1)” rather than simple charity? How would you describe the difference between the two?
2. What is significant about the fact that the Old Testament ideal “there need be no poor people among you (Deuteronomy 15:3)” is finally realized in the early church, “there were no needy persons among them (Acts 4:34)? What are some of the factors that allowed the ideal to become a reality? Why do you think the reality was short lived?
3. Why do you think Jesus chose the text of Isaiah 61:1-3 to reintroduce himself to his friends and family in Nazareth? Why do you think Luke chooses this sermon to introduce us to the public ministry of Jesus? Why is the gospel, particularly, “good news for the poor?” What other themes in the text are consistent with the Old Testament concept of justice?
4. Since not many of us will sell everything we have and give it to the poor so that we will have treasure in heaven, how can we live out the spirit of Christ’s encouragement to the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21, Matthew 19:21, Luke 18:22) and the rest of his followers (Luke 12:32-34)?
5. James tells us, “Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wildflower (James 1:27). How does the gospel elevate those in humble circumstances? How does it humble those who find themselves in plenty? How should we elevate fellow believers who find themselves in humble circumstances? How should we elevate those who don’t know Christ who find themselves in humble circumstances?
6. Why does James tell us it is wrong to discriminate? What are some subtle ways we discriminate? What are some practical ways we can live out the New Testament vision of justice?



NOTE TO THE READER:

This 360 Discussion Guide is not a question and answer Bible study, it is an expanded version of the notes from Sunday’s message. The study will not make a whole lot of sense if you have not heard the message, but will serve as a helpful summary if you have. We have included some “Questions to Consider” at the end.

THE NEW TESTAMENT WORD

dikaiaosune (δικαιοσύνη), is “the character or quality of being right or just.” The word group can be translated right, righteousness, upright, to put right, just, justice, justify.

MATTHEW 6:1-4: “Be careful not to practice your righteousness (dikaiaosune) in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² *“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

THE OLD TESTAMENT IDEAL REALIZED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

DEUTERONOMY 15:3-5,7-8 However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, ⁵ if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today...

⁷ If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. ⁸ Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need

ACTS 4:32-35 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

JESUS' SERMON IN NAZARETH

LUKE 4:14-21 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ^a

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

JESUS REASSURES JOHN THE BAPTIST

MATTHEW 11:2-6 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

JESUS' CHALLENGE TO THE RICH YOUNG RULER AND US

MARK 10:17-21: As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁸ "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

²⁰ "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

LUKE 12:32-34: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

JESUS' YOUNGER BROTHER WEIGHS IN

JAMES 1:9-10 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. ¹⁰ But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower.

JAMES 1:27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

JAMES 2:1-17 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? ⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," ^d you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," ⁱ also said, "You shall not murder." ^j If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.