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Mark & Friends

Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment

Friday Bible Discussion with Pastor Mark Johnson and Friends • Friday, July 17, 2026

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Today's focus: Genuine faith is more than outward religious behavior. Jesus transforms the heart so that we love our neighbors, extend wise mercy, seek restoration, and live under the law of freedom.

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Program Summary

In this Friday roundtable from James 2:10-13, Pastor Mark Johnson and the room of friends explore the difference between outward religion and a heart genuinely transformed by Jesus. The discussion shows that breaking one point of God's law exposes our need for grace, while the royal law calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Through stories from church life, missions, service among the poor, structured second chances, and Jesus calming the storm, the

group emphasizes that mercy is neither passive approval nor shallow niceness. Biblical mercy seeks restoration, speaks truth in love, and flows from a heart that has experienced the peace and transforming presence of Jesus. The central reminder is both sobering and hopeful: mercy triumphs over judgment.

Key Takeaways

- Keeping outward rules cannot substitute for the new birth and heart transformation Jesus gives.
- The royal law is to love your neighbor as yourself - wanting and doing what is truly best for others.
- Every person should be welcomed and viewed through the loving eyes of Jesus, regardless of appearance, wealth, background, or social standing.
- Mercy does not ignore sin or enable destructive behavior; it seeks rescue, healing, accountability, and restoration.
- We can speak peace into difficult situations only as we first receive and live in the peace of Jesus.
- Faith is not merely knowledge about God; it is a living relationship with Jesus that transforms how we speak, act, judge, forgive, and serve.

Scripture References

- James 2:8-13 - The royal law, the unity of God's law, the law of freedom, and mercy triumphing over judgment.
- Leviticus 19:18 - Love your neighbor as yourself.
- Matthew 22:36-40 - Love God fully and love your neighbor as yourself.
- James 1:18 - God gives new birth through the word of truth.
- Mark 4:35-41 - Jesus brings peace in the storm.
- Matthew 5:9 - Blessed are the peacemakers.
- Ephesians 4:15 - Speak the truth in love.

Quote of the Day

“Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

- James 2:13

Broadcast Notes

- Pastor Mark Johnson facilitates today's continued discussion through James chapter 2.
- The roundtable contrasts rule-keeping with the inner transformation that comes through new birth in Jesus.
- Several participants share practical examples from church life, missions, ministry among the poor, and helping people through difficult circumstances.
- The discussion distinguishes mercy from permissiveness: genuine mercy seeks a person's good and may include structure, boundaries, and accountability.
- The closing emphasis is that relationship with Jesus - not mere religious knowledge - produces a life of love, peace, and mercy.

Practical Applications

- Ask God to reveal whether you treat people differently because of appearance, influence, income, race, age, or background.
- Cross the room this week to welcome someone who might otherwise be overlooked.
- Before correcting another person, examine your motive: are you seeking restoration, or merely proving that you are right?
- Offer mercy wisely. Where necessary, combine forgiveness with clear boundaries and a structured path toward restored trust.
- When tension rises, pause and receive the peace of Jesus before trying to become a peacemaker.
- Read one chapter of James each day next week and ask God to show you one practical step of obedience.

Today's Challenge

Choose one person you are tempted to judge, avoid, or dismiss. Pray for that person by name, ask Jesus to help you see them through His eyes, and take one practical step to show truthful, wise, and restoring mercy.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You that Your mercy is greater than our failures. Forgive us for measuring people by outward appearances and for showing mercy only when it is convenient. Transform our hearts through Your Word and Spirit. Teach us to love our neighbors, speak truth with grace, welcome those who feel overlooked, and seek restoration rather than condemnation. Fill us with Your peace so that we can carry peace into every room and every relationship. May mercy triumph over judgment in us. In Jesus' name, amen.

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We're glad you're here, we're glad you're here,
Fellowship is sweeter, knowing you're near.
It's so good to see you, we hope that it's clear,
Everyone loves you, we're glad you're here.

Reading from James chapter 2, verses 10-13: For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.

For he who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you are a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of freedom.

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. That was James chapter 2, verses 10-13.

And that was the voice from Tim from Springfield who attends Calvary Church, right? That's the church that Pastor Mark Johnson preaches and teaches and shares at. So we appreciate him. Oh, magnify the Lord with me.

Let us exalt his name together. It's Friday, July 17th, 2026. Welcome to the Friday edition of Mark and Friends.

Wow, halfway through the month of July. It's not too much longer we're going to be starting to talk about Thanksgiving and Christmas and the New Year. It's coming faster, everyone.

Enjoy these hot summer months. Just because Walmart has to jump the gun doesn't mean we have to, too. I'm just priming everyone for the future.

But we're going to continue our study through the book of James. We're in chapter 2. Last week we looked at some of the important aspects of how do people see us at church. Do we love them because they dress up nice or look good or might be wealthy? Or are we consistent in loving all people as God would value them? Their identity is the distinction that God has given them.

They're valuable, they're unique, and they're special. And God desires all to come to know him. So we need to define people through the lenses of Jesus, that he loves all people.

Well, today we're going to continue looking at verses 10 through 13. And Pastor Mark Johnson is going to facilitate our discussion. We appreciate his commitment to God's Word, to teaching, to preaching, to be available for our room of friends.

So we're excited to see what God would teach us today. The question I would ask today as we jump into this is, have you ever struggled with something you knew you shouldn't do and you should give it up but you continued to do it? And it was a struggle in your life. You knew it wasn't pleasing to God, and yet you continued in it.

Somebody listening today may be going through that struggle right now. I was thinking something that you would say, oh, I'm going to say this, no, I know I shouldn't, and I say it anyways, and then you're in trouble. All kinds of levels of that.

You can have victory in dozens of places and still have a struggle in some place. So let's remember, James is writing to believers, Jewish believers, scattered abroad from the persecution of the church. These were people raised in Judaism.

He is showing them the way to a God-pleasing faith. The true Jew was very religious, trying to be righteous with works. But James teaches us the practical lesson of faith meeting life.

That true faith is not a matter of religious exercise, but true faith is a matter of new birth that creates new life. God moving in me. So I may be self-disciplined enough to go to church every week.

I may be self-disciplined enough to stop some habits in my life I need to stop. I may be self-disciplined enough to serve in the church and give in the church. And still have things that I am at war with.

Maybe my temper. My kids see me at church praising and worshiping God, and I come home and they do the wrong thing, and I blow my stack. I blow up.

I say things I shouldn't say. I do things I shouldn't do. Where does this get overcome? See, the Father chose to give us new birth, a new life through the word of truth.

So again, the Father's goal was that the church, the Christian, would be the first fruits of a new creation. We're born again. We are transformed by the work of Christ.

We ask Him to change us. And when He does that, that's what begins to give us new desires that come from His word into our life to change the way we're living our life. I wrote down the word ambassadors.

That's how we're to reflect Him, His goodness, His love. And I didn't get to share this last week, but I know CU Church, Pastor Jason Epperson, he preaches three different times. But each time before he preaches, he talks about loving God and loving people, and how when God instituted the tabernacle, the largest space was the Court of the Gentiles, where all people from all walks of life, all different life experiences, social, economic, everything, could come and experience the love of God.

His desire was that all people could come into that Court of the Gentiles and experience His goodness. And I'm just thinking that's how people should experience any church they visit. They should be welcomed, encouraged, and then hear God's love expressed through the preaching, teaching, and the fellowship.

You know, Mark, when I was a young man, the hippie movement, the Jesus People movement was taking place. And some of these young men and young women came into our church. And

I remember somebody asking my father one day, he said, you see all these guys down here with the long hair, and they don't dress the way they're supposed to dress when they come to church.

What are you going to do about that? And my dad said, I'm going to do absolutely nothing about that. And they said, why not? He said, if their heart gets changed, God will change in them whatever he wants to change in them. If their heart doesn't get changed, us dressing them up and cutting their hair the way that we like for hair to be cut and to wear the clothes we want them to wear doesn't change anything.

It's just somebody who has short hair that's going to hell instead of somebody with long hair going to hell. None of those outside things are the things that matters. It's us opening our heart to the Spirit of God that we would be transformed.

We don't have a spiritual bucket list. Oh, here's the 20 things I've got to accomplish before I stand before God. It's not a chart to study our life with.

We want our heart to be transformed. Last week, we talked about this with how we see people. How do we see people? So you study the life of Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa made a choice as a as a young woman. She wanted to minister to the poorest of the poor. She taught the people in her habit that came with her to look for Jesus in the poorest of the poor.

Now, I'm telling you, in the United States of America, we don't have the poorest of the poor. They don't exist in the United States of America. You need to go to someplace like India to see what is the poorest of the poor.

And she chose to go there and to live her life there. Now, God took her because of years of serving that people and put her in places of great prominence that she even carried into those places. The spirit of loving all people and speaking the truth to all people.

And so you have this idea that when our heart gets right, God makes us right in all the circumstances. So we don't look at people that way because our hearts has become changed. So one of the places where we look at our heart is we say, God, how do I judge people? How do I see them? How would I treat them if they walked into our church? That's one of the things I like so much about James, because it's practical Christianity.

You look at this, not so much. What are the rules I'm supposed to follow? It's like, OK, I'm not a murderer. I'm not an adulterer, but maybe I'm mistreating the poor.

And this is a way you look at yourself and go, what condition is my heart in? Am I following this mercy that we're supposed to be doing? If I'm showing mercy to everybody else, then I'm probably doing what God wants me to do. But if I can look at this and go, I have not been treating other people well, then I'm not right with God. That's what I need to work on.

Yeah, and treating people well isn't just, I've got to be careful. Would I walk across the room for somebody who I thought was influential? And would I not walk across the room to be friendly and kind and to pray with someone who was wounded and hurting? Where does my heart go to? We are called to keep, listen, the royal law. What's the royal law? Love others.

Yeah, James 2.8 says, if you keep the royal law found in Scripture, love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing right. This is a direct quote out of Leviticus.

It's a direct quote from the Sermon on the Mount from Jesus when he gives us the greatest commandment. And he gives us two standards that cover all the law and all the prophets. Love God with everything in you.

Love your neighbor as yourself. That word for love there means want the best for, do the best for them, do what is good for them. It doesn't mean empower them to continue in their mess.

It means to help them grow, to help them do better, to speak the truth in love, to be a people who's wanting the best for others. This is the foundational law that governs all of human relationship. Yeah, I think this is a good part for me to segue into what I think the Holy Spirit is touching my heart.

Remind me of in 1996 when my husband and I made our first mission trip to Ghana, West Africa. We were tired. We were discouraged.

We were just sick because we saw the poverty that we've never seen before. And you know how when you go places and you think you have the answer, we did not have any answer. People were just so poor and so sick.

They hadn't seen a physician for years and years. They came with stuff on their bodies. It was so incredible.

And that night after we had given our all, we were in the room, I'll never forget it, and we were praying. We wanted to give up. And I remember clearly the Lord said, I love people more than things.

You must love these people. And I think as I look back, I realize that God was really wanting to show us. Because if you look at what God built for the poorest of the poor, you know, air-

conditioned, beautiful building, provided water, light in a place where there was nothing before.

And today to be able to have all those people, we've seen over half a million people. In this poorest of the poorest neighbor or communities where people make less than \$2 a day. There's no way that we could have done that.

Had to be God. I hear you saying that the Lord was growing you. Amen.

Amen. I mean, with your education and your doctor husband and yourself, you thought you had the answer. And let's back that up one more step.

That's our pride. And the Lord, it seems to me, was making you aware of that and that you're going to have to rely on him. And you did.

Praise the Lord. Praise God. So I think one of the things as I sit here, we could make a decision when we become Christians.

To wear all of the garments that the world put on us. When I came to the United States, I could make a choice. I can decide that I'm going to live my life and believe what Americans say about me.

Or the narrative that Americans says about black people. Or a black woman. Or whatever.

Or I could choose to be a Christ follower. Put on the garment of Christ, which is love. Yes.

And for me, I think that Christians need to remember that. God has given us a garment of love. We should be able to walk into any room and any situation and transform it.

Because we have the greatest message on earth. And that is God came to earth. He walked among us.

He died on the cross. He rose again. And He has given us a pathway to new life.

And we are to take that message all over, wherever we go. It doesn't matter where we are. And that is the way that I want to live the rest of my life.

Amen. So let me talk to you a little bit about mercy. So you have a person and they are drowning in a tub of ice water.

Is it merciful just to turn on the warm water and warm up the water? Grab them. Grab them. Take them out.

Mercy is to help them out of that thing. Yes. And sometimes people, when you're trying to help people out of something.

They don't necessarily see it as being merciful. You're warm when you're a lifeguard. You're warmed about approaching the drowning person in the lake.

That they may drown you if you're not careful. You've got to be patient enough to serve them in a way that will allow you to get a hold of them and get them to shore. And so as we go through life, yeah, there are times when we judge someone as not being merciful.

When the very thing they're doing is trying to get the person in a place where they can actually help them. And they're trying to move that way. The question is what is the motive of my heart? Has my heart been transformed? Am I a person who is serving in mercy? Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Mercy is great. So I would rather be merciful to people. But I'll tell you, I've learned if I'm going to offer somebody who's doing something mercy.

Maybe they've committed a sin or they've hurt somebody. They've done something and I'm going to give them a second chance. I don't give them a blind second chance.

I give them a structured second chance. Here are the things you now must do. You must do these things.

If you do these four things, then we're with you. If you don't, you're going to repeat this offense on other people over and over again. But it's a desire to see a person restored.

It's a desire to see a person healed. Now, as June was talking, you can go to places in the world. And again, I remember reading about Mother Teresa where they would bring these babies who were dying.

That baby was never going to have a chance to pay them back in any way. And the people in her groups, she would say to them, just take this baby and hold it. And they would take that baby and hold it, try to feed it a little bit.

But sometimes in their arms, the baby would die. Not able to give anything back. But Mother Teresa's point is I want them to feel the love of God for those last moments in life.

Are we able to show difficult people the love of God? Are we difficult people that need the love of God shown to us? Sometimes I am. Sometimes I'm the difficult person. These people say, Pastor, it's okay.

We're going to get there. It's going to be all right. Calm down.

Calm down. It's going to be all right. Pastor Mark, this reminds me of an earlier session that we had when you were leading us through the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes.

That we are called to be peacemakers. It does not say we're going to not rock the boat in a situation. It means that with the power of the Spirit, we can bring to light maybe some situation that the person that we're dealing with or group or whatever will come to light.

Liz, you think about Jesus on the boat when the storms are arising. Yes. And there's the picture.

All of the disciples are trying to bail the boat out. They're trying to do everything in man's power to get the boat. Finally, they go back to Jesus who's doing what? Sleeping.

He's sleeping. He's at peace. One of the lessons there is we have to have peace in us before we can speak peace into situations.

Amen. And if we're part of the storm, even if we're trying to bail it out desperately, but we're filled with fear and insecurity and we're filled with the threat of the day, we're not going to be able to be peacemakers. We've got to be able to be the people who have experienced the peace of God so much, know the purpose of God.

Jesus knew, I'm not dying out on this lake. I've got a cross to go to. I've got to work to get done.

Wow. This isn't going to happen here. What are you guys afraid of? I've got bigger things to fear than this lake.

I'm going to something I don't want to go to. But he had the peace of God that was able to speak peace into everything else. And I think we can have that peace when we recognize that Jesus is in the boat with us.

It's all important to recognize that we can count on him and call on him and lean on him. Mark, that's a great lesson, but I'd push it a little bit farther. What James is really talking about in this isn't the law.

It isn't just the knowledge. It's the experience. It's the touch of Christ in us.

Relationship. Some people lower our faith to a knowledge level. Got to know this, know this, know this, know this, know this.

And then we legally live by that. He is pushing us away from legalism into a faith that transforms. And that's why I like he closes this passage with mercy triumphs over judgment.

So few times do we hear people talking much about mercy nowadays. Oh, listening friends, a lot to think about. James chapter 2. Read it this weekend.

Read it all week long. There's five chapters in this book. So maybe this coming Monday through Friday you can be reading a chapter each day.

Or read it five different times this week and see what God would reveal to you. Well, thanks for joining us for today's edition of Mark and Friends. If today's program encouraged you, we invite you to continue studying and learning by visiting the Mark and Friends page at greatnewsradio.org and wluj.org. And as I've mentioned this on many programs, there's the broadcast there, a transcript, a printable PDF, program summary, key takeaways, scripture references, quotes of the day, broadcast notes, practical applications, today's challenge, a closing prayer and so much more.

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This is Mark Burns, Pastor Mark Johnson, and our room of friends with the Ministry of Great News Media. God bless you and have a great day, night and weekend. All right.

Hallelujah.

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