

THE BOOK OF JAMES

LIFE LIVING LESSONS

Session 4: Is Your Faith the real thing?

James 2:1-13

Context: James 1:22,27

Being doers of the word, not just hearers

Pure ministry is to orphans and widows. Why? (They need care and it is pure because it does not benefit materially.)

James 2:1

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

Romans 2:11

For God does not show favoritism.

Ephesians 6:9

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Colossians 3:25

Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

- Don't laugh, but, what do you think God's thoughts are on favoritism?

- There is no doubt that favoritism is a sin. What are common ways favoritism sneaks through into our everyday lives?

James is going to point out that when God's real church comes together and people have real faith, first of all, they're doers of the word. And second, they value people the way Jesus values people, not for what they have, but for who they are. As we explore the next few verses, you will see that James has in mind the idea of prejudice. Webster's definition of prejudice is: injury done to someone due to preconceived judgments or opinions without ground or sufficient knowledge. Prejudice was just as common in James' day as it is today. Let us look at the hypothetical scenario James paints for his readers

The Illustration: James 2:2-4

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?

- What does James mean when he says you have "become judges with evil thoughts?" (v4)

James 2:5-11

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," 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," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Three reasons why discrimination and Christianity are totally incompatible!

#1. It is inconsistent with _____ ' (v5)

Luke 21:1-4

¹As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ²He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

James 1:9-10

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

The world exalts the rich through fame, attention, and status, but over and over in Scripture we see that God exalts the poor. Do poor people then receive favoritism from God because he exalts them but not the rich? Not at all! God is not elevating them above the rich in any way; rather he is elevating them from their lowly place that society has placed them in. It was not Jesus' intention to say, "This widow is better than all of you," but instead to use her as an example of what it means to have a heart that is all in. Jesus has always been a support to the underdog, and this is what James is speaking of in verse 5.

What he's saying to them is this: God loves poor people, and He loves rich people, but it's the poor people that are predisposed to be more receptive because of their need. And he also says it allows them to have a heart and a passion to be rich in faith because they don't have a plan B. If you travel to a third world country, you'll discover that third world Christians really don't have big problems in their prayer life. Third world Christians talk a lot about heaven because they know it's real

Though salvation has nothing to do with our savings account, how do the struggles of a rich and a poor person differ (from a spiritual perspective)? _____

#2. It is inconsistent with _____.(v 6-7)

James looks at their current situation. The Roman aristocracy had all the power. If someone was in debt to them, they had a policy where they could go on the streets, and if you owed them, they could call the guards and throw you in jail. 80% of the church consisted of the poorest people in the Roman empire. Who was giving them a hard time and persecuting them? Rich people. And not only that, but what were they slandering?

It was against the law to worship Christ, and they were now all over the empire, they were being called "Christ ones" or "Christians." And this noble or beautiful name that they were slandering is what? Christ.

By nature, we all do it. Deep down, we want to be in the in-crowd. Give an example today of how you or I are tempted to trade a value of something that is temporary in order to have a superficial relationship with a person because somehow you think it increases your social status. _____

#3. It is inconsistent with _____. (v 8-11)

Diatribē: It is a rhetorical device used as a verbal attack against a person, group, institution, or a particular behavior.

James begins to address what he expects his readers' response to be. He can anticipate the comeback an angry reader would say. "Well, it was just because that poor guy was kinda smelly. I mean, if we put him up front, people would leave! I would rather have the ten people around him stay! And to be honest, I think the rich guy was here about a second earlier, so I just put him up front because of that... C'mon James! It's not that big of a deal! And seriously, it's not like I murdered someone or committed idolatry or something. How big of a deal is showing a little favoritism here and there?"

What are some of God's laws that people break that seem little or insignificant; some maybe even acceptable in our day? (Living together, lying, gossip..._____)

Verse 10: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery' also said 'Do not commit murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker." Compare James' teaching here in verses 10-11 to Jesus' teaching on "law breaking." How do the Ten Commandments and Jesus' teaching on them (Matthew 5 :21-48), help us understand the reality that we are all lawbreakers? _____

James says partiality is very serious business. It's inconsistent with God's character. It's inconsistent with sound logic. It's inconsistent with Scripture. And one of the greatest evidences of counterfeit Christianity, is when in the name of Christ, people who sing songs and hold up Bibles and talk about love, are not doers of the word. They talk but don't live it.

The Application

James 2:12-13

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.

What is Mercy? _____

Do you think of yourself as one who extends mercy often? Or are you one who struggles to extend mercy? _____

What should you do if you find yourself not extending mercy on a regular basis? _____

Romans 15:7

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

What does it mean to accept one another? Does acceptance mean agreement and approval?

Would you Have considered favoritism much of a sin before reading James? Or is it one "that isn't a big Deal?" _____

Conclusion

Favoritism can easily sneak into our lives and attitudes without us even noticing it. And truthfully, some of us are more worried about other “bigger” sins than this one we may view as “small.” Let us not neglect to address the possible favoritism in our minds and hearts, for if it was not important, James would have taken the time to write about something else. Pray that God would enable you to be gracious and merciful to people who do not deserve it. Finally, let us do everything out of remembrance of the mercy that God has shown to us because of Christ.