

NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 2 (PT. 1)

LAST WEEK WE DISCOVERED HOW JAMES BEGAN HIS WRITING TO THE EARLY CHRISTIANS WITH A CALL FOR A NEW WAY OF LIVING. IF WE ARE THE FOLLOWERS OF THE KING OF THE AGE TO COME, WE OUGHT NOT LOOK LIKE THE PEOPLE OF THIS AGE. THIS WILL BE SHOWN IN THE WAY WE DEAL WITH TEMPTATIONS, HOW WE LISTEN AND SPEAK, AND HOW WE TRULY SHOW DEVOTION TO OUR "RELIGIOUS FAITH". JAMES LEFT US WITH AN INTERESTING CONTRAST BETWEEN CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED AND KEEPING OURSELVES MORALLY PURE. AS WE TURN TO JAMES' SECOND CHAPTER HE WILL CONTINUE ON THE IMPORTANT THEME OF HOW WE, AS JESUS FOLLOWERS SHOULD CARE FOR OTHERS.

JAMES 2:1-13

JAMES 2:1 - SUMMARY STATEMENT OF VS. 1-13

ESV STUDY BIBLE: "THERE IS NO PLACE FOR PREJUDICE IN THE LIFE OF FAITH. "PARTIALITY" COMBINES A GROUP OF TERMS SIGNIFYING "TO ACCEPT/JUDGE ACCORDING TO FACE" AND REFERS TO FAVORITISM SHOWN ON THE BASIS OF STATUS IN SOCIETY. JESUS, ACCORDING TO JAMES, IS THE EXALTED AND GLORIOUS LORD AND CHRIST, AND IS ALWAYS TO BE THOUGHT OF AS SUCH."

JAMES 2:2-4 - EXAMPLE OF PERSONAL FAVORITISM

V. 4 - HOW DOES THE EXAMPLE THAT JAMES USES IN THE TEXT ILLUSTRATE N SOMEONE MAKING "DISTINCTIONS"? HOW DOES IT ILLUSTRATE BEING A "JUDGE" (WITH EVIL MOTIVES!)

KEY TERMS: GOLD RING, FINE CLOTHES, DIRTY CLOTHES, POOR, SPECIAL ATTENTION.

THESE ARE "KEY TERMS" BECAUSE THEY HIGHLIGHT WHAT THE CHRISTIAN IS DOING - LOOKING AT THE OUTWARD APPEARANCE AND THOSE THING WHICH GIVE "VALUE" IN THE WORLD'S EYES.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS THAT THE MODERN CHURCH MIGHT BE CHALLENGED WITH "PERSONAL FAVORITISM?"

- WEALTH/APPEARANCE OF WEALTH
- AGE
- RACE, ETHNICITY
- GENDER
- HANDICAP/DISABILITY
- PHYSICAL APPEARANCE
- MARITAL STATUS
- VARIOUS SINS
- POLITICAL OPINIONS
- BIOLOGICAL FAMILY
- PEOPLE OF INFLUENCE

Q - WHY DO WE HAVE TO BE ON GUARD AGAINST THIS? WHAT IS THE ROOT REASON WHY WE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO ACT LIKE THIS?

JAMES 2:5-7 - UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM

AS WE DISCUSSED IN JAMES 1:9-11, SCRIPTURE DOESN'T TEACH THAT GOD MAKES SALVATION DECISIONS BASED ON PEOPLE'S BANK ACCOUNTS. YOU CAN BE A WRETCHED POOR PERSON OR A HOLY, GENEROUS AND LOVING RICH PERSON AND VICE VERSA. HOWEVER BEFORE WE JUST BRUSH OFF THE CONVERSATION ABOUT THE POOR BECAUSE IT SEEMS STRANGE IN OUR AMERICAN CONTEXT, LET'S CONSIDER WHAT JAMES IS SAYING.

GOD HAS ALWAYS HAD A SPECIAL PLACE IN HIS HEART FOR THOSE WHO ARE HELPLESS. THOSE WHO ARE VICTIMS, THOSE WHO ARE EXPLOITED, THOSE WHO ARE DEFENSELESS. WE KNOW THAT A MARK OF TRUE RELIGION IS TO CARE FOR ORPHANS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR DISTRESS (JAMES 1:27). THESE TWO GROUPS REPRESENT A LARGER GROUP PEOPLE - THOSE WHO DON'T HAVE WHAT THEY NEED, OR EVEN WHO THEY NEED TO CARE FOR THEM. GOD CARES ABOUT THESE INDIVIDUALS.

HERE'S THE THING, THERE ARE POOR PEOPLE IN OUR WORLD BEYOND JUST THE GUY HOLDING UP THE SIGN ASKING FOR MONEY. THERE ARE SINGLE MOMS WORKING TWO JOBS TO PROVIDE FOR THREE KIDS, NOT BECAUSE SHE GOT PREGNANT BECAUSE SHE SLEPT AROUND, BUT BECAUSE DAD WAS KILLED IN CROSSFIRE IN THEIR GANG INFESTED NEIGHBORHOOD. THERE ARE MEN WHO SERVED AS SOLDIERS IN FOREIGN LANDS WHO ARE WORKING AT WALMART BECAUSE THEY WENT FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO THE ARMY AND NEVER GOT A CHANCE TO GET A MORE MARKETABLE SKILL THAN JUST WORKING HARD. THERE ARE COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ARE WORKING IN RESTAURANTS GETTING JIPPED BY BAD TIPPERS AND STUDYING TO BE NURSES BETWEEN SHIFTS, RENTING ROOMS, NOT APARTMENTS, ROOMS, IN ROUGH PARTS OF THE CITY. THERE ARE IMMIGRANTS WHO WENT THROUGH THE IMMIGRATION PROCESS, LEARNING TO LIVE IN A NEW PLACE WITH NEW LANGUAGES, STRUGGLING TO WORK AND LIVE BECAUSE THEY ARE SENDING MONEY BACK HOME TO FAMILIES IN WAR-TORN COUNTRIES ALL THE WHILE BEING MOCKED IN THE MEDIA AND BY THEIR *REAL* "AMERICAN" NEIGHBORS.

WE LIVE IN A WORLD THAT FAVORS THOSE WITH MONEY, THAT FAVORS THOSE WHO HAVE CONNECTIONS, THOSE WHO KNOW SOMEBODY. SURE, THERE ARE INSTANCES OF FEEL GOOD STORIES OF SOMEONE WHO ROSE TO THE TOP BY THEIR HARD WORK AND EFFORT - BUT THERE ARE MANY OTHER STORIES UNTOLD ABOUT THOSE WHO DIDN'T.

JAMES IS NOT ADVOCATING THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH TO BE THE PLACE THAT "BAILS OUT" EVERYONE IN NEED. BUT JAMES IS ADVOCATING THAT THE CHURCH BE THE PLACE WHERE, OR BETTER YET THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE EVERYONE AND NEVER SHOWS THE "FAVORITISM" THAT THE WORLD SHOWS.

IN JAMES' FIRST CENTURY CONTEXT, IT WAS THE "RICH" WHO WERE OPPRESSING THE NEW RELIGIOUS SECT (FOLLOWERS OF JESUS) AND MOCKING THEIR CLAIMS OF JESUS AS LORD. IT WAS THE POOR WHO APPRECIATED THE VALUE OF THE KINGDOM INVITATION. THE "RICH" DID NOT SEE IT AS VALUABLE BECAUSE THEY HAD A KINGDOM OF THEIR OWN MAKING TO DISTRACT THEM FROM ETERNAL THINGS. SO WHY WOULD THE CHRISTIANS OF JAMES' DAY THEN GO AHEAD AND TRY AND IMPRESS THESE FOLKS IF THEY HAPPENED TO JOIN THEM IN THEIR GATHERING.

IN LIGHT OF ALL OF THIS, JAMES IS CALLING THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH, AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH TO NOT SHOW PERSONAL FAVORITISM - EVER. AND OUR HOPE AND VISION SHOULD BE ROOTED NOT IN THIS LIFE AND WHAT IT CAN BRING US, BUT IN THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD WHERE THE KINGDOMS AND SYSTEMS AND RULERS AND GOVERNMENTS - AND ALL PEOPLE WILL BOW BEFORE JESUS THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

JAMES 2:8-11 - SERIOUSNESS OF THIS ISSUE

JAMES TAKE THIS CONVERSATION TO A PLACE FEW WOULD. HE REMINDS US OF THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS WHICH WERE GIVEN BY GOD TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL. WE ALL KNOW THAT THE COMMAND TO "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF" IS THE SECOND "GREAT" COMMANDMENT (AS JESUS HIMSELF CONFIRMED IN LUKE 22:39-40, MARK 12:31, LUKE 10:25-27). JAMES TEACHES THAT SHOWING PERSONAL FAVORITISM TO SOME (AND THUS FAVORING SOME OVER OTHER), THAT WE ARE IN FACT BREAKING THIS COMMANDMENT. AND IF WE'RE BREAKING THAT COMMANDMENT, WE'RE GUILTY OF BREAKING THE WHOLE LAW!!

JAMES 2:10 (NLT) - FOR THE PERSON WHO KEEPS ALL OF THE LAWS EXCEPT ONE IS AS GUILTY AS A PERSON WHO HAS BROKEN ALL OF GOD'S LAWS.

IN OTHER WORDS, IF YOU REJOICE IN THE FACT THAT YOU'RE NOT AN ADULTERER, BUT COMMIT MURDER - YOU'RE GUILTY! AND JAMES IS RHETORICALLY IMPLYING THAT JUST BECAUSE YOU DON'T COMMIT ADULTERY, OR MURDER, OR WORSHIP ANOTHER GOD - BUT DO SHOW PARTIALITY - YOU ARE IN SIN AND GUILTY OF TRANSGRESSING GOD'S LAWS.

HOW WE CARE FOR OTHERS IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT THEN. AND FOR THIS NEW CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, LEARNING HOW TO FOLLOW JESUS, NEIGHBOR LOVE IS A GREAT PRIORITY. LOVE FOR GOD AND LOVE FOR OTHERS SHOULD BE OUR BADGE AND TRADEMARKS. PEOPLE OF THE WORLD MIGHT DISAGREE WITH OUR THEOLOGY BUT LET THEM NOT QUESTION THAT WE WERE PEOPLE OF LOVE!

TOO OFTEN TODAY "CHRISTIANS" ARE KNOWN FOR WHAT THEY ARE "AGAINST", WHO/WHAT THEY ARE "-PHOBIC" TOWARDS, HOW THEY HAVE ALIGNED WITH A POLITICAL PARTY OR POLITICAL FIGURE. BUT THESE ARE NOWHERE LAUDED IN SCRIPTURE OR BY JESUS AS THE MARKS OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

JOHN 13:34-35 - "A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE TO YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, THAT YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. 35 "BY **THIS** ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER."

JAMES 2:12-13 - CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

AS PEOPLE EMBODYING GOD'S GOOD NEWS, WE SHOULD LIVE LIVES OF LOVE AND MERCY. THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOD'S DESIRE FOR HIS PEOPLE:

LEVITICUS 19:18 - YOU SHALL NOT TAKE VENGEANCE, NOR BEAR ANY GRUDGE AGAINST THE SONS OF YOUR PEOPLE, BUT YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF; I AM THE LORD.

MICAH 6:8 - HE HAS TOLD YOU, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD; AND WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU BUT TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH YOUR GOD?

ZECHARIAH 7:9-10 - "THIS IS WHAT THE LORD OF HEAVEN'S ARMIES SAYS: JUDGE FAIRLY, AND SHOW MERCY AND KINDNESS TO ONE ANOTHER. 10 DO NOT OPPRESS WIDOWS, ORPHANS, FOREIGNERS, AND THE POOR. AND DO NOT SCHEME AGAINST EACH OTHER.

LUKE 10:36-37 - (CONCLUDING PARABLE OF "GOOD SAMARITAN").. "WHICH OF THESE THREE DO YOU THINK PROVED TO BE A NEIGHBOR TO THE MAN WHO FELL INTO THE ROBBERS' HANDS?" 37 AND HE SAID, "THE ONE WHO SHOWED MERCY TOWARD HIM." THEN JESUS SAID TO HIM, "GO AND DO THE SAME."

LET US SPEAK AND ACT AS THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO A HIGHER LAW AND SYSTEM AND STANDARD THAN THE EVIL AGE AROUND US. THIS LAW IS ROOTED IN TRUTH, MERCY, KINDNESS, JUSTICE AND THE GREATEST LAW, THE LAW OF LOVE.

OUR PRIMARY IDENTITY IS NOT IN WHERE WE LIVE, WHERE WE WERE BORN, OR WHAT WE DO FOR "WORK". IT'S NOT IN WHETHER WE ARE MARRIED, OR NOT, HAVE KIDS, OR NOT OR ANY OTHER TEMPORAL MARKING. OUR IDENTITY COMES FROM JESUS CHRIST, AND WHAT HE HAS DONE AND IS DOING. AND WHEN WE LIVE OUT OF THIS TRUTH, WE WILL BE A CHURCH, A FAMILY, A PEOPLE UNDER GOD'S RULE, TRULY EXTENDING LIBERTY AND JUSTICE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY LOVE, FOR ALL.