

Marks

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

of Discipleship

April 18, 2021

Day 1: James 2:1

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

James asks a good question and as you will see by reading the rest of the section it is asked in relation to public gatherings. It is not just in the worship context but in any public meeting of the community. James is asking if we are to make our judgments about people based on something other than our belief that Jesus is Lord. There is nothing wrong with having a favorite but favoritism is using your power to act on behalf of your favorite. It is rigging the race so that your favorite will win.

Question: What is your favorite team and why?

Challenge: If you knew who would make the best next president and had the power to make sure they got elected (however, you would have to manipulate the voting), would you do it? Why or why not?

Scripture: Romans 2:1-16

Day 2: James 2:2-4

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 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," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

In matters of clothing, what we wear and when we wear it is important. If I have a \$300 outfit I should not wear it to clean out the manure from the hog house. If I am going to a wedding I want to be clean to honor the families of the bride and groom. Clean is different than how nice an outfit one might have. I knew someone (this happened 40 years ago) who did not want to come to a wedding because he said he did not have a sport coat. It took some talking to convince him that a coat was not required, nor would not having one put him in a bad light with everybody else. What we wear on the outside of our bodies is supposed to say something about the inside of ourselves.

Question: If you were to go to a wedding where do you think the seat of honor would be?

Challenge: Try this week to change how your dress. If you are more formal, then be casual. If you are more casual, then try more formal and see how it feels.

Scripture: Leviticus 19:11-18

Day 3: James 2:5

Listen, my dear brothers: 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?

I heard someone once say that we define rich as "anyone that has more money or property than I do." I think he was right, we tend to see others as being rich, not ourselves. Then we also have the tendency to point out that there are others less well off than ourselves. We want to be in the middle and do not like the title rich or poor. What really gets folks is when someone who is either really rich or poor talks like they are the opposite. Rich or poor is more a state of mind than of money. As James uses the term poor he means that those people depend on God more than something else. They live by their daily bread.

Question: Do you agree that rich and poor are a state of mind?

Challenge: Define poor.

Scripture: Acts 10:34-43

Day 4: James 2:6

But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?

James points out a problem with having a lot of money - it is not enough. I know someone who received \$200,000 from an inheritance. All of the money was in various stocks. This person was not well off so this money was a real gift. I saw him agonize over the downturn in the stock market (this was some time ago when the market was going down a lot) and it was driving him crazy. He kept talking about how much he was losing each day. He had lost sight that he had very little in the first place. If the inheritance would have been a few hundred dollars he would have been grateful for a long time. But because the amount was so much it seemed like he lost something instead of gaining something.

Question: Have you ever had a large financial gift? What happened?

Challenge: Define rich.

Scripture: Exodus 23:1-9

Day 5: James 2:7

Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

It was the rich who would take someone to court to gain their land. The rich were powerful and could manipulate the laws to benefit themselves. After cheating someone they would then use the legal system to steal their land. Power is to be used to create life, not steal.

Question: Why do you think rich people get special treatment?

Challenge: Can you think of an example in recent history where someone in power used that power to steal something from another?

Scripture: Ephesians 6:1-9

Day 6: James 2:8 -10

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

The "royal law" is one that comes from the King. In this case the King is God and His son Jesus Christ. By the time of James writing, the church had embraced a variety of peoples. The concept of neighbor was being expanded beyond family and clan. Those who came to Christ, both rich and poor, came to the same worship and gatherings. They were in the same room so when they came together in the name of Christ they were equal. This concept of equality in Christ was a novel idea and one that was hard for the society to grasp and carry out. In the early church if one was elected a Bishop, that person gave up all of their wealth and property to the church. So if you were rich, being elected a Bishop could be interesting.

Question: If you violate a traffic law should you get a warning (and if so, how many?) or a ticket? What do you think?

Challenge: Try to define "neighbor."

Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:17-25