

Sunday Morning Message

November 14, 2021

Putting Your Faith to Work – Study of The General Epistle of James

A Real Working Faith is Not Partial

Text – James 2:1 - 13

Congregational Reading – James 2:1 - 13

Introduction

We have been taking our time going through this General Epistle of James, which was the earliest New Testament writing, written at the time to a predominantly Jewish Church; but through the Holy Spirit of God's inspiration, also intended for a much broader audience – Jew and Gentile alike - and also designed to be applicable for many generations to come, including the time that we are in right now.

Back in chapter one, we looked at two meanings of the word "temptation." There is the temptation that comes in the form of trials and testing, and then there is the temptation that is an enticement to sin. James told us what we could do when either form of temptation comes our way.

One of the things that will help us in times of temptation is the Word of God. James explained that the Word of God is like a mirror that reveals to us the things that we don't know about ourselves that need to be fixed.

The last two verses of chapter one revealed three tests that the Bible lists for people who truly belong to God. For people who have real religion, not just people who have gone through some sort of external rituals or ceremonies. James is talking about people who really know God, and whose lives are truly being influenced by the Word of God:

"(26) If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (27) Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27)

Basically what James was saying is that true religion, which comes from a real relationship with Jesus Christ will impact your life in three ways:

1. It will cause you to control your tongue.
2. It will cause you to care about those who are less fortunate than yourself.
3. It will cause you to live a separated life.

Transition

Today, we are going to continue down the path that James put us on in those last two verses of chapter one, specifically in the area of how we treat people who are less fortunate than ourselves. People who may be poorer than we are. This passage has a broader interpretation that will show us that God treats all people equally within the church. Within the church, there is no distinction between rich or poor, educated or uneducated; there should be no differentiation resulting from different cultural backgrounds. All ground is level at the foot of the Cross.

I. The Problem of Partiality Illustrated (James 2:1 – 4)

"(1) My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. (προσωποληψίαις from προσωπολημψία – prosōpolēmpsia – meaning partiality – showing favoritism) (James 2:1)

Notice the reference to Jesus Christ being the Lord of Glory. This is a reminder that the only person that should be glorified is the Lord.

(2) For if there come unto your assembly (συναγωγὴν from συναγωγή - synagōgē) a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; (3) And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay (or bright colored) clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool (or, on the floor): (James 2:2 – 3)

The synagogues typically had just a few benches for seating in the very front and along the back walls, but many people sat on the floor. The Pharisees always wanted to sit on the benches. The poor typically sat on the floor.

In the early days of our country, people were separated by race. People of color were not permitted to sit in the front of the bus, or use the same bathrooms, or drink from the same water fountains. Even in the courthouses and churches, they had to sit up in the balcony.

(4) "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" (James 2:4)

This has the idea of being separators with wrong or wicked motives. In other words, you are preferring the rich people because of what they can do for you.

In the world, people like to categorize other people by certain criteria. In America, we have a problem differentiating between people according to their race. The Greeks tended to favor

people who were educated. The Romans place a high priority on people who were citizens rather than bond servants. Sometimes people who are famous are given a place of prominence. Perhaps the most common way that people are preferred is due to their wealth. God says that none of these distinctions are to be made within the local church. All people were to be treated equally.

II. The Product of Partiality Reversed James 2:5 – 7

"(5) Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? (6) But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats (or, take you to court)? (7) Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?"

(James 2:5-7)

Rich people tend to be the people who reject faith.

"(37) ... And the common people heard him gladly." (Mark 12:37)

"(23) Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. (24) And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

(Matthew 19:23-24)

Poor people have an easier time recognizing their need for God. Rich people tend to trust in themselves.

Note – there is absolutely nothing wrong with being rich, but do not let your wealth cloud your judgment and cause you to think that you are better than somebody else.

Whatever God has blessed you with – whether it be wealth, ability, or position – use it for the Lord.

III. The Principle of Impartiality Practiced 2: 8 – 13

"(8) If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: (James 2:8)

This “royal law” – love thy neighbor as thyself – is a quote from Leviticus 19:18. It is also quoted eight times in the New Testament. In Luke 10:29, the neighbor was the man that fell among thieves and was helped by the good Samaritan. In Galatians 5:14, the neighbor was the weaker brother that we needed to be careful about offending. In Romans 13:9, the

neighbor referred to everybody else. Here in James, your neighbor is the poor man that comes to your church.

(9) But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. (10) For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. (11) For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment." (James 2:8-13)

God is saying here that being impartial is just as much a violation of God's Law as committing murder or adultery. It is not the same sin, but it is sin.

Notice the reference to the "law of liberty" – we saw this previously in James 1:25:

"(25) But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:25)

Obedience to God's Word brings liberty. It frees us from sin, and it liberates all who are under its authority within the local church. We are all free in Christ; we are all on equal footing.

Notice that last phrase:

(13) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

Jesus said:

"(7) Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

We are to be merciful on the poor.

Conclusion

There is little that we can do about the way the world treats people, but within the local church, there are some things that we need to insist upon.

1. Everyone is on equal ground within the local church.

"(12) For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. (13) For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made

"to drink into one Spirit. (14) For the body is not one member, but many." (1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

"(27) For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:27-29)

"(9) Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; (10) And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: (11) Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian (βάρβαρος – barbarous – someone who didn't speak Greek), Scythian (Σκύθης – scythes – inhabitants of Modern day Russia – the wildest of barbarians), bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." (Colossians 3:9-11)

2. No one is to be given preference in position due their wealth or place of prominence in the world.

In the early days in America the wealthy would buy certain pews in the churches, kind of like box seats at sporting events. Wealthy families would have a place of prominence reserved for them.

God has always been especially concerned about the poor:

"(1) Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble."
(Psalm 41:1)

"(7) He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; (8) That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." (Psalm 113:7-8)

"(13) Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." (Proverbs 21:13)

"(27) He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse." (Proverbs 28:27)

Jesus commands us to act contrary to the world and actually focus some of our attention on the poor:

"(12) Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. (13) But when thou makest a feast, call the

poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: (14) And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." (Luke 14:12-14)

Though our primary responsibility here at the church is to minister to people spiritually, especially when it comes to preaching the gospel, we are also supposed to be compassionate to those who have need. We are to help them when we can with food and clothing, etc. And, we should also try to help them trying to get them in a better position financially. Helping them find good jobs, etc.

3. All of us are to prefer others over ourselves.

"(10) Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;" (Romans 12:10)

4. All of us are to serve one another.

"(13) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13)

Turn to Mark 10:35 - 45

"(35) And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. (36) And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? (37) They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. (38) But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? (39) And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: (40) But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. (41) And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. (42) But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. (43) But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: (44) And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. (45) For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

(Mark 10:35-45)