

## **Show No Partiality**

This morning we continue in chapter 2 of James' letter with frank and needed advice. "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. James begins with the endearing term "My brothers" and then in strong language makes the point that in Christ there is "no partiality" or bias or preference or favoritism. God does NOT play favorites, Christ was sent to save the world. The Apostle John recorded the words of Jesus, "If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." (John 12:47) Paul also understood Jesus had no partiality for he wrote, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." (1 Timothy 1:15) Christ calls people from every country, race and social-economic class. John wrote of Christ, "When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. <sup>10</sup> You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.' " (Revelation 5:8-10) It is because Christ was "slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" we are to be a kingdom of priests. I am not interested in what religions define as priests, but what God defines. God's definition of who we are as priests is found in the entirety of the New Testament. God saved us, equipped us and authorized us to be His ambassadors, His priests to

serve the people of the world. As Christians we are servants of our Lord Jesus who said and commands, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:18-20) This is what it means to be “priests to our God.”

However, as sinful fallen, yet redeemed people, we all have prejudices that lead to demonstrating partiality. While serving as missionaries in Papua New Guinea our small bamboo house was gravity fed water through a plastic PVC pipe coming from a system fed by the river. It broke and had to be repaired. Igona was the man that maintained this system. He and I journeyed to the provincial capital to get parts. We left early in the morning by PMV, short for Public Motor Vehicle, for the 55-mile trip, which took 6 to 8 hours by 4-wheel truck, and so it is an overnight trip. When we showed up at the missionary guesthouse just outside of Goroka to stay the night I soon found out that the nationals, like Igona, who we were there to share the gospel of Christ with, were not welcome at the guesthouse. What witness does it give when there is this separation of “us” and “them”? I addressed the guesthouse policy in direct terms as James addressed this problem in his letter here in chapter 2, and Igona and I spent the night. However, they also made it clear that I should never bring a national back to the guesthouse in the future. What message did those running the guesthouse give to Igona? Months later, this is the man that the Lord sent one dark night to save my life. A man I dearly love.

Is this prejudice, this partiality against Igona not exactly what James was addressing? Reading from James chapter 2, verse 2, “For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over

there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,'<sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" We all have memories of when we behaved in a manner that was not becoming of Christ, showing our prejudices, our partiality. Hopefully as we have grown in our sanctification we have matured in our attitude towards others no matter what their social and economic station in this life is. With God there is not partiality, yet, because of man's partiality here in this passage we find God showing concern towards the poor, for verse 5 says, "Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?"

God singles out the poor to show the depth of his love, unlike the world that honors the rich and dishonors the poor. God does this to demonstrate to the world the depth of his grace and to show the world that he sent Christ for all – not just those who the world favors. As believers we have been reborn with God's own nature and God's nature is one of great love for those in need, this is who we are to be and to be less is contrary to the nature of God. Jesus responded to the young man who proudly claimed he had kept the Ten Commandments and then asked Christ what he lacked. "Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' " (Matthew 19:21) The young man was not prepared for Jesus' answer and left. Jesus tested the man's willingness to follow him at any cost and it showed Jesus' continued concern for the welfare of the poor. Jesus then goes on to explain, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>24</sup> Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:23-24) The young man wanted to know what one work he could do to guarantee his salvation. This is the problem of the unsaved world – wanting control. Here Christ uses a "hyperbole" to illustrate his point; "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle." A hyperbole is the use of an exaggeration to emphasize a point, to force one to think outside the normal

boundaries and the illustration is not meant to be taken literally. There has been much debate about what Jesus meant by “eye of the needle” whether there was a small gate called “eye of the needle” and on and on. They miss the point, which is - One cannot hold on to their sinful priorities and personal control and think they can come to God on their own terms. The young man illustrates that reality.

Although many of the followers of Christ will not be materially wealthy they are assured that those “rich in faith” or those who believe and live the gospel of Christ will persevere and enjoy eternal life with God. God saved us to not only worship him but also to share the gospel of Christ and serve others. A perfect example is serving those in need is through the East Mountain Food Pantry. We each should be eager to serve and share the gospel and yet, this remains a struggle.

James moves on and makes clear God’s attitude towards those who abuse the poor as he continues in verse 6, “But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?” What I hear James saying, “If you turn your back on the poor, your behavior does not correspond to God’s character or to his Word. First Christ had a special place in his heart for the poor and second, it is the rich who often do not feel a need for God and because of this have an attitude and life style that blasphemes God and his teachings. Their ambitions can lead them to abuse others for their own gain.

When the British controlled India and it was one of their colonies they represented those with political power and wealth. They were the people in charge of government, business and owned the best property. Their attitude in general was to exploit the resources and people for gain; it certainly was not to serve and help. Even those who came to share the gospel of Christ struggled with prejudice that came with the nationalism of being British. In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi

wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India.

So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.” **The usher’s prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior. Gandhi believed in the Gospels, however what was done with the Gospel was the offense.** How would history be different for over a billion people if one man calling himself Christian had behaved as Christ lived and taught towards just one other man?

Throughout history God has shown his concern for the poor, not just the poor in spirit as Matthew 5:3 speaks about but the financially poor, those that society tends to reject or avoid. We get a glimpse of God’s attitude towards the poor in what he told the people of Israel through his prophet Moses, “**It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples,**”<sup>8</sup> but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and **redeemed you from the house of slavery,** from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.<sup>9</sup> **Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”** (Deuteronomy 7:7-9) In some ways it is easier for the poor to see their need for God, but this does not excuse the wealthy from fulfilling the Word of God and sharing not just the gospel, but also their wealth in an effort to help the poor of this world. King David wrote, “**Blessed**

is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him.” (Psalm 41:1) Later he also wrote, “in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy.” And later, “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.” (Psalm 68:10 and 113:7) Certainly God had done this directly as with the Israelites and when He came to earth as Christ, but we must remember, as Paul understood, that we are God’s ambassadors until Christ’s return and called to love mankind. Paul asked for prayers that he would live up to God’s calling and we should also seek prayers that each of us might live up to God’s calling in our lives. Paul wrote, “... that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Ephesians 6:19-20) My beloved, we are called to live the gospel of Christ as servants, boldly proclaiming the mystery of the gospel. How are we doing? Are we sharing Christ’s love with the poor? Are we fulfilling the royal law of the Scripture?

### **Fulfill The Royal Law**

James closes his command to live without partiality in verses 8 to 13, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.” Just like the young man who approached Jesus in Matthew chapter 19. <sup>11</sup> “For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

To show partiality or bias or favoritism is sin because it is contrary to God's nature, Christ's life, and the description of the Christian life lived in faith as defined in the New Testament, and now James says it also violates the "royal law according to the Scripture." James is not teaching we obtain salvation by being obedient to the "royal law" but rather that we live the "royal law" because of our love for Christ who demonstrated a life lived by the "royal law" because of his love for God's children.

The "royal law" is simple, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Like many true and good things in life, this is easier said than done. The word "royal" indicates that this law is sovereign. When a king issues a royal law it is applied to all in his kingdom. When the Creator of the universe issues a royal law, well then, it applies to everything and everyone for the law is not only sovereign but also it is divine.

James gives the example that if one keeps law and violates another law the person is guilty for the truth is all sin separates one from God. We are all sinners, we are all guilty and it is only through Christ we have salvation and are forgiven. So, for me the question is not is my sin worse than yours or vice versa, but rather as James writes, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." How can I development within my heart and mind a attitude of love and mercy? It is by coming to the foot of the cross and recognizing how great a God is who would sent his own Son to pay for my sin.

Seeing the love Christ had for all sinners to die in their stead and how unworthy we all are of such great love. Paul said it better than I ever could, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Let me stop here for a moment to examine the word "love" which in the Greek is the word "agape."

Agape love is pure and unconditional love without regard of how the one loved responds. Back to Paul letter to the Romans, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

<sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (Romans 5:8-11) God loves us unconditionally, purely and so completely he sent Christ to die for our sins. We are reconciled with God and we are to love as he teaches so others may also be reconciled.

As a saved sinner I will never achieve this state of pure and unconditional love. Everyone who knows me, knows that I have many struggles, many sins and even though I would desire not to have prejudices, I do. However, this is the goal to strive for. How can I grow closer to the goal? Peter wrote a key instruction, “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:8-9) In other words we begin to be able to love by humbling ourselves before God, consciously working to love others whether they treat us love or indifference or even with evil. This is hard work and in truth at times beyond us, but it is not beyond the power of the Holy Spirit that God has placed within and lives within each believer. As one actively works to love as God loves they will “obtain a blessing.” Not necessarily material wealth, but the blessing of a deeper relationship with the living God, the blessing of seeing ourselves being used to bring others to Christ and the blessing of eternity with God.

Here is our goal my beloved, the goal Christ has set before every believer and every church, before you and me, “ ‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31) If we can embrace this and strive to live this we will fulfill James’ command to live without partiality, we will

be obedient to the royal law, we will grow in humility, and we will live with a passion to share the gospel of Christ with everyone; rich and poor, easy and difficult for we are all God's children. So, my beloved, live, live each day loving and serving Christ and the people he brings into your life without partiality.

Let us pray.