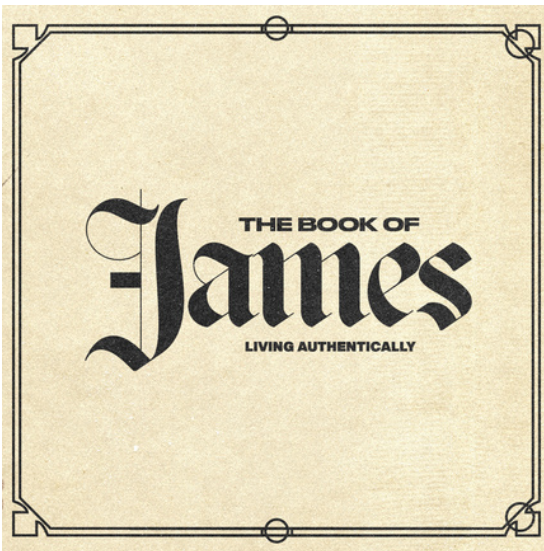


SERMON STUDY GUIDE



04.21.24 // Week 2 // “Playing Favorites”



The world's landscape rapidly changed after the resurrection of Jesus. As God's work of redeeming people continued, communities were formed. But the truth is we are still messy even while we are redeemed. James writes with a bluntness and candor that is unique in the New Testament. But amidst the direct, proverbial nature, he speaks truths that still land with us 2,000 years later. Here we learn how to put feet to our faith and live lives congruent with our beliefs!

ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS

- If you were cereal, which type of cereal would you be and why?
- Have you ever misjudged an experience or a type of food only to realize later that you were totally wrong?

GOING DEEPER INTO THE MESSAGE

Let's read James 2:1-12

1 My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. 2 For if someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor person dressed in filthy clothes also comes in, 3 if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," 4 haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 Yet you have dishonored the poor. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into court? 7 Don't they blaspheme the good name that was invoked over you? 8 Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. 9 If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all. 11 For he who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder., So if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom.

Point 1 – The ground is level at the foot of the cross.

Jesus always wants us to follow His example in how we treat people. This is one of the reasons that He lived on earth and walked among us. He wanted us to be able to look back on the examples of how He handled situations and how He treated people in those situations. He didn't want to leave us with no idea what He wanted us to do.

Jesus gave us a very clear picture of how we are to act toward all His people. He knelt before His disciples and washed their feet. He took off His outer garment and wrapped a towel around Himself and washed Judas' feet, the man Jesus knew would betray Him. He did this so we never had to ask, "I wonder what Jesus would do in this situation?"

What people do, how much money they have, where they work, what kind of house they have, how many doctorates, or PhD's they have is not what gives people their value. Their value is found in being made in the image of God. Their value is found in Jesus' own words, *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* Luke 6:36, NIV. And here Jesus was talking about how you should treat your enemies. How much more should we have mercy with our brothers and sisters in Christ!

We are to strive to be Christ-like. Christ looks at the heart. We do well when we love our neighbors, all those in God's family, as ourselves (vs. 8).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do you think it's easier to give preferential treatment to one kind of person over another? What kind of personal biases might you have to confront in order to be more Christ-like in your treatment of people?
- What reaction do you have to James saying that showing favoritism is a sin? How do you respond when someone is shown favoritism over you?
- Who is most difficult for you to see as being a part of the royal family of God? How do you think your heart would change toward them if you were to start praying for them?

Continue reading James 2:13

13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Point 2 – Choose mercy over judgement.

The type of mercy James is referring to here is genuine compassion put into action. In the Old Testament it was often used of Yahweh's personal involvement and deliverance of His people in unfortunate circumstances (Isaiah 63:7-9). This is when we see someone in need and our emotions stir us to do something about what we see. This is not empathy only, when we can understand how someone else may be feeling. This is to take action toward helping someone in need. Mercy is the proactive display of God's love to the guilty and the compassion extended to those in need.

Ironically, we are to be impartial towards people but partial in how we prefer mercy of judgment. Once our faith understands that divine mercy has overcome divine justice, faith must include a propensity of mercy toward others. After all, "we are all beggars at the foot of the cross." Yet, James uses this phrase in a particular context of justice. Injustice is being committed against the poor and dejected of society. Unfortunately, that is happening even within a community of believers. James has serious words for this! This is not a minor thing, but something that needs to be drastically corrected. His point is if you want to be harsh toward the less fortunate, you will be dealt with harshly by God. But for those who are merciful (especially, in context of the poor), mercy will triumph over judgment for them! Mercy is one of the only themes in the Bible where reciprocity actually exists. Mercy is the currency of the kingdom of God (not judgment). It's "the coin of the realm."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- If nothing moved you toward mercy before, has that shifted in light of James 2:13? Why do you think God wants you to show mercy to others?
- When has someone shown you mercy and what kind of impact has it had on you in your life? Who is someone who you could show mercy to this week? What would that look like?
- How are we going to be known for our acts of mercy?