

I Believe... So Now What?
(Week 4)
James 2:1-13
"Blessed Are The Merciful"

Introduction

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Matthew 5:7

As we have previously stated, the book of *James* has often been called a "commentary" on the Sermon on the Mount. The **second chapter of James** certainly fits well within this framework. What many people fail to grasp is that when Jesus preached His famous sermon (found in **Matthew 5-7**), He began by actually describing the transformation process of someone who is being regenerated (born again) by the Spirit of God. This transformation begins with humility and brokenness.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs."

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Matthew 5:3-4

You see, when The Holy Spirit of God begins to do a work in us, He will first show us that we are sinners and convict us of our sins (**John 16:8**). This causes us to realize we need a Savior (poor in spirit), as well as, feel a sense of remorse and brokenness before God for our sinful condition (Blessed are those who mourn). The reason that Christ says that these people are "blessed" is because they are in the beginning stages of salvation, by grace, through faith. When we are convicted and broken, we are finally in the place where we can receive the mercy of God.

When we act on our brokenness and turn to Christ for forgiveness, we enter into the next phase of our regeneration.

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness:
for they shall be filled."**

Matthew 5:6

The transformation has now begun, and we long to please God, rather than our own selfish and sinful desires. We realize that we are far from perfect, but we so long to be! The Spirit of God is changing us from the inside out. We'd rather please God, than have the things that this sinful world could offer. We have been forgiven and changed, never to be the same again! We certainly did not deserve such mercy, but it has been given nonetheless. As a result, we WILL show mercy to others. To do this is "proof positive" that we are being transformed into the image of Christ. We long to show His mercy, because He has been so merciful to us! This is why Jesus says:

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Matthew 5:7

And **THAT** brings us to the **second chapter of James** my friends. Those who have been truly born again will show no favoritism in whom they choose to love, for to do so is to bring dishonor to the One Who has redeemed us with His own blood. Jesus chose to love us. Therefore, we must choose to love those that He loves. There can be no exceptions to this rule for the born again Believer. If Christ is in you... you **will** love. Simple as that. A true Christian loves to show mercy, because he has been given mercy. Simply put, we will always: 1) Embrace the Rejected, and 2) Embody the Royal Law of God. Jesus has never, and will never, show favoritism. He simply loves... unconditionally. That's the reason that we can all gather here and sing the songs of the redeemed. If we are to be as He is, then we will prove it by loving... loving as He loves (**John 13:35**). *The Bible* plainly tells us that with God there is no one considered to be above another. In fact, we have been commanded to always esteem others better than ourselves (**Philippians 2:3**). There is no such thing as a "Christian Snob".

Embrace The Rejected (vs 1-7)

"My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. 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, if you look with favor on the one wearing the fine clothes and say 'Sit here in a good place,' and yet say to the poor person, 'Stand over there,' or 'Sit here on

the floor by my footstool,' haven't you made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 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? Yet, you have dishonored the poor. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into court? Don't they blaspheme the Good Name that was invoked over you?" **James 2:1-7**

James makes it abundantly clear in this passage that it is not Christlike to play favorites. The phrase **"do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ"** would be better translated, "stop holding the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect to persons". Simply put, James is telling us that if we truly belong to Christ, then we will love and cherish everyone equally. *The Bible* clearly tells us that God doesn't play favorites.

"For there is no favoritism with God."

Romans 2:11

God doesn't care how much money you have, or where you came from, He simply loves. **John 3:16** tells us that, **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life"**. Let the truth of this sink in for a moment. Can you name one good thing that you have done that would have earned your salvation? Answer: No. You were saved, because God had mercy on you and nothing else. He didn't look down on you one day and decide that you were better than those around you. He just had mercy. Why? Because showing mercy is in His nature, that's why! So doesn't it stand to reason that if He actually lives within you, then you will also long to be merciful to others? Of course, it does. This desire to be merciful is actually proof positive of your salvation (**Matthew 5:7**). So therefore, it is impossible to **"hold on to faith in Christ"** and judge others based upon their social standing (or anything else for that matter).

We live in a world full of prejudice. It's just a matter of fact. People discriminate against others for every reason in the world. The natural disposition of humanity is to dislike and mistrust anyone who is different from us. Possessing Christ (holding on to Him - **vs. 1**) should forever change all of that. James uses, in this passage, the illustration of rich versus poor, but there are many more ways in which we can discriminate. I love the richness of his analogy. The first man comes to the gathering of believers and is obviously wealthy. The literal translation in James' description of him is that he is **"gold ringed, dressed in shining garments"**, while the poor man enters wearing filthy rags. These two men according to scripture are equal in the eyes of God, but we see them as differently as night and day.

I cannot tell you how many pastors that I have known who absolutely fawn over those that they believe to have wealth and influence, while hardly giving a second glance to those that they deem, shall we say, "less desirable". This ungodly practice goes on every Sunday in our churches, and it needs to **STOP!** God forgive us, when we look down on people before even finding out who they are! James says that we long to give the rich the best seats in the house, while we could care less if the poor ever feel welcome amongst us (**vs 3**).

James goes on to remind his flock that God typically uses what the world considers as "nobodies" to do His greatest works (**vs. 5**). Have you ever wondered why Jesus was born to a poor family and grew up on "the wrong side of the tracks" as it were? Remember what people said about Jesus, when they heard that He was from Nazareth? They said:

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

John 1:46

So why do you think that God uses those whom others find insignificant? Because God loves to show His limitless mercy on the rejected, and also, because He gets all the glory when those people shine! Look through your *Bible*, and you will find an amazing group of "nobodies" that God turned into "somebodies". Look at King David for example. When the prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king of Israel, no one even thought to call David in from the fields! Don't look down on others my friend, because when the world sees a lowly shepherd boy, God just might see a king!

James warns us all that when we make distinctions about others, for any reason, we **"become judges with evil thoughts"** (**vs. 4**). Doesn't sound very flattering, does it? When you take one look at someone and decide that they are not worthy of your time, my friends, you have just proven that you are nothing like The Lord Jesus Christ. Think about it this way. Every single person that you meet will fall into one of these two categories: 1) They are born again, and **Jesus** lives inside them. Or 2) They are

lost, and **Jesus** died to save them. Please tell me which of these types of people that He would command us **not** to love.

James goes on to say that the very ones that we tend to favor are usually the ones who will exploit us in the end! Of course, in James' day, wealthy Jews were severely persecuting those who had turned to faith in Christ. The first century Church was all too familiar with poverty, because their property and wealth were seized by those who were in power. But I can't help but think of what is going on in our world today. So many "celebrities", who would have nothing were it not for those who flock to see their movies or buy their CD's, have no regard whatsoever for those that they deem to be the "little people". Very often, they speak with contempt for those who follow Christ and scornfully disdain any who still believe *The Bible* is absolute truth. And yet, even within the church, many continue to idolize these ungodly people, who are devoid of morality. Why on earth do Christians support the wicked? Listen to what James says:

"Don't they blaspheme the Good Name that was invoked over you?" **James 2:7**

To James, it was madness to look up to these types of people, while turning our backs upon the very "salt of the earth". Give me a poverty stricken child of the King of Kings over the richest blasphemer in Hollywood... every day and twice on Sunday! We must embrace those whom the world has rejected, regardless of race, social standing, or outward appearances.

"There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female: since you are all one in Christ Jesus." **Galatians 3:28**

Embody The Royal Law (vs. 8-13)

"Indeed, if you fulfill the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by The Law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the entire law and yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking it all. For He Who said, 'Do not commit adultery', also said, 'Do not commit murder'. So, if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you are a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom. For judgement is without mercy to the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgement." **James 2:8-13**

The "Royal Law", as James called it, has two basic components.

"...Love The LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." **Luke 10:27**

James calls this the "Royal Law", because it is given to us by the King of Kings, and we, as His followers, are citizens of His Kingdom. Jesus taught that the Ten Commandments could be summed up in these two statements. The first four Commandments are about **"loving God"**, while the last six are about **"loving our neighbor as ourselves"**. It is incumbent upon every child of God to embody this Royal Law. We have been shown God's mercy and forgiveness. Therefore, we love Him, and we long to show His love to others.

Many would try to find "loopholes" in who they must love, but the Royal Law offers no exceptions. In the parable of "The Good Samaritan", Jesus emphasizes what a true neighbor is. The Pharisees in Jesus day were given to prejudice. The verse we just read from **Luke Chapter 10** is actually a portion of a conversation between Christ and a scholar of Jewish law, which began with the religious leaders question:

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" **Luke 10:25**

Jesus turned the question back to him and asked what was written in The Law. When the Levite gave His response to Love God, and Love your neighbor as yourself, Jesus told Him to do this and he would live (**Luke 10:28**). The man instantly realized that he could not possibly live up to this perfect standard, so he tried to carve out an exception for himself by asking:

"Who is my neighbor?" **Luke 10:29**

It was then that Jesus told His amazing parable of “The Good Samaritan”. The hero of the story, as we all know, was a Samaritan, a foreigner. He would have been considered a mongrel by the Jews. Jesus made it very clear that under God’s Royal Law, we are to love everyone as we love ourselves. Some have tried to use this scripture to encourage people to learn to “love themselves”, so that they can better love others, but nothing could be further from the truth. To become a follower of Christ we must first “humble” ourselves, not engage in some form of “self loving” narcissism. We are born “loving ourselves”. We feed ourselves when we are hungry, we clothe ourselves, we provide shelter for ourselves. Trust me, most people are very good at providing for themselves without any additional manufactured attempts at “self love”.

‘To love our neighbor as ourselves’ simply means that we are to look to the needs of others with the same diligence that we look to our own needs. A born again believer in Christ shouldn’t be able to fill his own stomach, while knowing that his neighbor is going hungry! THIS is what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. And, according to Jesus, this kind of love knows no racial, social, or economic prejudice. God so loved “the world”, and so we must. To love Christ with all that we have is to love all mankind with all that we are. This is the very embodiment of “The Royal Law”. Show me a person, who calls himself a “Christian”, but has no burden for the needs of those around him, and I’ll show you someone who is deceiving himself. If Jesus is on the inside, His love will show up on the outside.

James goes on to re-enforce his point by reminding his readers that no matter how religious (law abiding) they claim to be, to break one of God’s Laws is to be a lawbreaker (**vs. 9-11**). Many have used these verses to say that “all sins are the same in God’s eyes”. I strongly disagree with this statement. Stealing a candy bar from the grocery store is absolutely not “just as bad” as molesting a child. Only the misguided would make such an argument. In *The Old Testament*, there were different punishments for different crimes. These punishments were given by God Himself in the Law of Moses. If God truly felt that “all sins were equal”, then He would not have given different punishments in The Law. What James is referring to is simply this, if you break one of God’s Laws, then you are a lawbreaker. It doesn’t matter which law that you break. If you call yourself a Christian, but choose to ignore the command to love your neighbor as yourself, then quite frankly, you are not a Christian. We don’t get to pick and choose which commandments we get to obey.

James tells his flock that if they refuse to treat everyone with impartiality, they are indeed sinning against the God that they claim to love:

“If, however, you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by The Law as transgressors.” **James 2:9**

The word that James uses for “sin” (*hamartia* in the Greek) simply means to “miss the mark” or to fall short of God’s standard. But, the word he uses for “transgressors” (*parabates*) is much more severe. It means to intentionally “cross the line”. James is strongly warning his readers to take the commandment given in the Royal Law seriously, for we can rest assured... that God does. Love your neighbor as yourself and do not forget that **everyone** is your neighbor, no matter who they are or where they come from!

James finishes his thought by reminding us that we have been shown mercy. Therefore, we are to be merciful (**vs. 12**). The next verse is often misinterpreted to say that we somehow can earn God’s mercy by being merciful. This is definitely NOT what James is saying. No one can earn the mercy of God. But, if someone has truly been born again by The Spirit, then they will automatically become merciful. Those who show no mercy, demonstrate that they do not belong to God, and therefore, they will stand before Him in judgment and receive the punishment that they so richly deserve.

I LOVE the last portion of **verse 13** which says:

“Mercy triumphs over Judgment.”

Listen to me child of God. Jesus has forgiven you for everything that you have ever done. He loves you with an everlasting love and has promised to give you everlasting life. Though we deserved judgment, we were shown mercy. Mercy has triumphed over judgment! Since we have been shown such grace, why would we ever withhold it from others. Don’t play favorites. Embody the Royal Law. Love your neighbor as yourself. Then, as James would say, by this you shall prove that you possess “true religion”!

And ALL of God’s people said... TRUTH!!!