

FPFWC Christian Development



God's Call

February 2023

Winter Quarter

February 18, 2023

Lesson #3 – Responsibility of Those Called

SCRIPTURE TEXT – James 2:1-12

ICE BREAKERS-

1. Why does God condemn favoritism and what are its consequences?
2. Why is it important that we value what God values?

Key Verse: “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?”—James 2:5

LESSON BACKGROUND –

There are four or five men named James in the New Testament, so we should take care not to mix them up (see Mark 1:19–20; 15:40; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). Tradition has taken the phrase “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1) to refer to the James who was the half brother of Jesus (see Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Along with Jesus’ other half brothers, James did not believe in Jesus before the resurrection (John 7:3–5). By the Day of Pentecost, however, Jesus’ brothers had come to believe in Him (see Acts 1:14). Paul indicates that James had been a witness of the risen Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7).

James had become a leader in the Jerusalem church by the mid-AD 40s (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). His exact role is not clear in the text, but Paul groups him with the apostles and lists him alongside Cephas (that is, Peter) and John as “pillars” of the church (Galatians 2:9; see 1:19). The significance of this is heightened when we consider the centrality of Jerusalem to the earliest Christians. The Jerusalem church was more than just one congregation among many. It was the mother church; what happened there mattered to all Christianity. We see the truth of this, as well as James’s concrete impact, in the account of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. There James gave the final, decisive word on a vital doctrinal matter after Peter and Paul had spoken their minds. The event portrays James as an observant Jew who expected Gentile converts to observe only certain foundational aspects of the Old Testament law (see Acts 15:19–20).

Outside of the New Testament, the Jewish historian Josephus (born around AD 37) dates the martyrdom of James to AD 62.

Given the details of James's life and death, a reasonable supposition is that the letter was written in the AD 50s, if not in the 40s. That makes it one of the earliest of the New Testament documents. Likely it was written from Jerusalem.

Structurally, the letter lacks certain typical features of an ancient letter, features that we see throughout Paul's letters. After opening with standard features of sender, recipients, and greeting, it lacks the typical thanksgiving and closing. The writer proceeds loosely from topic to topic, appealing to the Old Testament often. The tenor of the letter is thoroughly Jewish, having been written by a Christian of Jewish background to Christians of Jewish background—fellow believers under duress. These recipients of the letter are “scattered abroad,” a reference to what is often called the Diaspora (James 1:1; compare John 7:35; 1 Peter 1:1–2).

LESSON COMMENTARY

James 2:1–13 (MBC): 2:1–4. The maxim in 1:19 contains the injunction to be “quick to hear.” In this passage, being “quick to hear” God's Word means, among other things, refusing to show favoritism to the rich. James pointed out that true religion consists in showing kindness to the disadvantaged (1:27), and the related idea is that of refusing to cater to the rich (2:1–13). These readers would be especially susceptible to such partiality in light of their oppressive circumstances (cf. 1:1–12)—that is, they might be tempted to show partiality to the rich in the hope of gaining financial assistance from them. Discrimination is one of the worldly stains to avoid (1:27). Showing favoritism or honor to anyone other than Christ disregards the exclusive glory that belongs to Him (our glorious Lord). James illustrates partiality with a rich man who comes into the reader's assembly or church meeting (vv. 2–4; cf. 1Co 14:23–25) and is given special attention. Money, prestige, or the need for financial security may have driven their evil motives, an understandable but unacceptable impulse even during hard times.

2:5. The rich rely on their money (Mt 19:23), but the poor of this world become wealthy or rich in faith. To be heirs of the kingdom may be equivalent to entering and enjoying the kingdom at the end of the age. Others understand the phrase to mean that faithful believers will receive a position of authority in the future world (Lk 12:43–44; Ac 20:32; Col 3:24; Rv 2:26). For those who love Him, see 1:12. 2:6–7. James asked how the readers could have dishonored the poor since (1) God Himself honors the poor (1:6), (2) the rich force believers into court with false charges, and (3) the rich blaspheme the fair name of Jesus (1:1; 2:1) held so dear by Christians.

2:8–9. Jesus made love your neighbor (Lv 19:18, 34) a foremost command (Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31). This is the royal law because of its preeminence and because it was sanctioned by the King, the Lord Jesus. The OT command to love one's neighbor (v. 8; Lv 19:18) prohibited partiality (v. 9), particularly against the poor (Lv 19:15).

2:10–13. The Mosaic law is an indivisible unit. Breaking one command incurs the same penalty for breaking the whole law. Please note that although the law is a unit, this does not mean that all commandments are equal. Jesus referred to both the greatest commandments (Mt 22:36–40) and the “weightier provisions” of the law (Mt 23:23). The word guilty does not refer to feelings of blame but to God’s judicial indictment. God is “one” (cf. Jms 2:19) and spoke against both adultery and murder (v. 11). To violate either one makes a person a transgressor of the law. The sin of partiality is elevated to the sins of adultery and murder. Christians must speak and act (v. 12) out of the forgiveness they have received. For the law of liberty, see the commentary at 1:25. The evaluation or judgment (v. 13) of Christians who have shown no mercy will be exacting (cf. 3:1). For those who treat others with mercy, mercy triumphs (wins out) over a stern evaluation (cf. Mt 5:7, 12). This judgment is limited to believers since the verse forms an inclusio with 3:1, where the judgment is on James and all Christian teachers. For God’s evaluation of Christians in the future, see the comments on Rm 14:10–12; 1Co 3:10–17.

LESSON NUGGET – If you have true saving faith, you will practice impartiality and see people in terms of character and not clothing. You will not cater to the rich or ignore the poor, but you will love each person for the sake of Jesus Christ. Christian love simply means treating others the way the Lord treats you and doing it in the power of the Spirit.

Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, Wiersbe Study Bible, The Life Application Bible and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary