

Studies in James

James 2:1-13

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The Message

What is it that makes us look up to and admire others? A simple question perhaps, but our answer as a Christian is likely to be (and should be) fundamentally different to the answer of a non-Christian. A non-Christian may say wealth, success and power. The message of the first half of the second chapter of the Book of James gives us some insight into the answer, and forms the basis of this study.

Jesus teaches us that the most important commandment is to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart {kardias} and with all your soul {psuchees} and with all your mind {dianoias} and with all your strength {ischous}*”. The second most important commandment is to “*Love your neighbour as yourself*” (Mark 12:29-31). When we look at the Ten Commandments together we will look in much more depth at the significance of Jesus’ response, but we need to ask ourselves what result obeying these commandments will have in our lives.

James tells us simply: “*do not with partiality to persons have the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory*” (James 2:1). We need to understand the calling that we have to love the unlovable as well as the lovable - our faith needs to be as real and as visible to each. In Galatians we read “*There cannot be Jew nor Greek; there is no slave nor freeman; there is no male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:28).

James illustrates this using a very real example, of welcoming the rich man to a greater extent than the poor man. (James 2: 2-6). This forces us to confront whether or not we obey the greatest two commandments. We are being called to recognise Jesus in the face that the world discards and unloves. In verse 5 we find that not only are we to welcome the poor but also that we should be the poor. Only if we are the “poor” ourselves can we know that we are “chosen to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love him”. (Luke 6: 17 - 49).

It is in recognising that everybody is our ‘neighbour’, including rich and poor, and loving them all equally as ourselves, that we find the outworking of the royal law - we cannot be selective. This law is based on love, and is a consequence of our love for God. If we are not truly seeking to ‘love’ then we will ultimately be led to show partiality and “work sin, having been found guilty as transgressors by the law” (James 2:9).

James brings this passage to a conclusion by reminding us that we must “*Speak and do so as being about to be judged by the law of liberty*” (James 2:12). Since this law is governed by love, we can have confidence that judgement will be merciful since “*mercy rejoices {katakauchaomai} over judgement*” (James 2:13).

Questions

1. How would you as a Christian define ‘success’? How can we become more ‘successful’?
2. How do we recognise the poor people?
3. How can we speak and act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty?
4. What would judgement without mercy mean for us?
5. What does it mean “mercy rejoices over judgement”?