



## **MAKING IT REAL 3 - No Favouritism James 2 v 1 to 13**

In many ways the first chapter of James acts as an introduction to the entire letter. But James now turns his attention to one of the major themes he has raised – that of wealth and charity. That demands that we face up to how we regard other people whether they have more worldly wealth or less than us. But we must beware of taking extreme views like God only loves poor people or all wealth is evil. That is not what James is saying

James issues a warning against showing favouritism to the wealthy and looking down on the poor person. That was the prevailing culture of the first century Hellenistic culture. There is nothing new under the sun - we have considerable current evidence of the higher status of the rich in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If we allow ourselves to over-value the rich, we have surely missed the point of James 1:27 – ‘keep yourselves from being polluted by the world’. Most of us would not consider ourselves to be rich but few of us would be considered ‘poor’ when measured against many people in the world today.

We must therefore look carefully at this passage and see what it has to say to us and whether our way of dealing with people from all parts of society is at it should be. Neither must we ignore that Jesus pronounced a blessing on the poor (Matt 5:3) and issues a warning to the wealthy (Matt 19:23 to 24). That would seem to suggest that ‘to whom much is given, much is expected’.

### **FROM THE PASSAGE**

James’ prelude gives us the basis of his point. ‘As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ .....’ would suggest that the way we treat less fortunate people is not an add-on to our other activity but it is a central value to those who have trusted the Lord Jesus

1. Is it possible that we respond to the needs of the poor with an occasional charitable donation and think we’ve done enough?  
Should we go further than that and if so, how?

Most of us would be deeply offended if we were accused of looking down on people simply because they are not well dressed. Do we all have prejudices that mean we are more likely to be welcoming to people more like ourselves? I’m sure we would not deliberately scan the clothes worn by a person and adjust our welcome accordingly.

2. But do we naturally gravitate towards people we know well and ignore the person we don’t recognise?  
Does that happen at the end of our services?  
Do we go looking for the person on their own or the couple clearly unfamiliar with the church?

From verse 5 onwards we have yet another biblical rich/poor analogy. (Luke 6:20, 1 Cor 1 18 to 29). By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the NT word ‘poor’ came to mean those who did not trust in material wealth. For James this is simply bigger than ‘worldly wealth’. It is about those who do not trust in worldly values but rather trust in God for all their needs.

3. Have we lost that value faced with the world of consumerism that demands you need the very latest product to be ‘cool’?  
Do we too easily surround ourselves with the products that we simply must have?  
Do we need to re-evaluate our spending?

We fool ourselves if we think genuine poverty is no longer with us. Worldwide we forget, living in largely prosperous western Europe, that vast swathes of the world are living on the breadline. But there are still many poor people living

in the UK. The 'exploitation of the rich' (v6) is a live issue – there are wealthy people who use their wealth to good effect but there are plenty who do not.

4. Should we as believers be concerned about the state of poverty in our world today?  
At what level should we engage with this issue?  
Should it prompt any direct action on our part? If so, what?

As if to drive home his point, James draws us back to scripture in verses 8 to 13. He points out that God's word does not condone the showing of favouritism. James quotes 'the royal law', namely 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Matt 22: 37 to 40). In typical style James uses the words of Jesus to condemn favouritism as a sin (v9). And if you break this law, it's as if you are breaking them all. The only response to sinfulness is repentance.

5. It may not be right to go round the group and confess the times we have favoured one person rather than another. But ask each other how, at all levels in our church, we could root out a sin that clearly is serious. Has it happened in your own small group? If not, brilliant. Are you conscious of it when we gather at church? Is post lockdown a chance to put it right?

'Speak and act' – the key link in the epistle of James and here we see it again. (v12) We so easily magnify some sinful acts to be worse than others. Jesus associated discrimination against the poor with murder – he said that lust was no different to adultery. We may say that I'm not a murderer or a rapist so I'm not a bad person. Sometimes this means we look at another person and see their sin as worse than anything we have ever done. (favouritism)

6. Do we 'grade' sinfulness to justify ourselves. Is it possible that we look at others and criticise their behaviour?  
Pray that each of us may be non-judgemental and understand that 'mercy triumphs over judgement'

## **THINGS TO DO**

'Fear not, mercy triumphs over judgement' (v13) – if you're about to SAY or THINK anything may it be merciful not judgemental

This is a tough passage which challenges so many values in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain.

There are many ways to respond to this

1. We look at ways that we have judged another person and, if appropriate, say sorry
2. We can look at who we talk to when we get to meet in church – maybe we can look out for someone we DON'T know rather than talk to the 'in crowd'.
3. Look out for a lonely person in your locality and make a point of greeting them

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Ask yourself if you have grown into person that only likes people like yourself

Is it time to challenge that thinking?