

The Rich and the Poor. James 2:1-13

Acts 10:9-28

John 4:5-26

The society of the time of the early church had many divisions. Through out scripture we see these listed. There were lines drawn between peoples different social status's, those who were slaves and those who were free, there were the rich, and the poor, but not only was society split by social standing it was also split between nationalities. The Jews separated themselves from the gentiles thinking themselves superior. Christianity had a massive impact on this society, the Gospel is for all people, not just the Jews, not just the free, not just the rich but for every man, woman, and child. The Gospel of Jesus Christ bridges this gap between these different people groups, and it has a uniting effect under the blood of Christ.

Paul wrote of this in Galatians that we just finished, Chapter 3, verse 27 and 28 Paul said, “ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew, nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promises. Paul also said it again in Colossians 3:11 he says “ there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Paul is describing the family of God. These social distinctions have no merit, there is no favoritism, no advantage in God's society. The Rich see themselves as being privileged due to their money and power, Jews saw themselves as being privileged due to the promises given to Abraham which they believed being the natural descendants of Abraham that it made them privileged of God. Also educated people and societies always seem to see themselves as being just a little bit better then the uneducated, we see where Paul lists the Greeks and barbarians. But None of these distinctions matter when it comes to Christ.

As we have been studying through James it becomes rather apparent how important this little book is to us today, to the church today. This very thing that James is talking about here in the first few verses of chapter 2 seems to not only be a part of our society here in America, but is also a part of our churches.

In Galatians we learned of God's adoption, and who the true heirs of the Abrahamic promises were made to. James affirms this also in chapter 1 when he says that the Lord promised to give the Crown of Life to all those who love him. These are the adopted children, the heirs of Abraham, The gospel calling goes out to all of mankind, no matter your nation, your social status or creed. I am sure in a society that was so set in their classes, and distinctions that such an idea of equality between them was hard to grasp. In fact we see that many of the Jews would not accept the fact that the Gentiles were apart of God's people.

Even Peter had to be reminded of this through a vision recorded in Acts chapter 10. We are all familiar with this vision that peter had. He had went to a rooftop to pray and the bible records that he had become very hungry and fell into a trance, and before him a great sheet bound at the corners descended to him and on it were all kinds of animals, creeping things, and birds. Then he heard a voice telling him to stand up, kill, and eat. Of course Peter didn't want to do it, because everything that was shown him he believed to be unclean according to the Jewish dietary laws. But God told him, Peter, what God has made clean, you must not call unclean.

In fact the bible tells us that God chose the foolish things to confound the wise, and the weak things to bring shame to the strong. If you remember a few weeks ago James said that the lowly brother should glory in his exaltation. Even the slave, or a person who is suffering, or if you find yourself stricken with an illness, if you are a child of God you still obtain a treasure beyond any earthly treasure, beyond any riches of silver and gold..you obtain the gift of God's salvation, his adoption,

So on just a surface reading of James chapter 2 this morning it is quite apparent that the groups of people he was writing to still struggled with partiality, they did not seem to grasp the idea that all are equal under God. There is more to this than just simple favoritism, James warns us in verse 9, that if you show partiality you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. He goes on to remind us just as Paul did in verse 10 here he says that whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he is guilty of all. For he who said do not commit adultery, also said do no murder. Now if you do not commit adultery but you do murder you have become a transgressor of the law.

Paul was dealing with partiality with the Jew's and their treatment of the Gentile Christians in the book of Galatians. Here James is dealing with partiality between the treatment of the rich and the poor in the church. Reminding them again that God shows no partiality, he says in verse 5. Listen, my beloved brethren, Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? This gift has been given to the poor, as well as to the rich. What ever our social status is in this world should not define us in the gathering of believers, for we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and equal in the sight of God.

This is just as important to the churches today as it was in the ancient church. We tend to cater to the successful, attend to those who have money in the assembly. The pastor may choose his messages so not to offend these people. Often times a person, or family who has money in the church will be catered too for the church does not want to offend them for fear that they will not give tithes, or give support to the new building project. We tend to focus on making sure that these people are comfortable, and welcome and sometimes we do this at the expense of others.

James is warning these people not so much about their treatment of those in regular attendance but of people who are visiting. Verse 2, says that if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him "You sit here in a good place": and say to the poor man, "You stand there, or sit here at my footstool" Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts.

There is a temptation to do this very thing for the reason that I just mentioned. I think there can be a tendency to cater to the person who appears successful for hopes of the money, and support that will flow into the church. If we look at a poor person entering the building, versus the rich, if we are not careful we can easily fall into as James says, judges with evil thoughts. We look upon the rich and think, "wow, if this person stays with us we can finally have the funds to remodel the sanctuary. But then we turn and look at the poor man and think, well this person won't be giving much, if anything and in fact will probably just be a further burden on us. This type of thinking is exactly what I think that James means by being judges with evil thoughts.

As Christians we need to be careful not to fall into this trap, of being guilty of the the sin of partiality.

We are claiming to be followers of Christ and we should act as such. People are always watching our conduct and are quick to point out our faults, especially those who ridicule and despise us because of Christ, they will always be quick to point out our sins.

We need to guard ourselves because those on the outside see our actions as a reflection of Christianity, if we show this type of favoritism, bias, or racism in the church we are showing the world that Jesus Christ himself is partial, that he is prejudiced, biased, or even racist. We need to be careful that we do not taint the glory of God through our own sin of partiality.

We must be careful not to judging unjustly. If we judge the poor man, and cast him off to the side we may very well be finding ourselves in a very bad place. David says in Psalms 109 verse 30, and 31 I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth, Yes, I will praise him among the multitude. For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, To save him from those who condemn him. We do not want to be on the side against God, condemning the poor. We should not become judges with evil thoughts.

James even tell us right before launching into this admonishing to flee from partiality, he says that pure and undefiled religion is to care for the orphans and widows. To care for the poor, scripture is full of examples of Christ's ministry to the poor and oppressed.

Another thing we need to guard ourselves from with this sin of partiality is to be careful that we do not despise, or think less of those that God has chosen. We need to be careful to not be like Peter and judge what God calls clean, unclean.. Rather we should be looking to what God says. Remembering that God chooses the weak things, and the base things, the things that are broken, and despised, lost and oppressed.

If we look at the ministry of Christ recorded in the gospels, we see that he usually ministered to the poor, the sick, the people that society despised, the tax collectors, the prostitutes. In Luke Chapter 7 we see that John the Baptist has sent some of his followers to ask Jesus if he was the coming Messiah, and Jesus answer in verse 22, Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

Christ does not show partiality, his gospel is to all of mankind but it seems that the poor, the suffering, the sick, and the dying are the ones who are more likely the respond to it. For it brings hope to the hopeless, and mercy to the oppressed. The rich hope in their riches, and power, and James says that is it not the Rich who oppress you and drag you into the courts. If you remember the situation that was going on in Jerusalem at the time. There was a great famine, and the rich families were buying up the lands, increasing their riches, and oppressing the poor by making them work the lands they previously owned for barely enough wages to survive.

James is reminding them of this and using it I think to chastise them in their partiality. Why are you favoring the rich.. do you not remember it was they who oppressed you.. who dragged you into the courts and took your land? So just as he was warning us not to dishonor the poor that God has chosen to honor, we should not show special honor to the Rich who may end up oppressing us. Holding us hostage by threatening to leave the church, or with hold their giving.

Another danger of the sin of partiality is that we break the royal Law. Paul said in Galatians that all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: That You shall love your neighbor as yourself. If we are showing partiality toward one over another we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves. James says it

here also in verse 8. If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well; but if you show partiality you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors, for whoever shall keep the whole law and stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

Continuing in verse 12 he says, So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty, for the judgment is without mercy to the ones who has shown no mercy, Mercy triumphs over judgment.

This goes back to what James was saying earlier in verse 25 of chapter 1. That he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed.

We are to speak, we are to do, and we are to act as one who will be judged by the law of liberty, Just as Paul said, If we have the spirit, we should walk in the spirit having the works of the spirit.

Christ has set us free from the bondage of sin, Showing mercy upon us. We are all deserving of death, and hell, but God sent his Son to die, to pay that penalty so that we may become his adopted children. And this mercy that God has given to his children, triumphs over judgment. We being God's children should show mercy to others, and not judge with our own man made laws and restriction, we should not show partiality toward one or another judging them with evil thoughts.

If we do not show mercy to one another and judge without mercy then we to shall be judged with no mercy. Jesus said in Matthew 6, 14 and 15. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses. We must be guard against the sin of partiality and that in sin we do not show mercy and judge one over another. For if we do not show mercy, then no mercy will be shown toward us.

So in conclusion in light of all this, we can see now why James would say My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory with partiality, or as some translations say do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory with respect of persons. God is not a respecter of persons, he does not treat one better than another because of his riches, or his wisdom, or strength. God judges mankind under one standard, by those who are his children, by those who love him, and keep his commandments, and by those who do not. We to should not look at the outward appearance of a person and judge them with partiality. We are all equal under God, if we are children, then we are brothers and sisters and we should act as such toward each other.

We can also understand Peter, and his acceptance of the Gentiles and the lesson he had to learn in Acts when he says If therefore God gave them the same gift as HE gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? And when they heard these things they became silent, and they glorified God saying, Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.

With all this in mind, we can heed the words of Paul in Romans 15, verse 5. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus. That you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

We serve a glorious, merciful savior. If we are Christs, We should seek to serve and to do things for his glory, and guard ourselves that we do not sin and become judges with evil thoughts in our minds

and calling unclean, that which God has called clean. We are to love as Christ loves, not loving only those like us, or who we judge worthy of it, but we are to love all our neighbors as ourselves thus fulfilling the law of liberty. We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in love we are to reach out to those around us so that if God maybe pleased to do so, they may be called into the family of God.