

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 14 Text: 2:2-9 Date: 5-14-23

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(2) For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly,

and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

(3) and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"

(4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

(5) Listen, my beloved brothers, **has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom**, which he has promised to those who love him?

(Ex 20:16; Job 34:19; Prov 18:23; 24:23;
Mt 5:3; 25:34,46; Lk 6:20; 12:21,32; Jn 3:3-5; 7:24;
Ac 7:12; 10:34; 1 Cor 1:26-31; 2:8; 2 Cor 8:9; Rev 2:9)

(6) But you have dishonored the poor man.

Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?

(7) Are they not the ones who blaspheme **the honorable name by which you were called**?

(Is 63:19; 65:1; Am 9:12; 11:22; Ac 8:3; 15:17; 16:19-24; 17:6; 18:12; 1 Cor 6:1-8)

(8) If you really fulfill **the royal law according to the Scripture**,
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

(9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

(Lev 19:15-18; Dt 1:17; 16:19; Mt 5:43; 22:36-40; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:25-37; Rom 13:8-10)

**The First Beatitude as Description
of Christ and His Congregation (2:5-6)**

The principles for the proper attitude to the poor are found in this section. V. 5 puts it all together. “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him?” The resemblance to the First Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3), is striking.

Who are the poor chosen by God? Again, James and the First Beatitude seem dependent on a common tradition. Curious is James’ switch from the plural to the singular. After describing the blessedness of the poor (plural), James adds, “You have dishonored the poor man” (singular) (2:6). Would it not have been more consistent for James to have used the plural and said, “You are dishonoring the poor ones,” since the congregation’s behavior against the poverty-stricken was a continuing affront? James seems to be referring to one specific act in the past by his use of the aorist (past tense) and singular object. It may be that the poor man is a generic reference to all poor men, but why is there no generic reference for the rich man? The use of the singular in v. 6 and not the plural is unnatural, unless James is referring to one poor man in particular. The designation best fits Christ, whose self-improvement was a mark of His servanthood.

The command to love the neighbor, grounded in the Old Testament with the words “according to the Scripture,” is also called “the royal law,” i.e., the law issued by the King for His kingdom. James has spoken of the poor who inherit the kingdom promised to those who love God (2:5). Though “kingdom” here is strongly eschatologically freighted, as its rewards remain in the future, it is also a present reality in the person of the crucified and resurrected Christ. As the King, Christ provides the real substance to the Kingdom. In Himself and His atoning death He actualized what appeared above His cross: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The Kingdom is so much Christ Himself that if the Kingdom and Christ are not in every respect identical, they are at least coterminous. The royal law is really the law of the King, i.e., Jesus, which He has set down for those who are joined to His kingdom.²

The command to love is taken directly from Jesus, though not quoted from the gospels. James’ citation is identical to the tradition as it later became inscripturated in the gospels. James, like Matthew, calls these words a law (*nomos*), not in the sense of threat and warning but in the sense of a divine plan.

The entire work of Jesus pulsated with His love for people. This love must reflect itself in the life of the communities that carry His name. Though the command to love is as old as the Pentateuch and permeates the entire Old Testament, it comes to its fullest expression in Jesus, who as the King sets down this principle as basic for all in His kingdom. At the time James was writing, the early Christian communities in Palestine were acquainted with the Kingdom parables of Jesus. James’ use of the words “kingdom” and “royal” presuppose this knowledge. The full impact of James’ allusions,

LIFE APPLICATION

“The royal law according to the Scripture,
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

How does this work out in everyday life?