

James - Chapter 2

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[0 : 00] Let's pray, shall we? Father, it is a privilege to be able to gather once again for the cause that brings us together, and we ask that as we focus once again on your word, you will provide the enlightenment and understanding of the text, what was on the heart and mind of the Apostle James when he wrote this.

We thank you for the truth that you've made available to us. And this morning we do once again want to uphold our nation. We recognize that there are many crises developing in many areas. We think especially of our southern border and what's taking place there. And we can only pray for some kind of order to be brought out of what appears to be nothing but chaos. We have no human solutions, and unless you provide one, there will not be one that really matters.

So we look to you for your wisdom, your strength, and your efforts on our behalf. Thank you for those whom you have put in office. We recognize that we have an obligation to be responsive to those whom you have set in positions of authority over us.

And we pray that they who have that authority will seek the kind of wise counsel that will enable them to make good decisions. Thank you again for the gathering this morning, for the meal that we'll enjoy, and the day that lies ahead.

[1 : 18] In the name of our Lord Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, we are in the epistle of James back in the back portions of the New Testament.

And it is not without misunderstanding on the part of a lot of people that they have difficulty in placing what's commonly referred to as the Christian Hebrew epistles in with the whole canon of Scripture.

And that is understandable because they are, I believe, right where they are supposed to be located, near the back of the book. And I want to just broach this subject briefly, and then we'll get right into chapter 2.

But I want to say this so it will give you something to think about. And that is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1 and verse 1, up through a good portion, and I'm not prepared to say how much of a good portion of the book of Acts.

The theme. The theme. We're including Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and much of Acts. The theme. The theme. The theme.

[2 : 37] Is the kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom. And John the Baptist began preaching that. The kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent, etc. And that kingdom has to do with the restoration of planet Earth.

Because as a result of Genesis 3 and the failure and rebellion of our first parents, creation from the earliest time took a crash.

And we are still living in a fallen world. This world is not the kingdom of God. This world is the kingdom of the adversary.

Jesus referred to Satan as the prince of this world. In John 12, again in John 14, again in John 16. And the Apostle Paul backed that up in chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians when he referred to Satan as the God of this age.

[3 : 45] He's in charge of this age. Now it is true, God is in charge of him. But God has in his wisdom, which is beyond our ability to understand, God has allowed Satan different parameters for wreaking his havoc upon the earth and he is utilizing it.

I've characterized Satan like a mad dog on a leash. And God can yank on his leash anytime he wants. But for now, face it. Satan is the God of this age.

And he will be the last enemy to be destroyed along with death. But right now, death reigns supreme. Death visits each and every one of us in a physical way.

But thanks be to God, because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on that cross, there is another dimension of life that is provided for those who are believers, and it is called spiritual life.

And over that, Satan and death has no control. Disease and death can invade our physical bodies, and it will. But it cannot touch that part of your being that is the real you, that is your spiritual self.

[5 : 11] That's the part that has been redeemed. That's the part that has been regenerated by the Spirit of God when you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Excuse me.

And that's the part of you, upon your physical death, the non-physical spirit in your body vacates your body and goes to be with the Lord.

And this is the meaning of the Scripture, absent from the body, present with the Lord. But in the meanwhile, we have to live in a fallen world that is full of all kinds of difficulty, heartache, reversals, adversity, and eventually death.

But Jesus said, be of good cheer in the world, in the world, you will have tribulations. That's problems, difficulties, heartaches.

But, be of good cheer. Why? Because I have overcome the world, he said. So our victory is certain. Meanwhile, we live in a world that is, a world that is awaiting a better world.

[6 : 20] And when Jesus Christ returns, he will collect on what he paid for when he was here the first time. And the payment that he made was that infinite sacrifice on Calvary, whereby God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.

And this means because Jesus died for the sins of everybody, everybody is an eligible candidate for salvation.

Many will not avail themselves of that, but they could. In other words, the death of Jesus Christ was sufficient in the payment that he made to pay for the vilest, rankest sins of the most awful individual who ever lived.

That's how sufficient the death of Christ was. Now those often do not take advantage by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ and what he paid for them.

Therefore, they do not derive the benefits. So let me put it this way. While Christ died for everyone's salvation, that does not mean everyone is saved, but it does mean that everyone was savable.

[7 : 47] Big difference. Big difference. Huge difference. So what we've got in James, and in Peter, and in Hebrews, and in the Revelation, is a return to the kingdom motif.

Once again, this is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 24 when he said, and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world before the end comes.

He's talking about that tribulation period that is yet upon us. So we are not preaching the kingdom now, we are preaching the gospel of the grace of God. Where do you find that? You find that beginning in Romans through Philemon.

These are the writings of Paul. And that has to do with the dispensation of the grace of God that James is going to mention here, and we're going to see how the conflict exists.

And it's coming up here in chapter 2 also. And this is the conflict that Martin Luther had with the epistle of James because he saw it as a contradiction to what Paul had written in Romans about the justification by faith.

[8 : 55] And James is saying, wait a minute, what about works? A man is justified by works also.

And Martin Luther had such difficulty with that, he called it, he called James, the epistle of James, he called it a downright straw, straw, S-T-R-A-W-Y, a downright straw epistle.

And he had difficulty with it. But I think we'll be able to see how that's resolved, and there is no difficulty. In reality, it is a marvelous blending. So what we've got here, keep in mind, is the epistles of Paul, the grace of God, and by the way, guys, what Paul is going to present, which we'll get there eventually, was a bombshell.

I mean, it was so radical and so different. It was saying that a man is justified, made righteous, declared righteous before God solely on the basis of faith without any works or deeds of the law. What? That can't be. Well, it was. And it is. But that's what Paul was preaching, and it got him in a lot of trouble. In fact, he was stoned on different occasions and abused in every way you can imagine from his own countrymen.

So, what I'm saying is, the letters of the Apostle Paul are the interior part of a sandwich. And the exterior part of the sandwich, if you want to think of it as a slice of bread, the Gospels and the parts of the Acts are one layer of bread.

[10:37] Paul's epistles are in between there in that sandwich. And then, the Christian Hebrew epistles and the book of Revelation comprise the outer, the other outer slice of bread.

And Paul, with his writings, sandwiched right in between. And it's called the dispensation of the grace of God. And fellas, this is where we are right now.

We're in that period. And when the rapture of the church takes place, and I don't know when it's going to be, but as I've said before, we're closer than anybody has ever been. When that takes place, the church, which is the body of Christ, is removed.

And guess what comes back online? The kingdom. Why? Because once again, they will be looking for the king.

And he will come at the end of that period. So, let's get into James chapter 2. And I want you to just, I gave you that just to kind of let it germinate in your minds a little bit.

[11:37] So, in chapter 2 of James, we're talking about the sin of partiality. Let's read the text. My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes and say, oh, you sit here in a good place.

And you say to the poor man, you stand over there. Or, sit down by my footstool. In other words, just keep out of the way. Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?

Listen, my beloved brethren. Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?

Ah, there's that kingdom thing again. See? There's that kingdom thing again. Heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him. But you have dishonored the poor man.

[12:59] Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? Here is a situation that is ageless.

And it goes on today and it simply has to do with the manner in which we treat people. Someone has said that the measure of a man can often be determined by how he treats people who are in no position to do anything for him.

Think about that. How do we treat people who are not in a position to do anything for us? Someone else, I remember, said every person you meet you should treat with kindness and respect because you have no idea what that person may be dealing with.

We're all carrying burdens, concerns, issues that sometimes just consume us and you never know what a word of kindness or respect can do for someone who's really having a bad day.

Or a bad time. And that's what James is talking about here is preferential treatment to people.

When someone comes into a church congregation, of course, what he's talking about here primarily is a synagogue situation, but someone comes into a church situation, if it is someone locally who is well positioned, maybe politically or financially or something like, oh, did you see who was in church last Sunday?

[14:58] No, who was it? Well, it was Mr. Gottbuck's, you know, and this guy is so wealthy, I mean, he could buy and sell who knows what and have change left over.

And the tendency is to buddy up to talk to somebody like that. You know, you want to treat somebody like that with kid gloves.

You want to make sure that they are mentioned. You want to make sure that they are given every consideration. Why? Because, you know, they've really got money. And they deserve preferential treatment.

And I remember hearing a preacher years and years ago when I was just a young man entering the ministry and he told me about a policy that he had adopted and I thought, that sounds good.

I'm going to do the same thing. And I have. And I remember he was speaking at a Bible conference. This is a guy who had been in the ministry for a long time and was well respected and so on.

[16:00] And he said, he said, I made it a policy at my church. He said, I have absolutely nothing to do with the finances. I don't have any idea who the big givers are.

I don't have any idea how much money anybody gives. And I don't want to know. And we have people who take care of the finances.

They count the money. They make the deposits, et cetera. And they give me a slip of paper that just gives me the figure and lets me know what the income was for that Sunday.

But I have no idea who gave what, how it was made up, or anything else. And I don't want to know. And he said, the reason is it's a built-in prevention that keeps me from paying special attention to people that I know really have money and are the big givers.

and the tendency is to kind of gussy up to them. And he said, I don't want to ever be faced with that temptation. And that is just one piece of advice that I took from an older man when I was a very young pastor.

[17 : 13] And I've developed that and I wouldn't trade it for the world. That way, you have no idea who gives a little, who gives a lot, what's the difference, and you treat everybody alike.

And I think that's the only way to fly. And I would recommend that to any church or any pastor, but of course they have different ways of operating. So, this guy that he's talking about here is a kind of natural human tendency to pay particular attention to those you know are well-heeled and influential and you bend over backwards to please them and you don't treat them like everybody else.

And that's a shame. That's a shame. Because you realize that in the body of Christ, nobody is more valuable than somebody else to God.

He views us all the same way. He has love for each and every one of us. And he doesn't selectively choose different ones to bestow a greater amount of love on than others.

He doesn't do that. And what we need to realize is that in the body of Christ, everyone is an equal. Have different gifts, different abilities, but nobody in the body of Christ is more valuable than someone else.

[18 : 36] Or let me put it this way. In the body of Christ, there are no nobodies. Everybody is a somebody in the body.

In the body of Christ. And what makes you a somebody is merely the fact that God loved you and God gave His Son to redeem you and that makes you incredibly valuable.

The price that was paid for you. Well, let's go on. Any comments or questions, anybody? Okay. verse 8, If however you are fulfilling the royal law according to the scriptures, and here he's appealing of course to the law, which these books will be doing, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point is become guilty of all.

Now, we tend to think of the law maybe as being reduced to the bare minimum which would be like the Ten Commandments. But the law of which he's speaking here is of course the law of Moses.

[20 : 00] And what does the law consist of? Well, it consists of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The whole shmier. That's the law. That's the law of Moses. And it sets forth every kind of contingency and situation that you can imagine. And, it is all intended for and designed for the nation of Israel.

It is remarkable how many Christians think that they are under the law of Moses as well as under the New Testament that we are supposed to keep the whole thing.

And I'm so glad that is not true. But, people labor under that faulty assumption and they beat up on themselves because they don't comply with a lot of the things that Moses wrote.

For instance, there are dietary laws in the Old Testament. You know, if you're going to really keep the law according to the law of Moses, you can't have shrimp, you can't have pork, and a whole lot of other things you can't have.

[21 : 13] You can't even have catfish because catfish don't have scales. They have skin. They have to be skin. So they're not clean animals. And on and on.

Of course, you've got to keep the Sabbath and you've got to be circumcised and on and on. So you see, these things are all intended for Israel exclusively at a different time.

And when the Apostle Paul said in Romans, you are not under law, you're under grace. That's exactly what he's talking about. We do not live by the dictates of the law of Moses and its very purpose for being given was never what most people think it is.

And what most people think it is, is if you want to come into a right relationship with God, you have got to keep the law. And if you flub up on the law, and of course this is the Jewish mindset thinking, if you flub up on the law and you miss it, then you've got to offer sacrifice.

And you're back into animal sacrifice. Well, we're not into that. Of course, the law was given to Moses. It was never intended for us. And it's amazing how many people are under the wrong impression regarding that.

[22 : 25] So, here, even James, if you're talking about keeping the law, reducing it to the Ten Commandments, you think of the Ten Commandments as a chain. A link of chain with ten links in it.

How many links do you have to break in order for the chain to hold nothing? Just one. You break one link and everything comes crashing down.

That's what he's saying here. He who would keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he's guilty of all. He's broken the law. And the law was never given to keep and thus become acceptable to God.

the law was given, fellas, to show the character and the holiness of the God who gave it. And when you understand that and look at the law, you realize you have got a standard to measure up to that you are not going to make.

Nobody does. Nobody ever did except one person. He who said that he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill the law.

[23 : 44] He's the only one who ever actually kept the law. Therefore, he of course is in a different category altogether. So, he who said do not commit adultery also said do not commit murder.

Now, if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. So he's going to expand more on the law. You know, in Romans 8 Paul said makes a marvelous statement that clarifies a lot.

Paul said for what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh flesh.

What's that mean? Whose flesh? Your flesh! My flesh! The flesh of humans! The problem with the law is it was perfect but it was given to people who weren't.

[24 : 56] That's the problem. That's where the sin factor comes in. So the law is given to reflect the character and nature of God and to show man he cannot measure up.

Give it up! Give it up! Look for a Redeemer. And the Jews had a temporary Redeemer. What was it? It was the Day of Atonement.

Remember? Once a year Yom Kippur high priest would go into the Holy of Holies. There he would offer blood sacrifice for himself sprinkle blood on the altar and on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies and Israel as a nation got a reprieve from God for one year.

One year. And then they had to do it again the next year. And in the meanwhile sacrifices were always being made by these people and the priests had an ongoing responsibility to inspect the animals and offer the sacrifice and all and fellas all of this business of sacrifice animal sacrifice is a picture of substitution.

And what it is depicting is the innocent dies in the place of the guilty. And we look at that and we say well where is the justice in that?

[26 : 23] The innocent dies for the guilty? That's not just. That's true. It isn't just. It's mercy.

It's grace. It's a substitute that is innocent dying in the place of the guilty. Fellas, what is that speaking of?

What is that setting the stage for? What is that prepping the nation of Israel for? Yeah. God for a Messiah, an innocent one in whom there is no sin being made sin for the guilty?

That whole sacrificial system of animals was designed to accustom to program the nation of Israel for the fact that a redeemer was needed that they could not do it on their own.

And that's the whole purpose of Jesus coming into the world. The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. He who knew no sin was made to be sin on our behalf so that we would become the righteousness of God in Him.

[27 : 43] That is incredible. that's the gospel. That's the good news. That's, listen, this is the most salient point about Christianity.

And I don't know if you're aware of this or not, but there are approximately 1,500 major and minor religions in the world, cults, isms, schisms, splits, splinters, denominations, conferences, you name it, 1,500 of them.

And biblical Christianity is the only one, the only one, that operates on a grace basis of justification by faith, not on the basis of the deeds or works of the followers.

Our faith is resting on the work of our leader, our Lord Jesus Christ, and what he did. And think of that. Biblical Christianity is the only faith in the world that operates on a grace basis. Everything else is related to good works, good deeds, good intentions, giving this, that, one thing or another.

[29 : 00] That's what separates us. And we ought to make much of that because, hey, guys, that's why it's called good news. That's why it's called good news. and says, well, you mean in order to be accepted by God and be declared righteous by God, all you have to do is believe on Jesus Christ?

Yes. Yes. Well, anybody could do that. That's the whole point. Anybody can. You don't have to give anything.

You don't have to promise anything. You don't have to build anything. You believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is amazing. And John Newton wrote a hymn about it.

He called it Amazing Grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. You know, not long ago, that song became so popular.

Did you notice? All over the world they were singing that song. And I'm glad for that because the message is communicated in it. But I often wonder, how many people who sing that song and hear it sung really understand what it is.

[30 : 12] It saved a wretch like me? I wonder how many people would object, well, no, I'm not one of those. I'm not a wretch. I'm a nice guy. I mean, I pay my taxes, I never kick the dog, and I don't beat my wife, and I'm a nice guy.

I'm not, don't call me a wretch. Well, listen, if you, if you are compared with the holiness and righteousness of God, you're a wretch.

We're all wretches. We're all wreck, because none of us measure up to the standard of God. You know what God's standard is? God's standard is the same as He is, which is perfection.

Well, who can measure up to that? Nobody. That's the whole point. So, He who knew no sin measured up to that.

And when He died as our substitute, we put our faith and trust in Him, we come into a position that the Scriptures call being in Christ.

[31 : 23] And being in Christ means you possess the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And let me tell you, fellas, if you don't have that, nothing that you do have will suffice.

That's the only thing that gets God's attention, is that which is in keeping with His own character and nature, which is perfection. And when you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, God looks upon you as having died on that cross with Jesus.

Think of that. That old hymn that started out in the plantations down south, Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

What's that mean? That means, are you in Christ? We say, well that was 2,000 years ago, I wasn't there, I'm here. Listen, as far as God is concerned, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, now I know this is a tough thing to swallow, but I can take it to the bank, it's true.

If you are in Jesus Christ, God accepts you and looks upon you as being so perfect and so complete and so entire, just as Jesus Christ Himself is.

[32 : 48] That's what your position is. Now, your practice is an entirely different matter. You do not grow and mature and develop in your position.

That's fixed, certain, permanent, done. But there is plenty of room for growth, development, and maturity in our practice. And that's what, hey, that's why we're here right now.

That's what this is all about. That's what this Bible class is all about. it is just one more opportunity to grow a little bit in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

So you've got a position that is perfect in Christ. You've got a practice that is growing, maturing, sometimes struggling, sometimes one step forward and two steps backwards because of our humanity.

That's the way we are. We have weaknesses, we have flaws, but we get together for occasions like this to be of encouragement one to another and to get just a little bit more of the word and to understand a little bit more of how things work and where we fit into it.

[34 : 00] And that's called growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. And God has just one objective for us guys, and that is God loves his son so much that he just wants to populate heaven with people like him.

And as we are conformed to the image of Christ, that is our spiritual growth, that's our destiny, that's what we're supposed to be all about. That's why we're here. That's why we're in church on Sunday. It's for more growth, maturity, development, encouragement, one to another, building up one another, all of it is part of the same package. Now we're getting into the faith and work section and I'm a little reluctant to go into it, but I think you'll find it really, really eye opening.

Because, well, let's just read the text here and I'm going to skip down to verse 18. We'll deal with these more in detail, but I want you to get the feeling for it.

James says in verse 17, Faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, you have faith and I have works.

[35 : 08] Show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one, you do well. The demons also believe and shudder.

In other words, don't congratulate yourself too much because you believe there's a God. I mean, even the devil believes that. And he shudders. Are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

Now he gives an example. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected or completed. And the scripture was fulfilled which says, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.

So you see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. And this is why Luther had so much difficulty with this passage, and a lot of people do even to this day.

[36 : 20] But I think we can dissect it and make good sense of it, and the passage will mean a lot more to you, I trust, when we finish our exposition of it. And then in verse 25, And in the same way, Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works?

When she received the messengers and sent them out by another way. For, just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

And I'll just comment just a little bit on that last verse because it's a verse that has meant a lot to me over the years. And it sets forth the principle that your spirit that nobody has ever seen, but it's very real, your spirit is not only as real as your physical body, but your spirit, now this is going to be difficult for some of you to believe, but I'm convinced that it is true.

It is your spirit that is in charge of you, not your body. Your spirit energizes your body.

The body takes direction and orders from your spirit. Now I've realized this is a totally new concept to some of you, but I'm satisfied the Bible really teaches this and we'll elaborate on it somewhat.

[37 : 53] Remember when we're told in Genesis 2, when God created Adam, he created him from the dust of the ground, and I think that was a very literal thing.

The point has been made, it is not a coincidence that the chemical makeup, the chemical makeup of your physical body is found in the chemicals that are in the earth.

And that's what you might expect. Adam was taken from that, and when he finished making that physical body, we're told this marvelous thing that none of the animals ever experienced, but the text says that God breathed into the nostrils of Adam, and Adam became a living soul.

He energized him with what he breathed into Adam, and what God breathed into Adam was the life principle. he activated Adam. And fellas, you have that life principle in you, and it's called your human spirit, and that's the part of you that was regenerated and made new in Christ when you received him as your Savior.

And when you die, that's the part of you that exits the body and goes to be with the Lord. So, we'll look at this faith and work things in James, and I want you to have the week to think about it in between, and if you've got questions, feel free to write them down or to ask them next week, and we will enjoy dealing with the text, and thank you so much for being here this morning.

[39 : 32] Thank you. Thank you.