

Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions: Loving Others

When you see a homeless person begging for money, what are your first thoughts about this person? Have you ever experienced a time where you felt out of place due to your economic situation in life?

Have you ever experienced life with the severely impoverished, how did it affect you? Have you ever volunteered at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter, how did that experience affect you?

Why do we tend to subconsciously judge people according to looks, whether it be race or how they dress?

The deep dark secret of our religious subculture is that we want Christianity and we want church on our terms in a way that aligns with our preferences and accommodates our lifestyles regardless of what the New Testament says. We have to decide if we are going to take religion on God's terms or if we are going to settle for it on our terms. Today, we'll examine what James says about this in his letter.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 2:1-7.

There is a link between 1:27 and 2:1-13 as James contrasts the ways of God with the ways of the world. In chapter 2, there is a picture of how the church had bought into the world's system. In the world, you give preferential treatment to those who can benefit you the most. Are we doing the same thing in the church today?

In what ways might the church today show preferential treatment to certain people?

What are the long-term consequences for people when the church is prejudiced?

Why is it a mistake for the church to value the rich over the poor (or the poor over the rich)?

Do you think a poor person would feel comfortable in our congregation if they were to attend? Explain.

Very often, it is the 'wealthy' that gave the church problems. They were taking Christians to court, and the powerful were the ones persecuting the church, not the lowly. On the other hand, just because someone is poor does not mean that they cannot contribute their gifts and talents to the church. As James begins chapter 2 with "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ," and "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (1,5) we too must begin with being captivated by the glory of Christ and gripped by the grace of Christ in order for our lives to be marked by true religion.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 2:8-13.

We called to be “devoted to the law of Christ” (8), “cognizant of the judgment of Christ” (12), and “a reflection of the mercy of Christ” (13).

How is it that if we break only one law, we have broken them all?

What are the two greatest commandments? How might those relate to James’ point in this situation? How is it that rejecting someone based on prejudice is a failure to love?

If we break any law of God, then we are convicted by God as being lawbreakers. All of us, everyone in the world, is a lawbreaker. We are all sinners. James tells us here that it doesn’t matter if we are poor or rich or white or black, we are all in the same boat as sinners, so there is no reason to prefer one person over another. As Paul teaches us, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

What does it mean that “mercy triumphs over judgment”? How can that help us overcome our prejudices of others?

What do you think that the “law of freedom” is? How will remembering that law help us treat the poor more charitably?

God has set us free from judgment through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We were poor and miserable, and yet God the Father gave us all His riches through the Lord Jesus Christ. In return, our Father expects us to do the same for others. We ought to be generous towards others, hopeful for them, and believe that they are extremely valuable to us because they are valuable to God.

If you have time in your group, read and discuss Galatians 2. How would you have reacted in this situation? Would you have the courage to call out the different manner in which these believers were treated? Read Galatians 3:28. How can we apply this verse in our Church, in our small group and in our lives?

APPLICATION

Why is it such a struggle for us to look beyond ourselves and see people as Christ sees them? How can we as a small group help hurting people see Jesus in their everyday lives?

If faith always expresses itself through love, then how would you characterize your faith right now?

How could you purposefully help to overcome any prejudice you might have towards others?

PRAYER

Thank God that His Word lovingly confronts our prejudices and contrived religious ideals. Ask Him to penetrate our hearts and minds with His truth and the power of His Spirit until our lives are a full manifestation of true and acceptable religion that expresses itself through love.