

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday June 2, 2019. "James: A Practical Guide for Life. Life"

I. Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work thru from the message this past Sunday. Whether you were able to attend the worship service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it.

II. Theme and recap.

We began a new series last Sunday that we'll be in for the entire month of June. It's a study of the book of James. James was written to churches all over the eastern part of the Roman Empire, and gives practical, useful, advice and wisdom to handle the tough things of life. James has been called the Proverbs of the N.T. James is brutally honest, direct, in what our life following Jesus should look like, and can almost be seen as a template or blue prints in how to live life well. Even though the tone of James feels harsh, all of the wisdom is **for the readers benefit to handle the things of life**. Last Sunday we opened the book of James with the overall purpose of the letter, to help grow a spiritual maturity, completeness. And James first hit the topic of pain and suffering.

III Scripture.

Sunday was an extremely difficult passage and message. Kal shared he too, hadn't quite worked thru this chapter yet. And as a community of faith, this was something we all have to work thru together. There were a lot of verses from James 2 used, so just read the entire chapter, it'll take just a couple of minutes. And then we'll wrestle with the specifics and application.

The first attack James makes is on favoritism...which is the root of inequality. James begins this part of his letter recognizing we all are guilty of showing favoritism. And the bi-product of favoritism, of ranking worthiness, is inequality. The treatment of some people over others.

This passage claims there are several factors, flaws deep within us, what James called "*evil motives*", (which will be explained in more detail on June 23), that drive our tendency to show favoritism. So.

Think about the issue of favoritism. Where do you see it in our society today?

What do you think drives it?

Kal pulled from the passage these things that drive favoritism.

1. Our personal beliefs and values.

James is addressing favoritism because he seems to believe ALL of us have this built in practice of being swayed by our own preferences and beliefs. We are hardwired to practice inequality. We can't give everyone the same time or attention. We can't do for everyone what we do for our family and close friends. But sometimes, this preference becomes weaponized, when we live in a scarcity mindset; "*there's not enough to go around, so I'm going to intensely protect mine*". So we over time,

develop ways to determine who we should give our time, attention, resources, and who we shouldn't.

2. We focus on external.

We, the world, focuses on how a person looks, dresses, color of skin, economic background, lifestyle, etc. We all have ingrained, learned, categories for what a person IS, based on what we can observe about them. James is saying we have to acknowledge, and push against this inner desire to be swayed what we see on the outside, and to actually place less value on it.

3. We believe the world's view of merit.

Because wealthy people have certain things, obtained a certain status, society believes they deserve special treatment because they earned it. We never ask how that person achieved or arrived with those things. There are special privileges for people, because you reached a certain level, you deserve certain things. This is at the root of a belief in something called; '*meritocracy*'.

But we have to ask.

How did they acquire those things...was it really all hard work, merit?

Is society's idea of merit flawed? How so?

And is this how God's Kingdom, 'Heaven on Earth', works?

4. We don't believe we're in this together.

Because of a western cultural thing, we've lifted up "*rugged individualism*", everyone is responsible for themselves, and lost site of a thing called "the common good". If you want to wax nostalgic, miss anything from the 'good 'ole days', then mourn for the loss of the belief, 'we're all in this together'.

This believe in a common good is what makes 'church' different, better.

In our diversity, we're all really different, but we're each in this for the benefit of everyone, of us all.

5. And we have to talk about "*evil motives*".

James states there is something deep within us that is flawed, we are unaware of, that causes us to be drawn into the belief; some people are better than others, more deserving, more worthy, more important...better. And we can ignore, exclude, push away others because they're not. James said it's "*evil motives*" that drive these practices. Again we'll drill down in this in two weeks.

IV Challenge.

James 2 closes with a pretty strong statement, that God shows preferential treatment, a 'favoritism' towards the poor and marginalized, because the world favors the wealthy and connected and pushes the poor and disenfranchised to the edges of society. Kal wrested with; Does God ACTUALLY show a preferential treatment of the poor, and does this talk about salvation. Nothing in the passage points to this being a statement about salvation. And there seems to be a direct command for us to give preferential treatment towards the poor. There seems to be no other valid interpretation of this.

Reread chapter 2:5-9 again and ask; What do you think James was saying?

This was a difficult passage, and it closed again with the same challenge in chapter 1. What good does it do if you just know stuff, but don't practice it. Our faith is proven by our actions. So, the final challenge. **What does, should, would, it look like to actually put this teaching into practice?**