

James 2:1-5 'Indiscriminate Love!'

Last time in James we finished chapter one, looking at v26 and 27 in a sermon I entitled: 'Religion That God Accepts As Pure'. It was all about "religion." I explained that the word which James uses for "religion," occurs nowhere else throughout the whole of the entire Bible, only in v26 and 27 of James chapter one. "*Threscos*," meaning those external acts of piety, or religious practises and rituals. James begin with v26 "If anyone considers himself religious."

And that really is the key here. Believing that our religiousness, (those things that we do and are seen to do) holds us in good stead in the sight of God! Just like the Pharisee in Luke 18 who said, "God I thank you that I am not like other men." Yes he was very "religious" and yet he went away lost in his sin. Although James continues to exhort us in the doing, (yes responding to God's word) it is not that we are saved by those things, but that we are saved for those things! And his evidence of that which is genuine, (that which is true religion) is "keeping a tight rein on our tongue," because what we say and how we say it, is indeed a reflection of what is going on in our heart.

He uses Jesus' own example of the second most important Commandment in chapter 2:8 "Love your neighbour as yourself." If what comes out of our mouths is anything but love, how can we then tell others about the love of God in Jesus? And it's having that "tight rein," being in control of what we say and how we say it, because our desire, is to show others that which God has done, and continues to do for us in our lives!

So to not have that "tight rein" is self-deception and our "religion is worthless." "*Mataios*." It's corrupt, it's perverted, it's all a lie, as in Romans chapter 1. It's all a deception, we are even deceiving ourselves! So v26 then, is what false "religion" looks like. v27, shows us the real deal. "Looking after orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world." But as I explained, it's not only "orphans and widows" but anyone in need as we are led to help. It's having that attitude of a willing and generous spirit. Again, seeking to reflect what God has done for us through Jesus!

Finally, we considered "keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world." Not "polluted" by God's wonderful Creation, but that "world" of human sin and depravity, which so abounds and in such increasing measure today. All of those things about "religion," are summed up by God Himself in 1 Samuel 16:7b "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart!"

And so we begin James chapter two, and I have entitle today's sermon 'Indiscriminate Love'. Now friends, if you remember, James began this letter with the words, "James a *dolos*", a slave." Although having all the position, being the Pastor, the Bishop, the Preacher, and Teacher of the church at Jerusalem. Head of the ruling council at Jerusalem and even brother of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and yet he doesn't compare himself to Jesus at all. He only calls himself a "slave." And having just spoken of what true "religion" looks like, (that bridling of the tongue, having a generous and compassionate spirit and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world," James now exemplifies these very things in the way he now goes on to speak about not showing favouritism. Not having respect toward people, (or the lack thereof) simply because of their standing, their appearance, their position or their connections.

He does so in the very first two words: "My brothers" he begins. This is a term that he uses 13 times throughout the five chapters. At times calling them "My beloved brothers." In the following chapters

he is going to speak to them by way of some reproofs. But he does so with that “tight rein,” that “bridled tongue” of love, compassion and restraint. This is because his desire is yes to instruct them about their shortcomings, but it is also to encourage them as he does so. Not to cut them off at the knees so to speak!

So although he speaks from that place of spiritual seniority and authority, he does so with tenderness. He doesn't simply blast them out of the water! Yes, “My brothers.” Friends, although there are indeed different roles, different giftings and tasks that exist within the body of Christ, His church, we are all brethren! As we have seen before, we are all equal in Jesus. Yes, James addresses them as equals, Brethren. And they were to do the same amongst the churches. “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” Can you see? We are all brethren; we are all “believers.” All equally saved through the precious Blood of Jesus. The Lord Jesus alone is glorious!

John 1:14 “The word became flesh and made his dwelling, (*literally he tabernacled, pointing back to the Old Testament*) among us. We have seen his glory the glory of the one and only who came from the Father full of grace and truth.” Yes Jesus alone is “glorious.” We will all stand in His glory when He comes or we are taken home in death! As Paul said in 1 Corinthians, when people were aligning themselves to different ones, (the different shining stars let's say) he said in chapter 1:12 “One of you says, I follow Paul, another, I follow Apollos, another I follow Cephas.” He goes on to say in chapter 3:5 “What after all is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you believed.” And at the healing of a certain blind man in Lystra, and the citizens wanting to make sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul he cries out in anguish, v15 “Men, why are you doing this we are only men, human like you.”

The reality is Beloved, is that we are all sinners, and there are no special people, so to speak. Jesus had to die to cleanse each one of us from sin. No, we are not special of ourselves we are all sinners worthy of hell. But we are special in this, each one of us. Even the most precious of all of God's creation. Because it was for each one of us, did Jesus suffer and die! But of themselves, there are no special people, what makes us special, is God's Own choosing of us. Yes our extraordinary God, doing amazing things through His chosen people! So with all of that in mind brothers and sisters, we read that James says, “do not show favouritism.” Again, don't be impressed, (or the opposite don't have contempt for people) simply because of their standing in the community. Their appearance (so whether or not they are the beautiful people) or their position, the connections that they may have or where they are from.

He gives them this example. v2 “Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, (*literally splendid clothes*) and a poor man in shabby, (*or dirty, clothes*) also comes in. v3 If you pay special attention to the man wearing splendid clothes and say, here's a good seat for you, but say to the poor man sit by my feet, (*literally under my foot stool*) have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” Now friends, if we are completely honest with ourselves, I believe we would have to confess, perhaps even without meaning to, that this sort of thing can find a place within all of us at times. Every church has the desire that all of the people in the congregation be growing in personal godliness. And also their understanding of what Christianity is, and what it means to be a Christian. That we grow collectively as a church, but also individually. And further still, in God's time, that we grow numerically. But the thing about growing numerically though, is that we are going to have to love, all of those people that God sends unconditionally! Now this is very easy to say when it is a theoretical objective so to speak. But far more difficult when it is placed before us as a practical reality.

Now I may have shared this story with you before. Many years ago something quite miraculous happened. About a dozen people out of the blue started attending one of the churches in town. I'm not going to say which one it was since all of the personnel and staff have changed anyway, and also it's not helpful to dwell on such things. But yes, a dozen or so people, (there may even have been 20 I'm not sure) started attending one of the local churches. But they were not the kinds of people that you might expect. They were people off the streets, some of whom had been living rough. No they didn't have the "splendid clothes." And they didn't speak in church kind of language, for want of a better description. No, their clothes looked like the kind of people who were living on the edge, perhaps on the outer limits of society. But for whatever reason, God brought those people to that church. And no, they didn't have all the marks of church stuff. But what they did have, was a God the Holy Spirit inspired desire, to know Jesus!

Now Beloved, if such a thing were to take place, if say 12 people turned up at our door one Sunday morning, humbly saying, they wanted to know Jesus, we would be quietly, (perhaps not so quietly) joyfully praising God wouldn't we? Yes praising the Lord for His goodness and mercy for having sent these Brethren to us that we might serve them as we seek to serve Him. Amen. But friends you see, that's not what happened. A bunch of people actually left the church because these newcomers were not the kinds of people that some of the regulars wanted to be associated with!

Now brothers and sisters, before we start getting indignant and thinking things like, how could they do such a thing? Aren't we supposed to love one another? And of course you'd be right. But again, such things are always easy in theory, but far more difficult when we are confronted with them and they are standing before us in reality.

Well that is exactly what James is talking about here! The churches in his day would not have been full of people wearing their Sunday best. Many were slaves and former slaves. Paul's famous love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13, was basically written because there was no love in the church at Corinth. O there were lots of gifts and knowledge, lots of "love feasts" as they were then called in the early church, but not a whole lot of love. Many of the rich people at those occasions feasted and gorged themselves, even getting drunk on too much wine, but the poor believers often arriving too late, were giving nothing to eat or drink. No they "went hungry" the scripture says.

Well James warns his scattered parishioners of being wary of doing such things! If someone happens to come along to worship with us, a stranger or newcomer to town, (even perhaps with the whole family) saying the right things and even speaking our language, I guess. Dressed in their Sunday best, yes their "splendid clothes," we pull out a chair for them, let them know that there are pencils and colouring-in for the kids if that's what they need. Yes we love them while they are with us. And I'm glad to be able to confess that that's what we do here!

But if others come in who don't look the part, dressed in their "shabby," (even perhaps their dirty clothes) and they come within their ignorance of what we do here, we show them what our Christianity looks like. By pulling out a chair next to us, and saying, as James does "My brothers", my sisters, there is a place over here for you next to me. And why? Chapter 1:27 "Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Two weeks ago we looked at the idea of moral pollution, which is so prevalent today. The best example, is that recent yearly celebration of sodomy and depravity, during which our Prime Minister covered himself in such glory. By having the dubious distinction of being the very first of our prime ministers to be directly involved in such evil. Yes we can do, (as many today who call themselves

Christians are doing, even pastors preachers and ministers) we can do as they are doing, and embrace not only the Sinner, but even their sin. And yet the true follower of Christ cannot do this. Because it is not love, to condone that which is taking people down the road to hell, no. So yes we can become polluted by that moral depravity, infecting our minds and our lives!

But we can also become “polluted” by allowing our minds to become tainted with the unloveliness, of this sin sick world. What I mean is, we can forget that we are all, equally worthy of hell. We can forget that we must love unconditionally, because that is how Jesus has loved us. As I mentioned earlier, there are no special people. God didn't choose His people because they were special, no. It's God's choosing of His people, that makes them special. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling, we sing. So for us to welcome and accept only those who fit into our box with Christian written on it, is certainly not, Christianity. I don't know what we ought to call it, (perhaps religion,) but it is not Christianity!

And friends you see, 40 years ago, I would have been one of those people! I've shared with you before that the first time I ever walked into church, as I was looking around, it was all just so foreign to me, and I was about to run. Until a voice came out of the crowd, as an old man by the name of Felton Turnbull, called out to me, 'Hey young fella, there is a seat over here next to me.' Friends can you see? He was doing exactly what James is calling us to do. And until I put this message together this past week, during all of those years, I hadn't even realised! The opposite would have been, (like those people in that church many years ago) v4 “Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

Beloved, what James is saying is that to deem in our hearts and minds that this person or that person, is or is not worthy of God's Grace, Mercy and Love, is to be guilty of doing two things. Firstly, it is to forget who we all are. As I've already mentioned, merely forgiven sinners, and worthy of hell! And secondly, it is to seek to stand upon that holy ground that only Jesus the Ruler and Judge of the entire universe, gets to stand. Only He knows, who it is that truly belongs to Himself! John 6:37-40 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Yes friends, only Jesus knows who truly belongs to Himself. So we are to love all of those who He sends to us, and walks through our doors. And with no regard to what they look like, how they are dressed, where they are from or who they know. John 6:37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” So friends neither must we. As we praise God for His Goodness and Mercy to ourselves, Amen! And that is the truth that James will continue to give us. As he exhorts us to treat all genuine believers the same!

In v5, he yet again continues to speak with tremendous tenderness. And this time, it is “*mou agapertoi adelphoi*” “my beloved brothers.” Yes he continues to deal with the problem of this sin, of treating people differently. “Showing favouritism,” simply due to the way that they look and what they wear. And he makes this simple, but deeply theological argument that so many sidestep or choose to ignore today! Because so many today are uncomfortable or deny this profound truth, which we've looked at before on more than one occasion. And it is God's Sovereign Choice! v5 “Listen,” or from the original, “Here ye, my beloved brothers. Has not God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those who love.” Yes it's a rebuke to the believers. How can there be this kind of favouritism among you? Even treating the

poor for whom Jesus died, differently to those who are well off. When it is God Himself who has chosen them all?

Yes friends, he speaks with great tenderness and compassion, and yet he does not hold back the truth. As I mentioned earlier, that would not be love. If someone we love were blindly walking towards the abyss, would we not call out to them and warn them? Well of course we would. And so James does! In verse 4, he spoke of becoming “judges with evil thoughts.” Could our thoughts ever become more judgmental and “evil” than to look up on those for whom Christ died, (yes suffered and died and rose again) with contempt in our hearts, for whatever reason? Yes as we look down upon them, for whom Jesus died. No, James says. This must never be the case among the people of God!

And you know, this sort of thing doesn't just happen with newcomers. In larger congregations there can be this group and that group, and these groups don't even mix together. My brother in law and his wife attended a large church for a year and a half in Wollongong and hardly anybody spoke to them, for whatever reason. And that is the kind of thing that can happen in a large church! But please don't get me wrong, there can be great benefits that come with having a large congregation, but there are also inherent problems. One of which is getting lost in the crowd!

In v5, James makes the point that we must be careful how we assess people in our hearts. Firstly, because God Himself has chosen them. Yes they are the chosen of God. But also, those ones that you look down your nose at in their ordinary clothes, may well be those ones, through whom God is going to teach you much! In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 we read “for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written. I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.”

Friends, there is an old saying that clothes maketh the man. Well not according to James. It is God who maketh the man. And we are called to love them! What we with “evil thoughts” in our hearts may look upon with contempt due to outward appearances, God may have set aside and made ready to raise up, to do mighty things for His Kingdom. The Apostles were a bunch of fishermen and other ordinary men. They had not rings upon their fingers or finely tailored garments. We need to remember that it is not the appearance or even the amount of faith that a person has which works wonders for God's glory. But the One in whom we have that faith!

And I'll leave you with a question. I was going to finish with the statement, That surely we would rather be poor of circumstance but “rich in faith and heirs” of God's Kingdom. But as I was about to put pen to paper I thought to myself, is that true of me? Can I even really ask myself the question in such a wealthy society? I don't know. But it is a question that merits us pondering upon and reflecting. And the answer may even be a reflection upon our own giving, and our faith! But indiscriminate love brothers and sisters, that is what we are called to. And as is our Saviour's Love, our love is to be toward all who would come. And we are to seek to bring them to Him. Both high and low without favour!

Let's pray!