

DAY 2: Read Acts 10:19-35

Just before this passage, Peter has the vision of the sheet with unclean animals lowered to him with the command to kill and eat. He is told not to call anything impure which God makes clean.

1. How does this passage add to your understanding of James 2:1-4?

God makes it clear to Peter that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile if they each are believers. God makes it very clear that we are not to find distinctions or classes amongst ourselves – verses 34 and 35 are key.

2. Does Peter's unease about being in the centurion's home detract from his mission? Why or why not?

Peter's unease is very human. In the past, entering into the house of a Gentile would cause him to be unclean. For a Jew, the behavior was illegal. We tend to be uncomfortable in the presence of people who aren't similar to us. This discomfort cannot allow us the leeway of rejecting those who aren't like us. Peter's verbalization of his discomfort and his decision to ignore it are a good lesson for how our behavior should appear.

To Dig Deeper: Who is Cornelius and why is it helpful for us to know about him?

He was a centurion (Acts 10:1) Centurions were commanders of at least 100 men. The centurions mentioned in the Bible were men of good character.

He was a righteous and God-fearing man (verses 2 and 22).

He was a praying man (verses 2 and 30).

He had an angelic visitation and followed the instructions given to him, he was obedient (verses 30-33).

He was generous to the poor (verses 2 and 31).

He and his household received the Holy Spirit just as the Jewish believers had in Acts 2. This completely opens the eyes and hearts of Peter and his companions regarding the favoritism.

DAY 3: Read James 2:5-7

1. Does this passage say that God is responsible for particular people being poor? Why or why not?

No, but the Bible has much to say about God's concern for the poor. Psalm 9:18, Psalm 72:12-14, Luke 4:18, Matthew 11:5 to cite but a few. God says that the poor will be rich in faith.

2. Why are poor people in a better position to be rich in faith? How does showing favoritism dishonor the poor?

They have much to gain from faith. They are kept downtrodden by the rich, but God's way tells them that they matter to Him. The rich have more demanded of them.

3. Read Proverbs 30:8. Why does the writer ask for “neither poverty nor riches”?

The very poor run the risk of becoming very bitter. It may be difficult for them to accept that there is One who loves them dearly. The wealthy must realize that they are on the same plane as the poor before God. They must love Him more than riches or status, must treat other believers as brothers.

4. In what ways do the rich exploit us, according to verses 6 and 7? Are there examples of this in our own society? In what ways do we exploit those who have less than we do?

When James was written, the rich often brought the poor into court for debt. This would land them in jail or slavery. Freedom was curtailed. **Do you see any similarities to our day?**

Some feel that they can gain favor through their partiality, some feel that they too might become rich if they associate only with the rich.

5. Matthew 5:3 speaks about the poor in spirit. How are the poor in spirit related to the believers in James 2:5 who are poor in the eyes of the world?

The sinner who has been saved is the one who sees how poor he is. He can recognize that nothing he does or has is enough to stand before God without the cover of Jesus. Relying on Christ, the saved sinner, poor though he is, is an heir to the Kingdom – rich indeed.

DAY 4: Read James 2:8-11

1. What does James mean when he speaks in verse 8 of the “royal law”?

This refers to the Old Testament Law. Jesus summed up that law in Matthew 22:37-40. Some theologians call this the “law of all laws” or the “law of supreme excellence”

2. Rabbinic teaching about the law was different than Jesus taught. They believed that they received credits for doing good and lost credits for breaking a law. One could do more good than bad and still have a positive credit. Where do you see this belief still in practice?

Many people believe that if they are “good”, they will go to heaven. They treat behavior as a zero-sum game. This is contrary to Jesus’ teaching about the law.

3. What do verses 10 and 11 mean when they refer to keeping the law? What is Jesus’ teaching on the law in Matthew 5:17-30?

Jesus does not say that the law doesn’t matter. It is a standard that we cannot live up to in our own strength. We need a Savior. We cannot be “good” enough.

4. Read Galatians 2:11-14. Peter is found to be showing favoritism. What example does Paul set regarding how to stop the behavior? Can you cite similar behavior in today’s church?

Paul confronts Peter “face to face”. He calls out the sin so that Peter is convicted of it. Too often gossip and innuendo are utilized when poor behavior occurs rather than an honest conversation to speak truth.

DAY 5: Read James 2:12-13

We must be ever mindful that we are no better than any other. It is sinful for us to think otherwise. We are all sinners, in need of a Savior.

- 1. Verse 12 refers to the “law that gives freedom.” What does this mean? What is the “law of freedom”, or in some versions the “law of liberty”? (See James 1:25, John 8:32, Romans 8:2, Galatians 6:2)**

This is in contrast to the “royal law” in verse 8. It is the law of Christ. Christ said “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). In John 15:12 Jesus says that his commandment is that we “love one another as He loved us”.

- 2. In verse 13, what are the meanings of the terms “judgment” and “mercy”? Can you think of examples of mercy triumphing over judgment? (See Luke 6:36-38, and Proverbs 21:13.)**

Judgment can be looked at in several ways. God often used judgment not for destruction, but for refinement. The remnant that remained after judgment were repentant, obedient, righteous. When God judges in the end, there will be destruction and a new world will replace the current one (Revelation 21:2). We will be judged by how well we love.

Mercy is a kind, forgiving manner. We forgive because we are forgiven. We must show this benevolence to others if we expect it to be shown to us. When we are wronged, we often speak of wanting justice to be done. We want for the perpetrator to pay for our hurt. When we wrong others, we don't want justice, we want mercy.

- 3. Matthew has a lot to say about our need to be merciful. Read Matthew 5:7, 6:14-15, 7:1-2, and 18:22-35. How do these verses help you to understand James 2: 13? Do you have difficulty with forgiveness? How do you show mercy to those who harm you? How have others shown mercy to you in a meaningful way?**

DAY 6: Reread James 2:1-13

- 1. Memorize James 2:1. How do you live this out? What challenges you about this verse?**
- 2. Write down two or three things that this passage teaches about what it means to be a disciple of Christ. In what ways do others recognize you as a Christian?**
- 3. Look up the lyrics to the hymn “In Christ There Is No East or West”. Meditate on the line “All Christly souls are one in Him throughout the whole wide earth”. How can we better show this unity?**