

James 2A

A new crown in the shape of a laurel wreath was made for King Hiero II in ancient Greece. Well-known Greek mathematician Archimedes was asked to determine whether it was made of solid gold, or whether silver had been added by a dishonest goldsmith. Archimedes had to find a way to test the crown's composition without damaging the crown, so he could not melt it down to calculate its density.

While taking a bath, Archimedes noticed that the level of the water in the tub rose as he got in, and realized that this effect could be used to determine the volume of the crown and thus the purity of its gold. By submerging the crown in water, it would displace an amount of water equal to its own volume. He could then compare the amount of water displaced by the crown to the amount displaced by a pure gold brick of equal weight.

If the crown displaced less water weight than the pure brick, it would be proven to contain metals other than gold. Archimedes was so excited by his discovery, he jumped from his bath and ran through the streets naked, crying "Eureka! I have found it!"

- Archimedes had discovered a way to measure the purity of a gold crown by means of a simple, nondestructive test
 - By submerging the crown in water
 - This story can be useful as a great picture for understanding the main thrust of James' letter
 - His letter describes how the Lord uses simple tests to determine the purity of our faith
 - The Greek word for test back in James 1:3 is *dokimion*, which means to prove or show the purity of something
 - So the testing of our faith, according to James, ultimately produces the perfecting or proving the purity of our faith
 - By removing the impurities of our walk
 - And like Archimedes' water test, the test the Lord sends are nondestructive in the sense that they aren't sent to destroy us but to build us up
 - So we could say that the Lord is at work in our life testing the purity of our faith to show whether it is contaminated with impurities of one kind or another

- In Chapter 1, James discussed how the Lord uses trials or difficulties as a means of testing our faith
 - And in Chapter 2, James describes two additional methods of testing
 - The chapter opens with an examination of how God tests our faith by our responses to people from varying social backgrounds
 - Later in the chapter, James moves to a third test, which we will address when we get there
- Turning to the second test now, James says:

James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

- The second testing of faith comes on the issue of favoritism
 - There is an interesting Greek word used here for personal favoritism: *proso-polemp-sia*
 - It's a translation of a Hebrew idiom which literally means to "lift up the face"
 - The point of the idiom is that lifting our face to someone is to show them our favor or attention to the exclusion of others
 - James says don't hold (the Greek word actually means accompany or join) your faith in Christ with favoritism among men
 - Again, we're talking about a man or woman of faith who is acting wrongly in that faith...failing a test in that sense
 - James now moves to using examples to make his point clearer

James 2:2 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,

James 2:3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

James 2:4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

- The setting for this example is your assembly, but the word in Greek for assembly is *sunagoge*, which is the Greek transliteration of synagogue
 - Remember, this letter was written to Jewish Christians, who still attended the synagogue as the way to worship Christ
 - Two different men enter the assembly, and the contrast between the men is clear
 - One is wearing fine clothing, or gorgeous apparel
 - While the other is clearly poor, as evidenced by his dirty (or filthy) clothes
 - The rich man is known to be rich by his gold ring, my Bible reads
 - But in Greek the phrase is a “gold-fingered man” which suggested he had many rings on his fingers
 - So he is not just rich, but obviously rich
 - And likewise, the poor man is obviously poor
 - And it’s in this visibility of wealth or social status where we find a test developing for the believers in this assembly
 - The test is how we choose to think and act in response to that show of wealth
 - And the key to passing the test, as before, is to think and act like God thinks and acts
 - Relying on godly wisdom, led by the Spirit
- In vs. 3-4, James presents an indictment and describes the crime
 - As each of these men walk in to the assembly, you pay special attention to the rich man
 - The Greek word for special attention means regard with favor
 - The rich man looks wealthy and so this leads the usher to guide the man to a good seating place
 - Likewise, the poor man is given a lowly position in the assembly
 - There are two errors or sins committed here

- And they are committed not only by the one who selects the seats, but by association everyone in the assembly who would see that decision as proper is also culpable
 - The first sin was in making a judgment of each person's worth, and then responding to each person in a different way based on that judgment
 - James says in v.4 that they have made distinctions among themselves
 - The assembly is showing favor to one man over another
 - And regardless of the basis for that judgment, the very fact that we make distinctions is wrong – period
 - This fact alone is wrong, and it means they failed the testing of their faith
- Our faith should bring with it an understanding that all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
 - Our faith also understands that by Christ's blood we have all been made new creatures and are seated with Christ in the heavenly realm
 - We are brothers and sisters in Christ without distinction in worth or value to God
 - So when we look upon our brothers and sisters in Christ and assume one to be better or more important than another, we sin
 - We aren't looking at each other with eyes of faith; we're relying on worldly eyes
 - Rich people aren't more important or more special than poor people in God's economy
 - Good looking people aren't better either
 - Neither are smarter people, famous people, UT grads, etc.
 - Any attempt to re-establish that kind of worldly ranking system in the church is simply sinful, and ungodly
 - When we see people in these ways in the Body of Christ, we sin because we fail to operate in godly wisdom
 - We are living in our flesh

- There was a time months ago when one of our elders received a call from a representative of a TV celebrity
 - This celebrity was in town to shoot an episode of a TV program
 - And the representative called the church to let us know that the celebrity and a small number of guests might arrive for one of our Sunday services
 - We told the person that we would welcome them no differently than we would any visitor
 - We hoped their arrival wouldn't be a distraction from the Sunday service, but we wondered what effect it might have
- In the end they never showed up
 - But if you think about it, just the fact they thought they needed to call beforehand says something about the church today
 - It suggests that celebrity has found its way into the Christian thinking and this person knew from experience that they needed to prepare a congregation for their arrival
 - Perhaps it's an understandable concern, but it's still sad
 - If the celebrity had arrived at Oak Hill Bible Church, would we have passed this test of faith? The test of favoritism?
 - Would we have seen them as merely another visiting brother or sister in the Lord?
 - Would our welcoming have been different, even in small ways?
 - Would we have shown them to the best seat?
 - Would we have handed them a bulletin or a cup or water or a donut when we might not have done the same for another visitor?
- I think we're generally very welcoming to every visitor, and I know we would have done the same to this celebrity

- But I still think it would have been a real test for some of us, myself included
 - To not just act normally, but to truly see the person with eyes for eternity
 - To simply see them as a sinner saved by grace and no different than anyone else
 - That's the test James is teaching about, and it's obvious from the letter that he has concerns that these churches were failing the test regularly
- In v.4 James says that our favoritism for the rich Christian over the poor one stems from evil motives
 - What "evil motives" do we have for making distinctions between rich and poor in the church?
 - If we're honest with ourselves, the answer comes easily
 - We favor a person who looks rich because we have a secret hope that they will return our favor by using their wealth to reward us
 - Perhaps they will reward us personally or just reward the church
 - But either way, it's the lure of money that causes us to think and act sinfully
 - That's the evil motive that James is referencing

The admissions counselor for a seminary was interviewing a prospective student.

"Why have you chosen a career in ministry?" he asked.

"I dream of making a million dollars in ministry, just like my father," the student replied.

"Your father made a million dollars in ministry???" the counselor exclaimed, much impressed.

"No," replied the applicant. "But he always dreamed of it."

- Remember the test came because the man was obviously rich
 - We see the wealth and the wheels begin turning, subconsciously maybe
 - We need to put those thoughts aside and replace them with the wisdom of God's word

- James offers that wisdom...

[James 2:5](#) Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

[James 2:6](#) But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

[James 2:7](#) Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

- James gives us God's view of rich and poor
 - God chose the poor of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom
 - But when we show the poor scorn or simply dismiss them, we dishonor that person
 - The Greek word is *atimazo* which means treat shamefully
 - We treat them as if we are ashamed of them or for them
 - But God has chosen them and made them rich in the things that matter, spiritual things
 - If we saw them with eyes for eternity, knowing they share the same future we have, then we wouldn't shame them
 - Consider this...they may earn more treasure in the coming kingdom and be the "rich" person in the future kingdom
 - And what kind of eternal reward might we have if we spend this life treating God's chosen in a callous or shameful way?
 - By the way, James' statement that God chose the poor is echoed in Paul's later letter to the Corinthian church

[1Cor. 1:26](#) For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;

[1Cor. 1:27](#) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,

[1Cor. 1:28](#) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,

[1Cor. 1:29](#) so that no man may boast before God.

- Speaking to a church made up of societal misfits, Paul says that was exactly the way God intended things to be

- God chose or selected those who would become a part of the church in Corinth from among the poor and socially disadvantaged in the culture
- And He did so for a specific reason, so that at the time of judgment God could shame the wise and powerful of this world
 - While the least of the world are lifted up by faith and receive a glorious inheritance
 - Those of the world thought to be rich and powerful will be shown to be “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”
 - As Jesus described them in Revelation 3:17
 - This principle has its exceptions, of course
 - Not every poor person will become a follower of Christ
 - And some rich and powerful will be called to faith in Christ
- But the general principle will remain true throughout history until our Lord’s return
 - You see that principle reflected in the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16
 - Or in the way Jesus said it’s virtually impossible for a rich man to enter heaven
- James moves on that not only is this differentiation sinful, it’s also fruitless
 - The rich don’t respond to our favoritism by throwing their money around
 - They take it for granted, and ultimately become the oppressors of society, especially if they are fighting to keep their wealth
 - James gives another general truth, that the rich and powerful tend to speak out against Christians and Christ
 - If you have doubts about these principles, just pay attention to the entertainment and political celebrities of our day or any day
 - Do they tend to honor and respect Christians and Christ?

- Do they tend to live godly lives and strive to be Christ-like?
- Again, I'm not suggesting and nor is Scripture teaching that the rich man has no hope and that all poor people are good
 - But there is a general principle at work in God's economy and we should understand it and let it inform our opinions about people
 - Bottom line: Don't show favoritism
- Instead of failing these tests by sinning in favoritism, James teaches us to live differently

James 2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

- In v.8, James commands us to live according to the Royal Law
 - Some call it the Golden Rule
 - Love your neighbor as you love yourself
 - Remember Jesus was asked which commandment in the Law was the most important
 - Jesus answered that the most important was to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
 - And the second most important is to love your neighbor as you love yourself
 - James is taking for granted that his readers have understood the first commandment having come to faith in Christ
 - And now he is reminding us that we have a responsibility to fulfill the second one just as much
 - If we treat every person as we would treat ourselves if we were on the receiving end, then we are following the Royal Law and we are doing well

- Showing partiality among people for any reason is incompatible with keeping this commandment of Christ
 - Have you ever considered that implication?
 - Christ gave two broad commandments for Christians under the New Covenant
 - Love God
 - Love your neighbor
 - And James says unequivocally that when we show partiality within the Body of Christ, we fail at this second commandment
 - We sin and transgress the Law of Christ
- Next week, James moves forward into an examination of this law and how we may run afoul of it
 - But to close today, let's just establish the basic truth that there is a law in effect for the Christian
 - We may already know and understand that as Christians we are not under the Law given in the Old Covenant
 - By Christ's fulfillment of the Law's requirements, He has met its terms for us
 - And by faith, we are credited with that work
 - So the Old Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ's work and no longer requires our work...we have ceased from that work
 - But some Christians go too far and assume that we have no law at all
 - They believe that no rules exist to guide our behavior
 - And they are wrong, since Jesus Himself gave us the Law for Christians under the New Covenant
 - The Laws are the two I mentioned earlier, and Scripture calls these two laws the Law of Liberty or the Law of Christ
 - James is about to explore the Law for a moment in this chapter, but he makes clear here that favoritism is one way we violate that Law
 - And just as there are consequences for violating the Law of Moses in the days of the Old Covenant

- There are consequences for violating the Law of Christ