

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

*September 5, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin*

## **Commentary on James 2:1-10, 14-17** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Book of James is not addressed to one congregation but is an open letter to all the Christian assemblies at the time between 45 and 62 A.D. during the same time as Paul's letters. The issue of partiality appears in the gospels of Matthew and Mark as well as Acts, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians. These texts all agree that, through Christ, God shows no partiality. While some of the texts use this to break the division between Jews and Gentiles, James is applying the concept to address economic barriers within the growing Church. As Christianity spread, it was no longer the Jews and the slaves that were joining but many wealthy Romans were drawn to the teachings of Jesus. This created a mixed environment within the congregation which was distinctly different from the segregated secular society. James argues if we have faith in Christ than we must act as Christ taught by loving one another. Wesley called this "saving faith". Faith is not enough if we do not accept the grace to do the will of God and love one another.

James 2:9 If you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

What does it mean to be saved by grace?

If we are saved by grace, shouldn't that same grace be shown to others?

If Jesus is the only one who is perfect, than why do we judge?

If we judge others based on the law, shouldn't we be judged based on the whole law?

Who can stand such a judgment but Jesus?

Is not our work to show mercy and let God be the only Judge?

## **Commentary on Mark 7:24-37** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Following last weeks lesson on what is clean and unclean, Mark shows that Jesus leaves the Jewish territory and enters into the "unclean" Gentile region of Tyre. If Jesus was expecting to escape notice from the Gentiles, Mark makes it clear that he was mistaken. An "unclean" Gentile woman entered the house he was staying at and bowed at his feet. This is not only an act of humility but in Gentile customs an act of worshipful petition. Jesus initially denies her request. Her answer, however, indicates that she is not only a "God fearer" (a term given to Gentiles who have converted to Judaism) but also that she is also aware of Jesus' teachings. The faith of her heart, not the "cleanliness" of her situation, is what saves her daughter. Remaining in the region of the Gentiles, a deaf man is brought to him whom Jesus heals. The Word has literally gone beyond the Jewish people and is being heard and proclaimed by the nations.

Mark 7:28 "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

Who is deserving of God's mercy?

Is God's grace limited to one particular people, race, or nationality?

Can those outside of Jesus receive mercy?

If Christians sit at the table, should not the grace given spill out to the rest of the world?

If we deny mercy, who will God invite to the table next?

## **Commentary on Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23** (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Book of Proverbs appears in the lectionary only four times. Proverbs 8 is read on Trinity Sunday and Proverbs 1, 22, and 31 are read over the next three Sundays. Proverbs 1 is the introduction to the collection of wisdom readings and 31 is a tribute to a "wise woman". This is actually a play on words since wisdom in Hebrew is in the feminine case. Proverbs 22 begins the section often called

"The Words to the Wise" (Proverbs 22-24). This section is similar in style to Egyptian wisdom texts of the time such as *The Instruction of Amenemope* but reflects a distinctive biblical theology. Much of the wisdom text was used to justify a strict system of punishment during the time of the Puritans and rationalization for the system of slavery. For this reason, many of the teachings of Proverbs are not read from the pulpit. Other sections of teaching, while practical in nature, lend themselves more toward legalism than the spirit of the Law expressed in the teachings of Jesus. This is not to say that the Proverbs are not helpful but rather should be viewed in the same light as certain sections of Levitical law.

Proverbs 22:9 Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

Could this proverb be about more than financial blessings?

What if the only bread we have is Jesus?

Does that change who we define as poor?

Do we share Jesus to make others like us?

Or do we share Jesus because Jesus has been so generous with us?

Is the only thing we can really share is the love we have experienced?

### Sermon "The Heart's Lost Love" ([\*Sermon Video\*](#))

In Genesis, it says that humanity was made in the image of God. If God is love as the Epistle of John states, then we are made in the image of Love. Since we left the Garden of Eden, every soul has longed to reunite with the Source of all love. Unfortunately, as the old country song goes we tend to look for love in all the wrong places. Sin blinds us to the Source of love and substitutes temporal loves instead. We seek love in wealth and power, in spouses and children, and in nature and our own creations. In short, we substitute worldly love for the eternal love our soul desperately seeks but nothing but God can fill our soul's one desire.

Fleshly desires and emotional euphoria can only temporarily gratify our emptiness. When these become unattainable or lose their power to numb our deepest desire, our intentions become distorted and evil. We take more and more with greed becoming avarice. The God given gift of sexual desire to produce offspring becomes distorted into fornication and licentiousness. When obstacles block these illusions of love, we turn to theft and murder. All our actions turn to pride and folly. Until we turn our hearts to God as the only source of love that will quench our deepest needs, our hearts will stray and no amount of moral laws or traditions can curb that sinful wandering.

As spiritual leaders, Jesus told the Jewish religious authorities that their focus on hygiene and cleanliness laws had nothing to do with defilement. It is our pursuit of everything but God that defiles us and makes us addicted to temporal loves. God, however, does not simply wait for us to come to our senses but seeks us in our confusion and calls to us in the darkness. Like the beloved in the Song of Solomon, Jesus calls to us to come away and leave our homes of false loves. The time of waiting is over. The winter is past and the rains are gone. The lover of our souls has come to claim His beloved. As deep calls to deep, so does God call to the Imago Dei (image of God) in everyone of us. The only question is whether or not we will stop our endless pursuits of empty love to hear and respond to the call of true Love.

The call of true Love demands a response. It is not enough to know that we are loved but we must also love in return. We must take the leap of faith and follow where our Lover calls us to go. Our faith lights the fire of love within us but we must then give off the warmth of love as our souls grow in grace. We must do as well as hear. We must love because we are loved. We must shine because the light has entered our hearts. When we begin to shine with God's love in our hearts, others begin to see the love their souls have been looking for and are drawn to that love like moths to a flame. Not everyone will desire to leave their false loves or their false sense of being loved but for the lost we are called to go.