

XI. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“True Religion and Reserved Seating”

James 2:1-7

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
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We are in our eleventh study of James and in this study we begin in James 2. You will see in just moment why James 1:26-27 need to be read to set the context in motion into James 2:1-7. James 1:26-27 says [26] *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.* [27] *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* He grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I find it abundantly providential today that I'm coming to James 2:1-7 which talks about where people are to be seated. So we have talked about true religion and now seating and today there is a fellow visiting who under the leadership of our deacons for fifteen years while I was at Christ's Covenant developed the diaconal ministry of ushering and we're at the only text I know in the Bible that talks about ushering. I am very grateful for those who work with our ushers for a couple of reasons. One I think ushers do many ministries but they display the heart and soul of a congregation as people come in. The way they do it many times direct the heart and soul of a congregation but I'm not so much coming to this text as a handbook on ushering. There is a bigger reason I want to get to it. There is a statement I want to make that will bear out this text.

Here is what this text will tell you. Your behavior, what we do, will ultimately betray what we truly believe. Let me reverse it. What we truly believe will increasingly be manifested in the choices we make in our life, our behavior. In other words, our life view will ultimately direct our life style and this text gives us an amazing insight into this moment where we get the chance to see it.

James, the brother of Jesus, converted after the resurrection, writing the first book of the New Testament chronologically, the most quoted book of Gospel wisdom that takes wisdom literature from the Old Testament anticipating the Gospel and brings it to glorious Gospel wisdom, knows what you know and believe will ultimately determine your behavior and he has written an entire book on it. Here is the theme of the book of James. The Gospel life is a life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation in a sin-cursed world informed by the God-sent gift of wisdom from above. It is not a life of perfect ministry and if we're perfect how would we need to mature. The Christian life is one of growth but it is joyful maturation even in a sin-cursed world with all these trials of life. Trials for a Christian are not interruptions in life. They are our life. The absence of trials is an interruption. God is sovereignly using these trials and James tells us to count it all joy when, not if, you encounter various trials. Why? It is because you know God is at work in your life.

He is showing you what you know and believe by that trial. He is showing you what you need to know and believe and he is uncovering the strongholds of idolatry that are still in your life that need to be eradicated. You are about to see that in James 2:1-7.

The trials of life are unpredictable. Somebody dies. That's a trial. Somebody lives. That's a trial. You are about to see and read of a trial of life to find out whether there is true religion or defiled religion in the life of a congregation which is about to be displayed and how do you deal with it in terms of a life view that is Gospel saturated.

So James is telling us we have a Gospel foundation, a Gospel motivation and to live a Gospel life in this sin-cursed world with persistent ministry and joyful maturation then you need wisdom from above. Now how does it come into your life? One, James says to pray for it. If you lack wisdom, ask and the Lord gives it. Secondly, get into the Word. You need to be a hearer of the Word but don't be a hearer only. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger but be a learner. Be a doer. A hearer only is like someone who looks into the Word and the Word is a mirror showing you who you are, who Christ is and then you take that mirror that shows you your utter helplessness and the utter glorious grace of Christ and you walk away and forget it. So don't walk away from the mirror. Take the mirror with you.

How do you take the mirror with you? Well with today's technology you can take it with you all kinds of ways but more importantly take it with you by embracing what you have heard with obedience. When you take the mirror with you the result is true religion. So when we say Christianity is not a religion but a relationship I know what we're trying to say but that's wrong. Christianity is not a man-made religion that gets you to God. Christianity is a true religion as a result that God has come to you. It's not my religion gets me a relationship with God. It's God's relationship that He has established with me, then gives me a sacred way of life so that all of life is religion for me. I am attempting to live for Him who came to save me.

Then James gave us three marks of that religion. He said it is a bridled tongue. Why is there a bridled tongue? It is because when you get a relationship with Christ you get a new heart and man speaks from what fills the heart. Increasingly that tongue gets more and more bridled. Hopefully there is fewer and fewer slips of the tongue and misstatements of the tongue as we would avoid that language we don't want to make. We want to have the language that builds people up, not tears people down.

The second mark of true religion is that there is a public ministry of mercy and grace to the marginalized and the powerless. The most marginalized and powerless during that age would have been the widows and orphans. So James uses them as an example.

Then there is a private commitment, a personal commitment to personal holiness. You want to keep yourself unstained from the world. He has done something with something that we constantly have problems with. We have one branch of the church that says go do public ministries of mercy, grace and justice for that's what it is all about. Then there is another group that says to pursue holiness. You need to walk with the Lord. Kill sin in your life.

James says you'll get a new heart which will bridle your tongue. Then you want to do both the public ministry to those who need to feel the grace and compassion of God with Gospel deeds and you're also growing in grace with intentional holiness to keep yourself unstained so that your witness and testimony before the world is unstained and it opens up the doors for the public ministry that you're doing. So James puts it all together.

The rest of the book of James is teaching the marks of true religion. It includes the new heart with the bridled tongue, the public ministries of grace, mercy and justice, and personal pursuit of holiness in your life. That's why I started out this study reading James 1:26-27. James will take on a case study of what true religion ought to do in a trial of life and it's an amazing moment of a trial of life. Whoever thought when the church gathered for its greatest privilege which is corporate worship, a trial of life would occur? This trial would be brought by two visitors.

We have already looked at two Gospel wisdom maxims and in this study we'll pick up a third Gospel wisdom maxim. We want to walk through this trial of life and true religion by doing three things. We will look at the admonition that James gives. Secondly, there is the trial of life itself and then thirdly there is the answer. Let's take a look at the admonition first.

James 2:1 says [1] *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.* This is really important for everything else we'll study in the book of James. Every time James uses the phrase 'my brothers' or 'my beloved brothers' he is getting ready to say something about Gospel wisdom. This is the fifth time he has says this in the book of James and then he gives an admonition. Hold to the faith, not a faith. It is the faith revealed in the Word of God as to who Christ is. Note the object of that faith. *Hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.* Then James makes a statement that a lot of people treat like it's a throw away. He says that Christ is the Lord of glory. So now he is giving you another descriptive phrase of what true religion is. True religion out of a grace-given, Christ-purchased, Spirit-bought work of a relationship with Christ whereby you're saved and religion which is not the avenue to salvation but the result of salvation, he now turns and says to hold to that faith.

That is why our ministry theme for this year is contending for the faith. Hold to the faith. That is what his brother Jude says in Jude, contend for the faith. James says to hold to the faith. What faith? It is the faith revealed in God's Word in our Lord Jesus Christ. Then he makes the statement 'the Lord of glory' which is almost the most important thing in the text. The word glory means weightiness, something of substance, majesty, strength, something that everything can rest on, something that makes everything worthwhile, something you were made for, clout, influence, and significance. Here is significance, Christ. Here is weightiness, Christ. Here is majesty, Christ.

Who is saying this? It is Jesus' brother. How many books have been written by family members exposing their famous brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers? The guy I grew up with, played with, ate dinner with, is the Lord, Jesus the Christ and I can't say anything more profound than this; He is shekinah glory. He is the glory. He is the Lord of glory. That is what you're made for, His glory. How many of you think you'd like to go through life and just be a throw-away? We are all made for glory, but not the animals. We want our life to count. We want it to have weight. We want something to have been done. We were made for glory.

The question is, what is glory? For the believer we are increasingly becoming aware more and more that glory is the Lord's. What do you do? You do Jesus. You give Him your glory. I'm an athlete. I'm a salesman. I'm this, I'm that. For the believer increasingly they know more and more there is only one thing weighty that makes life significant. It is the Lord of glory. That is the admonition that is given so please remember it. Now let's get to the trial of life that shows up.

The trial of life is one that they didn't expect. They had gathered for a worship service which is the greatest privilege for a church. It seems to have been a crowded day. As it is assembling they get two visitors. There were two responses to those visitors but there was one reason for those two responses to those two visitors. Let's meet the visitors that showed up for the worship service.

James 2:2-4 says [2] *For if a man wearing a gold ring* (literally he has fingers covered in gold rings – he's goldfingered) *and fine clothing comes into your assembly* (assumption immediately made is that this is a rich man), *and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in*, (What are the two responses?) [3] *and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"* [4] *have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* Your behavior is betraying what you're thinking and believing. You just made a determinative decision about where these people are going to sit in your assembly of worship based upon your evil thoughts.

Here are two men that come in. One is goldfingered, wearing fine clothing and the immediate assessment is that he is a rich man. Here is another man with shabby clothing and the assessment is a poor man. There are two responses. For the rich man they want to elevate his seating and they don't even have a seat for the poor man but he can sit on the floor at our feet. The reason for these assessments and responses is that you value the rich man's glory and you see the poor man as weightless with no glory. Why? The reason we do it is because of I Samuel 16:7 which says [7] *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."*

You might be thinking that we need to quit doing that. You can't quit doing that because you can't see the heart. Human beings look on the outward. The problem is not that they looked on the outward and made the assessment that he is a rich man. The problem is that they wanted his glory more than the Lord of glory and the Lord's assessment. Here are two men made in the image of God and one man has the glory of the world. He needs to be saved and the poor man needs to be saved, if they aren't saved, but you have made a distinction between both men who need the Lord, made in the image of God, because you have become enamored with the glory of the rich man. The problem is not your limitation that you can't see the hearts of these men but the problem you have is what you see you value more than the glory of the Lord.

People will take this and turn this into the true dress code for church which is everybody dress poor. That is not the purpose of this passage. Christians learn four things about their dress. First of all they know that people are forming judgments of our hearts by our appearance. So what is it that we want to put in front of them? So Christians have learned how to dress with respect for who they are about to meet and for what they are about to do. They dress with excellence, neatness and with modesty. That's how we dress – respect, dignity, excellence and modesty. I had a grandfather who owned one suit and it was his Sunday-go-to-meeting suit. It wasn't expensive. He bought that suit to get married in, go to church in and get buried in because the occasions demanded he showed respect to people and he would dress with modesty etc. It had nothing to do with the price.

There was the story of the young man who was converted in a dorm room and so he decided to go to church the next Sunday. He showed up at church with cutoff jeans and flip flops because he hadn't learned about Christians dressing with modesty, dignity, excellence and all that. An older man in the church came over and told him "You're not dressed appropriately. Go home and ask the Holy Spirit how you ought to dress before you come back." The next Sunday he comes back wearing his cutoff jeans, t-shirt and flip flops and the older man said "I told you to go ask the Holy Spirit how you ought to dress before you come back here. Did you do that?" The young man said "Yes sir I did. I talked to Him and He said 'I don't know how to dress because I hadn't been to that place in a long time.'"

This passage is not a dress code for worship. The rich man was dressed wrongly and the poor man was dressed rightly. No, that's not it. As a Christian you work through those issues of dressing for respect, dignity, excellence and modesty. That is another issue but it does bring up that people do look on the outward. They looked on the outward and their first association was that this man is rich and this one is poor. This man has weight and this one is weightless. There is a reserved seat for the rich man but the poor man has to sit at our feet. The reason they did that was because they had wrong thinking. Their value had been set by the world for the riches of that man is weighty and the poor man is weightless. It betrayed what they believed as glory instead of the Lord.

How do we go about correcting that? Some would say to put a new dress code in place. That's not it. Let's go to mind and the heart. How do we see life and how do we see people? Most of all, what do we see as glory in life? Instead of the rich man being worshipped and the poor man being put in a place where he worships us, in our worship services where we come together to worship the Lord we actually in that process begin to lift of the glory in that world. So instead of having those evil thoughts we need to change our thinking.

James 2:5-7 says [5] *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?* [6] *But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?* [7] *Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

All James is doing is picking up on what His brother used to teach very clearly. Jesus said in Matthew 19:24, [24] *Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.* He is giving you a pastoral observation. Why would you bow to riches? They don't have weight. By the way, those that put weight into it their riches begin to insulate and isolate them from the Gospel message because they don't think they need it. Those that have it will use their power and possessions to control you that you become conquered by them, dragged to the courts by them and you become their possessions unless God grants them repentance.

Can God save a rich man? Absolutely. Nicodemus and Philemon were converted. God can save a rich man and He does but the bigger fishing pool has always been the poor. Why? It is because they don't even think they have glory. They are not insulated or isolated. So James says why did you put those who are more likely to respond, at least that's the way we see it, to the side and then these who are harder to get to because of isolation will use what they have to control you? The answer isn't to disdain the rich man or to disdain the poor man. The answer is to quit bowing and

worshipping the dust of glory from this world for it doesn't have weight. You'll never have enough money. You'll never have enough rings on your finger. The only reason he doesn't have more rings on his fingers is because he ran out of fingers. So what do you do? You learn to focus on the Lord of glory. There's weight.

Here is the takeaway. True religion is derived from a Christ-preeminent life view propelled by a Christ-passionate life love producing a Christ-shaped life style. This is Gospel wisdom Maxim number three. So how do I learn how to make right decisions when the trials of life come? I need to have a life love. The love of Christ compels me. That needs to be the passion of my life. Where does that come from? That comes from a life view whereby Christ is preeminent. There is nothing else.

Everything else in the book of James will be built off of these three marks and right here in the first example all three marks are absent when this church assembled. They didn't have a bridled tongue. Look at what they said to the poor man. Look at what they said to the rich man. They didn't have a heart of grace and mercy to the marginalized. The result is they were stained by their own evil thoughts. You will see this unfolding in case after case in the book of James.

What is the answer to the marks of a true religion out of a vital relationship with Christ? Go back to the relationship. God give me a Christ-preeminent life view that is fueled by a life love that will then let me increasingly make a Christ-shaped life style. So that again we can be called Christians, Christ followers, little Christs, because we love Him and want to be like Him, because He is our glory.

Let's go back to church seating. There was a time when Mr. White Man would sit here and Mr. Black Man would sit up there. We gloried in our race or we glory in our nationality. I love my country and I'm grateful for everything that God did but I have a greater allegiance and it's called the Kingdom of God and the King of Christ because that's where glory is. The nations of this world will fade away. I want to be a good citizen of that Kingdom in this nation. There is where my glory is. So we begin to make judgments based upon faulty views of what gives us weight and glory in our lives.

This glory thing is running throughout your Bible. The heavens are declaring His glory. Is it no wonder that people are doing everything they can to say 'God didn't make this'? I don't even know where this came from is what they are saying but once it got here it made itself and it keeps working on itself. The heavens declare the glory of God. The mountains rise up in glory, shouting glory to God. There's weight. Not even the heavens are weighty but it's the God who flung them into existence when He spoke them into existence with His Word. Then you see the glory in the garden, the glory that's displayed to Moses at Mount Sinai and you see Moses' desire to see God's glory.

I'm so grateful to two of my teachers that showed me this from this text, this key phrase of glory here. Glory is our deepest desire. There is our joy in our glory and the only thing that can bear the weight of our deepest desire to give us joy and glory is the Shekinah glory of the Lord but it's a dangerous, deathly glory. The angels have to be shielded. God said "Moses if I show you My glory you won't be able to live." So God shrouds His glory. In the cleft of the rock He put Moses. He puts His glory in the Tent of Meeting. He puts His glory in the Holy of Holies. He puts His glory in the pillar of the cloud that takes them through the wilderness but then wonder of wonders, joy upon joy God's glory is no longer in a tent, the Holy of Holies, a burning bush, but now the

Word has become flesh and we have beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

When God said that second temple would receive greater glory than the first temple that was fulfilled on the eighth day when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus into that temple. Then glory filled that temple. As Peter, James and John look upon Jesus up on that mountain, they see glory that overwhelms them as the voice from heaven declares “This is My Son (the Lord of glory) in whom I am well pleased.” See Him gloriously come out of the tomb and gloriously ascend. One day we’ll see His glory when He returns but until then His glory is in you the temples of the Holy Spirit. There is our glory. It is not how many rings are on our fingers or zeroes in our bank accounts or color of our skin or pedigree of our family. We are thankful for anything and everything God gives us but we glory in Christ.

When Christ becomes preeminent that will bring passion. When passion comes that will bring lives that reflect His glory even in what we eat or drink. That will help us make decisions about sex because it will be for His glory. So when you go to college and they say ‘you’re a virgin, you are weird’ you say ‘no I’m just after glory.’ I want to glorify the Lord. I think it makes sense to put my weight on that which can hold my weight.

When I was at Christ Covenant and we were meeting in this gymnasium we had these chairs. Some churches don’t get a chance to get great pews and so we had these chairs that were donated to us. They looked good but we called them the widow makers. One Sunday as I was preaching people began to disappear. I thought they were being slain in the Spirit but that wasn’t so. What was happening was that some of these chairs that looked good had a certain weight limit. I will not say what the weight limit was. The chair that looked good couldn’t take a weight.

When we go after the dust of the glory of this world we are putting our weight on what’s hollow, but the Lord can bear you up. His glory can not only bear your weight but His glory makes you weighty. Now you have Godly clout. Now you have Godly significance. Now you’re able to move forward into life for His glory. Why can you do that? Why can the Lord of glory be your glory? It is because He left glory to bring you from the dust of death to glory where you’ll be with Him who is your glory forever. Until then He’ll be with you and in you and He is your glory.

When I’ve been gone for a long while, I’ll come back and turn on my computer and inevitably the screen will say I have ‘sixteen downloads, do not turn off your computer, it will restart automatically.’ That is the rest of your Christian life. Every Lord’s Day it’s time for a download. Every morning get to your Word for it’s time for a download. Don’t cut off, it will restart. Download the Word of God by the power of the Spirit of God, Biblically informed, Holy Spirit shaped and the Holy Spirit and the Bible will point you to Jesus preeminence, who will give you power and passion. Eventually you will keep growing reflecting decisions in life where you become Christ shaped for His glory. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I thank You for the glory of the Father through the Son in the Spirit and I’m headed to a world of glory that is forever and on the way we can make decisions. In light of this text help us at

Briarwood – no reserved seating here, for we welcome everybody and we'll not be intimidated by the glory of this world nor will we covet it but Father we won't take the poor man and make him worship us nor will we bow to the rich man to worship him. We'll invite both to join us to worship Christ as we hold to the faith for Christ is the Lord of glory. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.