

READING James 2:1-13

SERMON

Love in Action (James 2:1-13)

When we meet someone for the first time in a social occasion there are usually three questions asked near the beginning of the conversation.

“What is your name?”

“Do you live far from here?” Or where do you live

“What do you do for a living?” i.e. what job do you do?

With those three bits of information you begin to form quite a picture about the person you are talking to. The name can give you some idea of their background, maybe whether they come from a top flight family or not.

Where someone lives tells you about the size of their house and if you know the area they live in, it says something, maybe a lot about them.

The job they do will also speak volumes and so people tend to dress up their jobs. Here are some examples. Can you guess what the job is?

Space consultant	(estate agent)
Ambient replenishment controller	(shelf stacker)
Revenue Protection Officer	(ticket inspector)
Foot health gain facilitator	(chiropodist)
Head of Verbal Communications	(secretary)
Technical horticultural maintenance officer	(gardener)
Flueologist	(chimney sweep)
Dispatch services facilitator	(post room worker)
Regional head of services, infrastructure and procurement	(caretaker)
Knowledge navigator	(teacher)

Some firms have gone a different route and use a description to make the job sound great. What about these? Can you guess the job?

'...you will enjoy the satisfaction of assisting people in their safe and time effective discharge pathways from an acute hospital setting.'

Professional Assistant at a hospital

'An exciting opportunity to join a newly formed Service Modernisation Team which will lead the drive for even better practice and will play a significant role in creating a self-generating culture of improvement.'

Administrative Assistant in the NHS Trust

'...are likely to be asked to implement strategic communication or provide high-level input into the development of strategic vision.'

Principle Corporate Officers / Organisation Communication Strategists

'...has specific responsibility for ensuring that all aspects of New Business Technical Requirements are fully scoped both in gathering current infrastructural parameters of the sending organisation framework and in determining comparative requirements through exercise of due diligence on current and anticipated infrastructures to support ongoing business continuity in the Location. Specific responsibilities covered in due diligence exercise to incorporate the following task performance.'

Technical Enablement Leader

You may not have such grand sounding job title or job description but it says something about you and when you tell someone else they begin to build up a picture of who you are and certain questions go through the mind

“Will this person be interesting to talk to?”

“What is it they do?”

“I thought they smelt a bit funny!”

“Why were they invited to this party?”

“They won’t want to know me!”

And perhaps some other things go through the mind. But what did James say? Verse 1

“My brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favouritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here’s a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

(James 2:1-4 NIV)

James is talking about looking at someone’s appearance and making value judgements on the way they are dressed and worse treating them accordingly. That is favouritism and this should not be in the Christian’s vocabulary. At Ashurst Drive Baptist Church we have as the ‘A’ word ‘Accepting’. We accept all people here and we do not want to have favourites and only a certain sort of people – people who are like us and top-hole, you know. We do not want people who will stir their coffee using their pen!

We also have the ‘B’ in ADBC and this is for ‘Belonging’ – we want all people to Belong here and feel as if they belong. So we respect all people and this should be our stance as Christians. We have to make the place welcoming for others. I was so pleased when recently talking to someone who has not been here that long that they found the place and people so welcoming, so friendly, we need to keep that up and strive even more to make ADBC an accepting place where people feel as if they belong.

But it seems as if some were thinking, back in that early church, because James is thought to be one of the first letters that was sent, that favouritism is only a little sin and God will overlook it. It is not like we are murderers or anything like that. But we read, verse 9

“But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker.” (James 2:9-11 NIV)

The problem is that we grade sin. It was interesting on Thursday when we were talking about Freedom and Liberty. Darren asked the question, “You are on a motorway and you see in the inside lane a police car. Hands up if you would slow down?” And a sea of hands went up.

Then the next question. “You get level with the car and notice it is just an motorway maintenance vehicle. Do you then speed up?” And again the sea of hands went up.

We think it is OK to drive faster than the speed limits, but we are good citizens when it comes to murder or thief or paedophilia! With God there is no grade of sin. We may think favouritism and gossip is down their at the bottom, and murder is up there at the top with disagreement about the sexual sins, but God has not grades, all is sin and all is equally sin.

Beware of the argument that it is only a little sin and therefore somehow excusable - it is still sin.

So why is favouritism wrong and a sin? James gives three reasons

Chosen by God – the first is stated in verse 5

“Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?”

(James 2:5-7 NIV)

You are amongst the poor and you are chosen by God and it is the rich who are exploiting you and taking you to court. Why would you want to suck up to the very people who are exploiting you, slandering God’s name and taking you to court.

God turns things on their head and it is the poor who are to inherit the kingdom not the rich.

But money can get in the way at times. On a slightly different example of what money can do, the organisation Teen Challenge, a few years ago, were threatened with having a grant cut from Redbridge Borough Council because they refused to water down the gospel in their message and also in the scheme that recovering addicts volunteered to go through. The grant was considerable and it looked as if Teen Challenge had two choices, to either take the grant, but downplay the Christian part of their organisation or refuse to give up their principles, lose the grant and go under for lack of funds. They chose the latter, refused the funds and are still going because God honoured their decisions.

Beware of letting money cloud the issue. We can sadly do dubious things because money is held out as a carrot.

God respects all peoples and so if we show favouritism of any sort, then we are not showing others respect. Think about someone you respect – how do you treat them? That is how you should treat all people – especially anyone who enters through these doors.

Violate Royal Law – we have the second reason, verse 8

“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right.” (James 2:8 NIV)

The royal law from Leviticus 19:18

“...love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18 NIV)

Quoted by Jesus when asked what the greatest commandment was. Jesus replied

“He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27 NIV)

And of course went on to tell the story of the Good Samaritan showing that our neighbour is anyone who needs us.

James has already spoken about the perfect law, chapter 1, verse 25, but let us begin at verse 22

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:22-25 NIV)

The perfect law that brings freedom. Seems strange to talk about law bringing freedom, but the best way to play a game is to have rules. On Friday I was with my stepfather and also there was my mother-in-law and two daughters and both grandchildren. A game of pairs was begun with my stepfather and the two grandchildren with help from the great grandmother and one of the mums. The game is that all the cards are put face down and then you turn over two and if the pictures match you keep those cards and have another go. If they do not match, then the next person has their turn. Quite quickly Elizabeth was winning as she held the most cards in her hands, However it was noticeable that at times, in most times she would turn over three cards and not two and find a match. I blame her grandmother Sue for teaching her to cheat at cards! But no-one minded because in a three-year old it is cute, even Noah at four did not seem to mind or notice.

However if she breaks the rules like that when she is older, it may not be overlooked as it will no longer be cute. The law, the perfect law of God does bring freedom, but only when we carry it out, when we are doers and not merely listeners. And in that perfect law is the royal law that we

“...“Love your neighbour as yourself,”” (James 2:8 NIV)

And notice verse 8 ends with the words

“... you are doing right.” (James 2:8 NIV)

Our love has to be active, not just in words, but in action and without prejudice, without favouritism. We have to love all, we have no choice, we have no option. Jesus came for all and he died for all. We have to love all as God loves us.

Judgement Will Occur- The third reason given by James we have touched on already and is in verse 9

“But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers.” (James 2:9 NIV)

If favouritism is shown, then it will be judged as a sin. Favouritism is wrong, its counterpart prejudice is also wrong.

We are a church that Acceptance and Belonging are important and notice the end of the passage we had read earlier

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!” (James 2:12-13 NIV)

If we show favouritism then we should not be surprised if it happens to us and that God will show favouritism to others over us. As Jesus said

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7 NIV)

The parable Jesus told of the servant who was let off a huge debt by the king and the servant then goes out and show no mercy to a lower servant who owed him such a small amount in comparison to the debt he had just been let off and he is brought before the king who says

“‘...‘You wicked servant,...I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”’ (Matthew 18:32-35 NIV)

And if in doubt which is the way forward?

“...Mercy triumphs over judgment!” (James 2:13 NIV)

Practice mercy, not being judgemental. When anyone comes into your life, do not begin to judge them and certain do not tell them all the things that they are doing wrong. Firstly accept them, help them to belong. In other words ‘Love them.’