

m MASTERCLASS | JAMES

DAILY DEVOTION

DAY 7

READ

JAMES 2:5-7

FOCUS

⁵LISTEN, 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? ⁶BUT YOU HAVE DISHONORED THE POOR. IS IT NOT THE RICH WHO ARE EXPLOITING YOU? ARE THEY NOT THE ONES WHO ARE DRAGGING YOU INTO COURT? ⁷ARE THEY NOT THE ONES WHO ARE BLASPHEMING THE NOBLE NAME OF HIM TO WHOM YOU BELONG?

REFLECTION from PASTOR MATT CIANFRANI

James opens our section of scripture for today with a word that every teacher, coach and especially my mom said to me daily: "listen." It could be for the same reason it was said to me all of the time--I wasn't really paying attention--or James understands that what he is about to say is so counterintuitive that we have to slow down and listen to what he is going to say to really understand it.

Regardless of the reason, let's listen. James starts out with a somewhat provocative idea. It is not the rich who will be "richest in faith" but the poor because they will have more opportunities to trust God and ask for His provision. In other words, their dependence on God is greater than someone who has the income to cover all of life's necessities and bills. The "rich" go to their wallets, and the "poor" go to their God. Simply put, the poor will recognize their dependence on God to meet their physical needs and this easily translates into a dependency on God for their Spiritual needs as well.

James builds the theology in this passage from the framework laid out by Jesus in the Beatitudes: we become rich in spirit by first recognizing our true spiritual poverty before God. That is to say we are spiritually bankrupt before God without Jesus. We offer Him nothing and within our own power have no ability to change that apart from Christ. That theological leap is made smaller and more easily digested by those who are "poor." Because oftentimes the wealthy of our world think of themselves as the opposite of what was just said. They will find themselves self-confident, too important, and, in many cases, believe that they are more of a "mistaker" who needs a second chance--not a sinner who needs a Savior.

The second point James lays out is that God is not impressed by the wealth of people, even though wealth is often all people are impressed by. It is easy for us to show favoritism to wealthy people because we are drawn to power and to opportunity. But God holds all power and can open and close any door He pleases. Because of this, He is not impressed by wealth nor will He show favoritism to wealthy people. Rather, Scripture indicates exactly the opposite. It says that to whom much is given, much is expected. This reality is addressed by James because he wants us to have the heart of Christ: a non-consumeristic heart to love people. A heart that doesn't ask the question, "What can I get from them?" but rather, "What can I give them?"

QUESTIONS

- DO YOU OFTEN FIND YOURSELF DOWNPLAYING YOUR SIN (AS IN, "IT'S JUST A MISTAKE")? WHY DO YOU THINK YOU DO THAT?
- HOW CAN YOU MOVE YOURSELF FROM ASKING WHAT YOU CAN GET FROM THE PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS IN YOUR LIFE TO WHAT YOU CAN GIVE?