

## “DEAD OR ALIVE?”

TEXT: JAMES 2:1-17

GOD’S WORD: PROVERBS 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

### I - PROVERBS:

The book of Proverbs in the Bible was written by Solomon. He is thought of as the wisest ruler of Israel that they ever had. If you remember my last message to you it was about Solomon asking God for wisdom to rule God’s people, and that’s what God gave him. Proverbs is a book of that wisdom concerning different topics. As I was reviewing it for this week’s message, deciding it would be God’s Word for us I couldn’t help but start putting names with the verses:

<sup>1</sup> *Choose a good reputation over great riches;  
being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold.*

Let’s just consider people like Bill Gates and Jeff Bozos and their reputations ruined by infidelity.

<sup>2</sup> *The rich and poor have this in common:  
The LORD made them both.*

Whether you are in the White House or in line at Jobs and Family Services, God made you both. Loves you both.

<sup>8</sup> *Those who plant injustice will harvest disaster,  
and their reign of terror will come to an end.*

Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and other world leaders through history.

<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are those who are generous,  
because they feed the poor.*

Mother Teresa, John Wesley, the Church.

<sup>22</sup> *Don’t rob the poor just because you can,  
or exploit the needy in court.*

<sup>23</sup> *For the LORD is their defender.  
He will ruin anyone who ruins them.*

Anybody else remember the movie Erin Brokovich? I could even go so far as to make mention of Jim and Tammy Faye.

### II – US:

How about us? Do you need to add your name to any of these verses? Do you need to join the list of the rich and famous? As I look at my life and consider I'm mostly like all of you, then the answer is yes!

We don't like to admit it, but we all have character flaws when we hold ourselves up against God's standards. Most of us have a bias or prejudice somewhere in our lives. We are living in a society that values possessions over people. We live to get what we want even at the expense of someone else. I love that two of the richest men are building rocket ships to colonize the moon and mars, supposedly to save our planet. My only question is if any of you have the millions of dollars to get a ticket. None of us are in the right tax bracket for a place in the plane so I'm guessing the societies there will be elitist. Besides...we've already destroyed God's creation on this planet, why do we want to branch out and kill a couple more?

Do you return a 10<sup>th</sup> of what God gives you so His work can be done? Are you blessed because you have been generous to help those less fortunate? I could keep going but hopefully you get the message. We all have flaws in the way we live out our faith.

### **III – TEXT:**

Lucky for us we have a lot of information in this book (Bible) to help lead us in our lives. To instruct us how to follow Jesus and live out our faith. One of those books is the Book of James which Pastor Becky started us in two weeks ago. The book of James only lists Jesus twice, in 1:1 and 2:1 but this letter is unmistakably Christian in its moral instruction. It is concerned with a broad picture of the moral principles in the community of Faith. The two it deals with in Chapter 2 are impartiality and Living Faith. Let's tackle the one on impartiality first...

### **JAMES 2:1-17**

#### **A Warning against Prejudice**

<sup>1</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? <sup>2</sup> For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. <sup>3</sup> If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor" —well, <sup>4</sup> doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? <sup>5</sup> Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? <sup>8</sup> Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the

royal law as found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>9</sup> But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.<sup>10</sup> For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws.

<sup>11</sup> For the same God who said, “You must not commit adultery,” also said, “You must not murder.” So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.<sup>12</sup> So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free.<sup>13</sup> There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

James urges inclusiveness. The worldly tendencies are to play favorites. To treat some better than others based on their money, manners, ethnicity, clothes, gender, even their church affiliation. James tells us this is wrong. That as followers of Jesus Christ we are to remember the command he gave us to love one another. Discrimination in any form is incompatible with Faith in Christ. The passage mentions the “poor” but James is speaking about all forms of discrimination.

This is so important that he points out (verse 9) that this is actually a sin. It is so bad that anyone who practices any kind of partiality stands under God’s judgement and should not expect mercy if they haven’t shown it and given it themselves!

Then he tells us what Living Faith looked like...

### **Faith without Good Deeds Is Dead**

<sup>14</sup> What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? <sup>15</sup> Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, <sup>16</sup> and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? <sup>17</sup> So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

This passage mirrors the teachings of Jesus which tells us that if we are connected to him (vine and branches) we are to bear fruit. If we don’t bear fruit then we are useless and will be pruned off. The Apostle Paul’s letters speak about Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians) and the fruit of our Salvation (Philippians) and other passages which all mean the same thing. Followers of Jesus have been blessed with various gifts that are expected to be used to lead others to the Kingdom and to take care of our brothers and sisters.

James makes it pretty clear that faith without deeds doesn't qualify as faith. True faith is living faith – it results in acts of mercy. Works of charity are supposed to emerge out of your faith. The Message translation says it best...Faith without works is a corpse!

Let me make sure you understand that you can't get your true faith, your Salvation because you worked for it. You can work at it but you can't work for it. You're faith and Salvation are a gift of God's grace, but they are supposed to make you want to work for God!

#### **IV – OUR LIVES:**

I worked in the world where Unions were in place. One thing I noticed about unions were that they would take anyone. They would protect anyone. If you paid your dues you got the same treatment as everyone else. So why won't the Church of Jesus Christ?

You are the church, so I'll make it personal? Why won't you? What parts of your life do you need to change or put in to place to be a follower of Jesus? Do you treat people the way they should be treated? Do you snub people? Do you give some the cold shoulder? Do you look down on others who you don't think are living the way you think they are supposed to? Do you stay in your own little group..."click" and shun everyone else? Have you fallen into the trap we've seen concerning masks and vaccines and react to those with a differing opinion with anger instead of understanding? And these are just a few examples. I'm telling you to take a personal survey in relation to this message/scripture and see if you have areas that need to be addressed.

The main question for today is this "does your life show a live Jesus or a dead follower. ARE YOU DEAD OR ALIVE?"

#### **V – COMMUNION:**

As we come to the time of the service where we will share communion I point you in these lessons contained in the Sacrament. One thing I love about our church is that we have an open table. We welcome everyone to join us in the act of communion no matter who you are, where you're from, and any other things that set us apart. We don't care that you're not a member or if you have ever been in our church before. We don't care about your denomination, or even if you've ever been in a church before. We want you to join us in this act because Jesus would do the same thing.

Jesus came and died for all...for everyone...he saw no differences...just people...souls. When he went to the cross and died for our sins he didn't do it with a list of those he was dying for and those who were excluded. He simply loved us all. Who are we to do different?

AMEN