

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 15 Text: 2:6-9 Date: 5-21-23

Trinity Lutheran Church - Pastor David Nehrenz

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

IF YOU FULFILL THE ROYAL
LAW ACCORDING TO THE
SCRIPTURE, YOU SHALL LOVE
YOUR NEIGHBOR AS
YOURSELF. YOU DO WELL.
[JAMES 2:8]

(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?**

(Is 63:19; 65:1; Am 9:12; 11:22; Ac 8:3; 15:17; 16:19-24; 17:6; 18:12; 1 Cor 6:1-8)

(8) If you really fulfill **the royal law according to the Scripture,**
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

(9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and
are convicted by the law as transgressors.

(Lev 19:15-18; Dt 1:17; 16:19; Mt 5:43; 22:36-40; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:25-37; Rom 13:8-10)

Note: "Commandments four through ten describe relationships with our fellow humans. Here Luther's understanding of "vocation" is apparent. Vocation comes from the Latin vocare, meaning "to call." God calls everyone to certain roles, or stations, in life. In this commandment, Luther describes our duty before God to honor father and mother, that is, to respect authority. God instituted all forms of authority as an extension of parental authority, for our good. There are various parental authorities, or "fathers," in our lives, including pastors, teachers, and government officials.

Another insight by Luther is about the life of good works to which Christians are called. We should not regard "Church work" as more holy than the other things in life that we routinely do. Rather, all callings and stations in life serve God and are opportunities for us to obey God's commandments and to serve our neighbor. The key observation Luther offers is this: faith is what makes a person holy. Faith alone. Good works serve God by serving other people.

From this it again appears how highly these Ten Commandments are to be exalted and extolled above all estates, commandments, and works that are taught and done apart from them. For here we can boast and say, "Let all the wise people and saints step forth and produce, if they can, a single work like these commandments. God insists on these with such seriousness. He commands them with His greatest wrath and punishment. Besides, He adds such glorious promises to them that He will pour out upon us all good things and blessings. Therefore, they should be taught above all others and be valued precious and dear, as the highest treasure given by God."

The command to love the neighbor, grounded in the Old Testament with the words “according to the Scripture,” is also called “the royal law,” i.e., the law issued by the King for His kingdom. James has spoken of the poor who inherit the kingdom promised to those who love God (2:5). Though “kingdom” here is strongly eschatologically freighted, as its rewards remain in the future, it is also a present reality in the person of the crucified and resurrected Christ. As the King, Christ provides the real substance to the Kingdom. In Himself and His atoning death He actualized what appeared above His cross: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The Kingdom is so much Christ Himself that if the Kingdom and Christ are not in every respect identical, they are at least coterminous. The royal law is really the law of the King, i.e., Jesus, which He has set down for those who are joined to His kingdom.²

The command to love is taken directly from Jesus, though not quoted from the gospels. James’ citation is identical to the tradition as it later became inscripturated in the gospels. James, like Matthew, calls these words a law (*nomos*), not in the sense of threat and warning but in the sense of a divine plan.

The entire work of Jesus pulsated with His love for people. This love must reflect itself in the life of the communities that carry His name. Though the command to love is as old as the Pentateuch and permeates the entire Old Testament, it comes to its fullest expression in Jesus, who as the King sets down this principle as basic for all in His kingdom. At the time James was writing, the early Christian communities in Palestine were acquainted with the Kingdom parables of Jesus. James’ use of the words “kingdom” and “royal” presuppose this knowledge. The full impact of James’ allusions,

LIFE APPLICATION

“The royal law according to the Scripture,
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

How does this work out in everyday life?