

Prayer

All praise to You, Lord God,
for the joy of love and happiness of friendship,
for the wonder of creativity and delight of achievement,
for the miracle of our faith and the wonder of glory,
and all we have in You, our Lord and God:
AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Retailing

Pray for Christians who are doing their best to trade in small businesses in a godly manner. Some find it very hard, and they deserve our earnest and regular prayers.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for world leaders and the consequences of their meetings*
- *Give thanks for the life God has given you, and for His love*
- *Pray that God's people will show good morality to the world*

Meditation

Memory; this precious gift, which, yielded to the love of God
Can work within your soul for spiritual strength and succour.

Give it time and space, and let it bring you precious peace
For all within your past which needs God's touch of healing.

Give it time and space, and let it search you for the truth
About how your life was held by sin, but Jesus set you free.

Give it time and space, and let it tell again the story
Of how you turned from self to faith and hope and love.

Give it time and space, and let it bring to mind the fact
Of your salvation found within the eternal Word of God.

Give it time and space, and it will always serve you
Until that time when all your life is held by God in glory.

Memory, this precious gift; yield it to the Lord, Your God.
And it will work within your soul for good and not for ill.

Bible Study - James 2:1-7

¹ My friends, you do not keep faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ by showing favouritism. ² For if someone comes into your church dressed up in gold and fine clothing, and then a poor person in shabby clothes also enters, ³ and you give attention to the one who is well dressed and say, 'Do, please, have a seat over here,' but when dealing with the poor you say, "'Stand there,' or, 'Sit on the floor,' ⁴ have you not discriminated amongst yourselves and become judges with evil designs?

⁵ Listen, my dear friends. Has not God chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom He has promised to those who love Him? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who exploit you, and force their judgements on you? ⁷ Is it not they who blaspheme the good name by which you are known?

Review

These words are sharp, as scripture sometimes is, and James must have been writing to people he believed to be in need of hearing some home truths about putting faith into practice. This reading bluntly exposes the

evil of prejudice within the life of the church, and James justifies his denunciation of it with vigorous Gospel arguments. In addition, the manner in which he does this is a reminder to us that in the midst of the many pressing demands upon our churches just now, God's priorities remain for the poor, and this must be our Gospel agenda today.

As in chapter one of this letter, there is considerable of similarity between what we find here and Jesus' teaching, and we are reminded by James' words of what Jesus said about those who would inherit the Kingdom. Jesus said famously 'blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven' ((Matthew 5:32), and frequently spoke of the poor (e.g. Luke 4:8, 12:33 etc.). Jesus also described the fate of 'Dives and Lazarus' (Luke 16:20f.), in which the poor Lazarus entered the Kingdom, but the rich Dives agonised in hell, cut off by his decision to please himself and ignore the poor; He also spoke of the value of the meagre offering placed by a poor widow the Temple treasury (Luke 21:1-4). Jesus' teaching was clear, and James applied it directly to the world of church life and attacked those who lived by the intrigues of power and influence within the church, and exposed it as utterly contrary to the Gospel.

It is easy for us to agree with what James says, but the truth of the matter is that most of us fall prey to all manner of favouritism and prejudice simply because of our preferences about those with whom we wish to spend our time. This may not be intentional discrimination, but unfortunately, we can allow this to become blindness when we are so busy with our normal friends that we fail to see the needs of others around us, particularly the poor. James presents this message graphically (2:2-4) and challenges us to ensure our lives are governed not by natural desires, but by spiritual needs and the guidance of the Holy Spirit within. The Gospel requires us to sacrifice our own likes and dislikes in favour of the values of the Kingdom of God, and this means that our eyes and ears need to be open to the needs of others as well as our hearts. Often, in our desire to pursue what is on our own minds, and often quite unthinkingly, we do not see the needy people in our midst. However, Christ calls us to honour the poor more highly than anyone else, and like Him, we are to make it our business to defer to the poor, not to the rich.

Why is it therefore, that many churches are still run by the people who have worldly influence and status, such as those who hold the purse strings, speak well, have 'influence', or who pay for the 'minister'? By comparison, what authority and advantage do the poor have in our midst? This is a serious question, which needs a serious answer. James was not conducting a witch-hunt any individuals in his letter; he sought only to apply Jesus' teaching to the real life setting of the church of his day. Both Jesus and James agree that the poor (and to this Jesus adds children) will nearly always have clearer insight into the things of the Kingdom than those with wealth in the world. They also say that those who have much will have the greatest difficulty in living a life worthy of the Gospel (Matt 19:24) and in demonstrating the values of the Kingdom of God.

Almost invariably, those who have had little worldly wealth, power or influence have led the spiritually growth and renewal of the Church for the last two thousand years. Whatever renown they have achieved has come because of the Gospel, and not because of their wealth, though many have been well supported by people of means. This should tell us a great deal about where to start looking for our spiritual leaders of the future!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How would you feel about this scripture if you were wealthy, and how do you feel about this scripture if you are wealthy?
2. Who are the poor in our midst, and who are the wealthy in our midst, and how may they be appropriately helped?
3. What lessons can we learn from this passage of scripture about how we govern the church?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I always feel sorry for the more wealthy people I know who have made a great impact on God's work by means of their generosity. However, I have seen too much poverty, and realise that unless the church begins to work and witness amongst the poorest of people, then we fail to preach the true Gospel.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Discuss with friends at your church whether anything similar to what James describes has happened in your church. What can be done about this?*

- *Make a note of the 'poor' people you know. If the list is short, prayerfully consider what can be done about this. Over a period of time, try to introduce yourself to more people at church (if this is possible), and so get to know all the people better.*

Final Prayer

Help us learn from this day, Lord God. In your wisdom, teach us how to make the best of every situation in which we find ourselves, and in Your mercy, protect us from all the works of the evil one. All praise to You, our Lord and God, our friend and Saviour: AMEN
