

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: James 2:1–5, 8–10, 14–18**

**Sermon: “The Power of Love”**

In our text James is addressing Christians who left Jerusalem following Stephen’s execution in Acts 7. Acts 8:1 tells us that Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and Acts 11:19 extends the range to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. In other words, James is writing to people from his church, people who had been scattered around the Mediterranean and might not be able to communicate with other Christians. The issues raised in this section are favoritism versus love. James is using this issue to lead these Christians once again to repentance and Christ’s cross.

If you were going to write a letter and leave final instructions for your family, what would you tell them? James is writing to members of his church who, because of local persecutions were now scattered throughout cities in the region of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. He had seen them grow in the grace and love of God. He had seen them become witnesses for Jesus Christ.

But then one day something unexpected happened. One of the most promising young men from James's church, a man named Stephen, full of passion and wisdom and truth debated about Jesus with a group of Jewish men. His opponents started a riot, seized Stephen, brought him before the Jewish legal officials, and stoned him. A great persecution arose against these new Christians.

Many of James's congregation went north to other Roman cities, where the Jewish-Christian debate was a far less significant issue. And in these cities they could actively live as Christians and continue to tell others about Jesus.

James knew, though, that some of these new Christians had moved to places where Christians were few. James wrote to them, knowing that, because of the persecutions, this might be one of the last opportunities he would have to communicate with them. Essentially this was his final word: ***"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."*** (v 8)

For some people who've been overcome by God's love, this simple instruction is enough. They look for opportunities to love. Now James knows that these people just need a little encouragement: Keep loving! But he also reminds them that love has no boundaries: ***"But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."*** (v 9)

James reminds his readers of the essence of love, especially God's love. You see, God's love isn't limited to Christians or to the rich or to a certain race or ethnicity. God's love is for all, and he calls Christians to be poised to love all people equally.

After all, that's how God loves us. He doesn't look at who we are or what we bring to the table. He simply loves us, and because of Jesus' death on the cross he promises to be with us, to forgive us of our sins, and to love us for eternity. And so, James describes how God's limitless love inspires and motivates our love. So how is your love life?

***In verses 14 thru 18, we read: "14What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"***

***<sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? <sup>17</sup>So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.***

***<sup>18</sup>But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”***

James sets the stage where two people stand. Both claim to have faith, but one person’s faith leads him to love actively as Christ’s witness, while the other person is unresponsive. And James asks, “Which person is living as Christ’s witness? Which person’s faith is alive?”

James pushes the point: “What good is it?” What good is it if you were to keep the whole Law (as if that were possible!) and yet commit just one sin? What good is it when a lip-service-only faith is accompanied by nothing in the way of active love or works of mercy toward one’s neighbor in need (James 2:14–16)?

We love being treated to eye-popping, heart-stopping performances in sports arenas or concert halls. But spectacular efforts can be ruined by just one instance of “falling short.” Over the course of a game, a pitcher can record 20 strikeouts or a quarterback can throw for 450 yards but nobody will remember such virtuosity if it was on the losing side because of the home run given up or the interception thrown at the critical moment. An opera can move us to goose bumps or even tears, but if the soprano cracks on her high note in the climactic aria, the audience deflates and that’s all we’ll be discussing at the exits.

When we realize we’ve “blown it completely” with not just one but an entire catalog of sins and are sinking in the depths of utter despair and ruin we turn to the Savior, who has unconditionally loved us to and through his cross to his desired end: forgiveness and eternal life.

God has created faith in us by his Holy Spirit. As the waters of Baptism flowed over our head, faith filled our hearts and minds faith in Jesus’ perfect life, his holy and innocent suffering and death, and his glorious resurrection.

Faith that when he said the words “It is finished” and breathed his last, he won salvation and forgiveness for the entire world. Faith that those waters of Baptism deliver God’s promises personally to you and me. And that faith in and of itself is enough to guarantee our eternal relationship with God. We don’t need to do anything else to earn God’s favor. But understand, when we were baptized into Christ, God created something else in us as well: his love; his will to act. Paul writes: ***“Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”***

(Romans 6:3–4)

We were baptized in order to live a new life, a life of faith-based, God-inspired love. In other words, the faith God put in our hearts yearns to act and move and respond to needs and speak about God’s abundant grace.

James essentially asks, “How can anyone’s faith not act in love?” In fact, our faith should be ready to love at a moment’s notice. By contrast, an unresponsive faith is really no faith at all. So how is your love life?

James gets even more specific with this example of what love looks like:

***“<sup>1</sup>My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. <sup>2</sup>For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, <sup>3</sup>and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” <sup>4</sup>have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”***

It doesn't play favorites. When visitors show up at the door to worship, whether rich or poor, whether handsome or homely, whether young or old, and for that matter whether Christian or non-Christian welcome them with the same courtesy we would welcome Christ.

For Christ welcomes us all this way: as forgiven sinners in need of the reassurance of God's forgiveness and grace. Christ opens the doors to us and all people.

So, how's your love life? The courtesy Christ extends should stand as the hallmark of his church. We don't play favorites here. All are welcome. All are sinners. By God's grace, all are forgiven. All are free to love God and to live for him.

Amen