

## James 2:1-17

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

**2** My brothers and sisters,<sup>[a]</sup> do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?<sup>[b]</sup> **2** For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, **3** and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet',<sup>[c]</sup> **4** have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? **5** Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters.<sup>[d]</sup> Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? **6** But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? **7** Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

**8** You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' **9** But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. **11** For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery', also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **12** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. **13** For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement.

**14** What good is it, my brothers and sisters,<sup>[e]</sup> if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? **15** If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? **17** So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

[Read full chapter](#)

### Footnotes

- a. [James 2:1](#) Gk *My brothers*
- b. [James 2:1](#) Or *hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without acts of favouritism*
- c. [James 2:3](#) Gk *Sit under my footstool*
- d. [James 2:5](#) Gk *brothers*
- e. [James 2:14](#) Gk *brothers*

May I speak in the name of God the Father, to the glory of God the Son, and in the power of God the Holy Spirit. Amen

Way, way back many centuries ago, not long after the 1990's began, there was a question being asked in sermons that seemed to appear out of nowhere, before swiftly disappearing again without trace. I don't know where it came from, why it suddenly appeared, or why it disappeared seemingly as quickly as it arrived. It was a simple question, but a stark one which could be brutal in the wrong hands.

If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

It's certainly an interesting question to ask ourselves from time to time. Does our faith shine forth in our everyday lives, or do we keep it as a private thing just for Sunday mornings?

How we live out our faith is a question that the writer of the letter of James is keen to try and answer. I wonder when was the last time any of you read the letter? If it's been a long time, or even never. I would encourage you to take the time this coming week to read it through. It's only 5 chapters and won't take you that long. Why not put aside 10 minutes a day and read a chapter every day between now and Friday, or even find it on audiobook or YouTube and listen to it?

The letter of James is a bit of a puzzle for scholars because unlike with Paul's letters such as Romans, Philippians or his letters to Philemon or Timothy, we are not quite sure to who it was sent. We are not even sure which James wrote it. Was it 'James the Just' who was Jesus' brother and one of the first leaders of the Church in Jerusalem? Or was it James the Apostle, the brother of John, who was supposed to have ended up in the North West corner of Spain. We don't know for sure but most people seem to think it was James the brother of Jesus who wrote it to churches made up of Jews who had become Christians. This would put it squarely in the very first decades of the Church. Its both heartening and slightly frustrating that the questions we struggle with in 2021 are the same ones the very early church struggled with.

There is an urban legend of an American pastor who visited the church he was about to lead whilst disguised as a homeless man. He arrived half an hour before the service, and out of a congregation of about 10,000 only 3 people acknowledged him. When he asked for change to buy food, no one gave him anything. He went to sit at the front of the church, and the ushers forced him to sit at the back out of the way. Half way through the service, it was announced that the new Pastor was here and was keen to meet his new congregation. The congregation's rapturous applause soon fell silent as the supposed homeless man made his way to the stage, where he revealed his true identity and gave a thunderous sermon on the parable of the Sheep and the Goats from Matthew 25.

Many people have tried to track down this supposed church, and the pastor involved, but without success. Ultimately I don't think whether or not it actually happened or not is important. What is important is the message the story tries to convey, a message which resonates with our passage from James.

I think that if we are honest, the Church of England as a whole can be seen as guilty of partialism that James warns against. It's estimated that about 17% of our adult population

have the reading age of a 5 year old, and yet look around many churches, including our own, and you will find them stuffed with books and pieces of paper all with lots of information on them. Look through those books and you will find them to be very wordy with a reading age over the national average. Now imagine that you have a, learning difficulty that makes reading hard, a low reading ability, or are functionally illiterate and ask yourself how welcome do you feel in our world of paper and wordy information?

Add into this the middle class mores and expectations that seem baked into our structures and we can start to add even more people who we are unconsciously making feel unwelcome. I have heard of people being persuaded from dropping exploring their vocation to priesthood as they would have chewed up and spat out by the expectations of the process. They had the potential to be brilliant priests, yet they were somehow judged by both their parish clergy and/or those in the diocese to be too working class.

James points to the equality we have as members of the church, as Brothers and Sisters in Christ. God loves us all equally without exception, so just as we are loved, so we too must love. James reinforces what Jesus himself taught, we must love our neighbour as ourselves. This is not the cute mushy love of trashy films and Barbara Cartland books, but the supreme love displayed in the life and death of Jesus. As was famously said at the wedding of Harry and Megan, there is a power in that love. However, as every fan of Spiderman knows, with great power comes great responsibility.

I'm sure that all of you with internet access have liked and followed our Facebook page, and never fail to watch Evening Prayer every week, and so will have heard me ask a question a few weeks ago – where do you see Jesus? Do you see the face of Jesus in those who are rich and powerful? Or just as in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, do you see Jesus in the poor and the outcast? Do you see Jesus in the face of the drug addict homeless person begging in the street? Do you see the face of Jesus in the asylum seeker desperately clinging to an inflatable boat as the cross the Channel in search of safety? If we don't see Jesus in these places, where he says that he is, where do we see him?

I'm not suggesting for one minute that we few here can solve all society's problems on our own with a click of our fingers, but we can still do what little we can. If we live lives of love, where we love our neighbour as ourselves, we have a responsibility to treat the homeless drug addict, or the asylum seeker in the same way we would treat the richest of royalty. If we live lives of love we stand shoulder to shoulder with those who are powerless. Love has been the defining characteristic of our faith from the very beginning. Let our love for the lost, the broken, the powerless, the naked, the hungry, the prisoner, the widow and the orphan be the evidence which convicts us of being Christians.

If we were arrested for being Christians, would there be enough evidence to convict us?