

The Royal Law of the Lord

03/24/24

There is one holiday every year we really don't celebrate much. We celebrate Easter and today we celebrate Palm Sunday. We celebrate Christmas, Memorial Day, St. Patrick's Day, and many other holidays we value as being important to us. One holiday we don't celebrate much comes on September 17th. Do you know what holiday is celebrated on that day? If you said Labor Day, you were wrong. The holiday on September 17th is actually called Constitution Day. In fact, Congress has designated September 17 – 23 of each year as Constitution Week. So, how many of us actually spend that day or week even thinking about our Constitution and being thankful for what it represents? We live in the best country partly because of the Constitution which gives us a lot of freedoms we enjoy today. One of the best parts of the Constitution is the section called "The Bill of Rights". They give us freedom as well as protect us from the government to a certain degree. The problem is when the government wants to distort these laws or take them away that we find ourselves getting closer to a country that is unfriendly to those who believe in freedom from the tyranny of government. As Christians, there are laws that we have to follow and live out as well. We get these laws from God's Holy Word. We can find these laws in Deuteronomy and then the updated version from Jesus Himself in Mathew during His Sermon on the Mount in which He expands on the Ten Commandments. Plus, the Bible states in Romans 2: 15 that we now have the law within us when Paul states this, "They demonstrate that God's law is written within them, for their own consciences either accuse them or tell them they are doing what is right. (NLT, 1770)" His Spirit writes them on our hearts and minds. However, there is one law that supports all of the God given laws in the Holy Word. This is what makes God's law better than any man made law, even better than the Constitution.

We've been going through James and we'll continue that journey today. Let's turn to James 2: 1 – 13 and James tells us this, "My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others? For instance, suppose someone comes into your

meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes. 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, doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives? 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 God promised to those who love him? And yet, you insult the poor man! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? Yes indeed, it is good when you truly obey our Lord's royal command found in the Scriptures: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you pay special attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law. And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws. For the same God who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' So if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery. So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free. For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you. (NLT, 1987)"

We've been talking about James and how this letter contains a lot of information about putting our faith in the Lord into action. We just don't tell others we are Christians; we show them by putting our faith into action. James is big on this and he starts off chapter 2 by talking about how can we claim we have faith in Jesus when we favor some people more than others. This was a problem in the culture that James and the Church lived in. Guess what, we have the same problem in today's world. James gives the example of someone coming into a meeting or assembly dressed in fancy clothes and another comes in that is dressed the opposite – in poor man clothing. James asks the question if we treat the rich man better than the poor man, isn't that discrimination or becoming judges of evil thoughts (KJV translation)? I think this may have shifted in our world today – those who dress bad fit in and those who dress up are looked upon as not being part of the in crowd. James tells us that if we show favoritism toward someone and discriminate against another it shows we are guided by wrong

motives. They were giving the rich a good seat while they told the poor to sit on the floor. I like the NLT here where it talks about wrong motives. These people were being nice to rich people for the wrong reasons. Their motive was wrong or we can say as well that their motive was evil. Usually when people are nice to rich people, it's to get something back from them. It's not out of love, but out of selfish desires. So, as a Christian, what motivates our actions? This is what James is really questioning here. This is important because James says in verse 9 that if we pay special attention to the rich, but treat the poor person at a lower standard, we have "sinned". We are guilty of breaking the law. In fact, James then adds about if we break one law, we break the entire law. James talks about if you commit murder; you have broken the entire law. This is hard for us to understand. At the park, we have laws under Code 75. If someone breaks 75 – 21 which deals with alcohol, then they get charged under that ordinance. If they break no other law, they are only guilty for the law they broke. James is telling us the opposite. If we break one law, then you're guilty of breaking the whole law. James states that in verse 10, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (NIV)" The reason for this is that all God given laws comes from one "royal law" as James calls it. In Greek, the term of "royal" is "basilikos" which means a royal official and / or something noble and kingly (Strongs Concordance). In other words, this law stands above the others laws or we can say that all other God given laws branch out from this "royal law". James tells us what the "royal law" is in verse 8 which is to love your neighbor as yourself. Since James is a good Jew, he knows God has this listed with the other God laws in Leviticus 19. Jesus would make this law in Mark 12: 29 – 31, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these. (NLT, 1514)" Jesus is telling us the royal command here. This is where James gets his statement. All other laws from God go through this royal law because it is the most important. So, our motive to follow God's law should be love. Love guides us through the laws of God. This is what makes God's law different from our U.S. Constitution. Love is the motive to live out the laws of God. This is God's Righteousness following through us and we allow this because of our love for the Lord. Again, all of God's laws branch out from the royal law. So, love is what

motivates us to follow Him. In fact, James tells us in verse 12 that the law of love will set you free. In other words, the love of Jesus sets us free because love wants to live out God's law.

What other example do we have of living out the royal law? Today, we are celebrating Palm Sunday. We celebrate Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Luke gives us the story in chapter 19 where he tells the story of Jesus riding a donkey and people are laying down their coats along the roadway for Jesus. In fact, some of the Pharisees get mad at Jesus because He is getting a lot of attention and Jesus tells them in verse 40 this, "If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would burst into cheers! (NLT, 1595)" People are singing and praising Jesus and this is a great story to celebrate. Yet, we have to ask the question what is motivating Jesus to do this? Let's remember Jesus had already told His disciples He was going to Jerusalem to die and to carry our shame on the cross. Jesus already knew what was going to happen. He knew the suffering and shame that was waiting for Him. He knew that during His time of the cross, He would be separated from His Father because of our sin that was put onto Him. Why, because God allowed His Son to be the perfect sacrifice for our sin. Jesus already knew all this was going to happen. Jesus didn't have to do this. It's hard for me at times to understand why Jesus would allow Himself to do such a thing for a group of sinful and nasty people. What motivated Jesus to do this? Folks, we have to understand that Jesus was living out the royal law that He told us to follow and as James told us to follow. Jesus loved His Father with all His heart, all His soul, all His mind, and all His strength. He did this by saying, "Yet I want your will, not my will to be done" when He was in agony in the Garden. Jesus followed the command of His Father through love. Then Jesus followed the second law which is equally as important – He loved us as Himself. Jesus lived out His royal command to the letter. Then we see that God loved His Son back by having His Spirit raise His Son from the grave for Jesus and for us. At the beginning of every year, new Scripture is put into the weekly bulletin that helps us to focus on a theme for the year. This year, we are focusing on what Jesus commands us to do, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." What is the motivation to do this? The motivation is the royal law – we do this out of love for Jesus because He first loved us. We move our love for Jesus into action because Jesus moved His love for us into action by going to the cross.

It is only then can we finally realize how thankful we should be for the “mercy” of Jesus. James finishes up in James 2: 13, “For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God’s mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you. (NLT, 1988)” We give mercy to others because Jesus showed us mercy when we didn’t deserve it. Just think for a moment. As Jesus was riding on that donkey toward the Sheep Gate at Jerusalem, Jesus was focused on that cross because He loved us. Jesus wanted to give us mercy by forgiving our sins when we confess them to Him. Jesus still lives out His love today. He still shows mercy to lost sinners. He still shows mercy to His followers who slip and fall during their journey with Jesus. Jesus was living out the royal law that Palm Sunday and He still does today on this Palm Sunday. The question we have to ask ourselves today is what motivates you and me to follow Jesus? What motivates us to want to obey Him today? His Spirit can help us to love Him as we should. If the Spirit can help us pray when we can’t, the Spirit can help us to love Jesus more and more every day. I think that would be a great Easter gift to Jesus – asking Jesus to help us to love Him more. Then to ask Him to help us to live out the rest of the royal command – to love others as ourselves. What motivates you to follow Jesus today?

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996.

The Strongest Strong’s Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.