

James 2

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[0 : 0 0] if you could turn with me please back to James chapter 2 and just as we turn here once again pray Father we thank you for this evening we thank you for your word which we have read and which we have sung and we pray that as we meditate upon your word you would you would hide it in our hearts that we would not offend you but Lord that we would know your blessing and that we would glorify you in the way that we live we pray that our delight would be in your law and your word and we thank you for your grace we thank you that it's by grace that we're saved it's by grace that we're sustained but we pray that you would help us as we give you thanks for the grace that enables us to be your children help us to show ourselves to be your children in the way that we live in accordance with the laws that you have given us so help us Lord we pray this evening we read this morning apart from you we can do nothing and we acknowledge that once more we acknowledge that day by day that we need you every hour we need you in preaching in listening in responding to the word before us speak Lord to us and through us we pray and enable us to respond in faith and in a way that glorifies your name we pray for the course that Anthony spoke of in the last few minutes and we ask that as that course is prepared that you would lay upon our hearts and that you would put in our path those who may be sought by you and sometimes we thank you that those who are seeking are not showing that in their warmth towards the gospel but sometimes we know that those who are being sought by you are antagonistic and are vocal against you we think of Saul

Saul of Tarsus who became Paul the apostle and we thank you that what you did in his life you were able to do in any life so we ask that you would be moving in the hearts of some that you would be moving in the hearts of your people that we would be responsive to your spirit obedient to his promptings and Lord we ask that that course every endeavour to reach out with the gospel would be blessed and would be used to bring souls to salvation and to bring glory to your name hear our prayers help us we ask in this time as we study your word and we ask it in Jesus name Amen This time last week I was in Uist and I expected that within a few hours of fast forwarding from this time last week I wouldn't be in Uist but the wind blew and the ferry decided it wasn't going to go so I was storm bound in Uist last weekend

I was stuck and so I had a wee bit of time on my hands on the Monday I hadn't packed much in the way to be able to work or do anything very much the weather was fierce so I had a wee bit of time on my hands and Ian who was with me at one point in the day he was deep in thought kitchen table the newspaper was open he had a pen in his mouth furrowed brow very intense I said to him what is he doing and he was doing the sudoku like you say sudoku sudoku help me somebody sudoku sudoku I can't see it that's what he was doing and it's something I've never done I've always avoided it it seems frustrating and anyway I had a tiny bit of time to kill so I said to him can you just explain how that works and so he started trying to explain how it worked but the more he talked the less clarity there seemed to be and after five minutes of listening and seeing you know how simple this was and how this just adds up to that and just put that number there and it's just so obvious it wasn't obvious to me my head hurt

I was confused I said thanks very much but I'll need a few more days stormbound before I return to this so there was confusion and sometimes as we read the bible we can have similar experiences there are some passages that we come to and they leave us confused there are some doctrines that we come to and we struggle to come to terms with them to get to grips with them we struggle sometimes to see how they fit with other doctrines as well and one of the biggest struggles that Christian people often have is to understand how God's law works together with God's grace in the life of a believer and even if we go back to this morning and even if we try to think about just one verse isolate one verse John chapter 15 and verse 14 we read verse 13 we thought about the cross of Christ that greater love that Jesus would lay down his life for those who could become his friends and then

Jesus says you are my friends if you do what I command now if we take that verse and we isolate it and we extract it from its context and we we just focus on that we might think wrongly that to become friends of Jesus to become Christians to be saved we need to keep his commands the law you are my friends he says if you do what I command so some people hear that and they think right if I want to become a Christian I need the law so I need to do what Jesus commands what God commands in his law and if I do that and I do it well enough I'll be saved and there are many many people in the country many people in this locality who will be walking about with that misunderstanding thinking if I try hard if I be nice if I don't do bad things and if I do as many good things as I can if I try and live in accordance with the ten commandments and I do a decent job

[6 : 48] God will look at me in the end and say you're okay you're through and yet we know better than that don't we because we know Ephesians 2 we often quote verses 8 and 9 of Ephesians 2 and it says there for by grace you have been saved through faith and this not from yourselves it's the gift of God not by works that no one can boast to become a Christian it's not about the law it's about God's grace it's not about our legal adherence but it's about God's gracious gift we know Romans 8 and verse 3 which says for what the law was powerless to do and that it was weakened by the sinful nature God did it by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering so we know I think we all know here that the law doesn't save us

Jesus does we know that we don't become friends of Jesus by our legal compliance by our keeping of the law we become friends of Jesus we become Christians we become Christ's words through his grace it's the gift of God no boasting on our part so the question is where does the law of God fit into our lives it's the question I want to think about tonight if you're a believer if you're a Christian where does the law of God fit into your life and for some people that's a sudoku kind of struggle think about Rome as the people in Rome came to understand about the grace of Jesus when the penny dropped on that one some thought well we're saved by grace it's all done so we can just live whichever way we want to live take God's law throw it away it's not about that anymore it's all covered by grace they said and all manner of stuff was going on in Rome but Paul corrects them and he says that's not the way to look at things it's a misunderstanding

Romans 6 verse 1 what shall we say then shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase by no means says Paul we died to sin so how can we live in it any longer and James is a book that speaks into this can only James is a book where the grace of God is not contradicted James believed that we are saved by the grace of Jesus it's all about grace it's all about the gift of God but James is keen to say to us as believers and he says it to us often the way you live matters holy living matters the law of God matters we don't we don't stamp it superseded and move on from it rather we if we are Christians should and we will if we are

Christians we will seek to live holy lives in accordance with us and in these few verses that I want to focus on this evening James helps us to see the law of God clearly so that we will live in a way that glorifies God and brings us joy and enables us to know the true freedom that we have been created to enjoy so there's four things I want to note about the law and the first thing to note is in verse 8 this is it's the royal law it's the royal law if you really keep the royal law found in scripture if I think back to the days of learning about legislation and all these kind of things I've learned about in school if I remember rightly acts of parliament before acts of parliament are actually brought into effect they need the royal assent they need that royal assent that royalty has to give them the rubber stamp of you and the fact is royalty is not involved in the debating and the formulation of these laws but before they can actually become effective actual live laws royalty has to approve them and the bible is where we find the law of god it's finally scripture if you really keep the royal law found in scripture the bible is where we find the royal law god is king he's king of kings he has given us his law he has not been detached from the process of formulating law he's been involved in every jot and tittle of it everything it speaks to us about his character it speaks to us about his expectations it speaks to us about his purity and his being he's revealed himself to us through his word through his law and because he is god and because he is ultimately in authority over every single one of us as his created beings the law is the royal law one commentator says the law is royal for two reasons first the king god the father gave it second it denotes a law fit for kingdom citizens who would do well to follow it the royal law comes with great ultimate authority it's found in scripture nice to see some boys and girls here tonight do you ever play in the playground

Jono do you ever play in the playground see it in the playground you see children they're playing games and I've observed in the playground and I can think back to the playground when you're playing games that the rules the laws of the game change as the game goes on I remember once playing Jono I remember once playing penalties with you on the beach and I know the rules of penalties and I know where the goals are and I know how you score a goal but from memory the revisions the changes that Jono was bringing to the game of penalties FIFA would not have approved but it meant that he ultimately won it and we hear this in the playground there can be games that are getting played and the rules are getting changed halfway through tag oh you can't tag me now because I'm hopping on one leg that's not the rules oh yes it is now you can't catch me I'm in the den that's not the den it's the den now and the persuasive powerful personalities will be forever changing the rules to make them suit because the children are all at the same level to a degree that happens it can happen but if

[14 : 24] Mrs McSween appears you all look dead don't you if Mrs McSween appears tomorrow morning and says there's a new rule in the school and there will be no trainers in the school grounds if that's a rule you don't like tough you as the children have no authority to overturn it you can't say well I'm going to change the rules to no school shoes in the school playground see Mrs McSween has the authority to determine what is law and what is not and in this world in this galaxy in this stratosphere the law of God is the royal law it's the supreme law it is irrevocable because it's the law of our God and king that's the first thing we see here we see the royal law the second thing we see here is that it's the right law look at verse 8 again if you really keep the royal law found in scripture love your neighbour as yourself you are doing right it's the right law

God's law is right maybe in days gone by we wouldn't have needed to say that so much today we need to say that day after day after day God's law is right God's law is right because God himself is perfectly righteous so if you and I want to know if the way that we are living whether it's right or wrong the scriptures are where we find the answer the royal law found in scripture this is where we will find the answers to whether or not we are doing right one day Rose asked me a question she said dad can a girl marry a girl can there be two wives and I said no Rose you can't it's not

God's design she says but I saw on the TV the news a girl marrying a girl and the fact is that's not a law that has been passed in this country that's something that the children and every age will be taught as a right thing but is it right no how do we know the royal law found in scripture the bible tells us Genesis 2 24 a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh that's God's design his royal law and he determines what is right and what is wrong some of you might watch The Apprentice on TV the TV show with the candidates who are all fighting and jostling for the one position they're all desperate to be their best they're all warring against each other to try and get this position this apprenticeship with Lord

Sugar and as they defend themselves in the boardroom and as they go for each other's throats they say it's dog eat dog in this world I must succeed I must win I must profit I must be the number one at all costs that's the law of business they say but is that the right law no how do we know scripture tells us that's just two examples of a myriad we could go to scripture tells us that's not the way to behave in the boardroom or anywhere love your neighbour as yourself says James as he echoes the words that are found in Leviticus 19 and then they're reinforced by Jesus in Matthew 22 and they're repeated by Paul in Romans 13 and Galatians 5 love your neighbour as yourself wherever you are whatever you're doing whatever context whatever circumstance love your neighbour as yourself not trample all over your neighbour to exalt yourself we have the scriptures we have the royal law we have the example of

Jesus who came Matthew 5 not to abolish the law but fulfil the law and this is where we will see what is right and wrong this is how we will know whether or not we are verse 8 doing right you had a good quote from Tim Keller in the readings yesterday because some will say the bible yeah it's fine for yesteryear but not today we're sophisticated you know we know much more today scientifically we're so far advanced we know so much more surely you can't still be depending on on this book keller quoting quoting from psalm 119 towards the end of the psalm says the same mind running the universe expresses itself in a bible so there is no limit to the perfect trustworthiness and truth of the scripture it is it is therefore the only solid foundation on which to build a life human cultures philosophies and trends of progress quotes rise up but within a generation or two become obsolete and forgotten but through all generations your word lord is eternal we need to remember that we need to hang on to that because it's god's word that has been attacked in the education system in the church in the media whatever we listen that god's word will stand when every other thing falls so this is it's a royal law it's a right law thirdly it's a rigorous law back to university days some of the students will be back to us in due course and hopefully come back having passed their exams but if they've told you they've passed their exams don't be too impressed because unless things have changed in university the pass marks 40% so it used to be anyway so if you have 10 questions you can get 6 wrong still pass some people think the 10 commandments are a bit like god's exam paper unless the assumption nobody gets 100% but if we try hard with the set test that's before us if we don't break too many commands too many times then god will pass us and he'll let us through might get 6 out of 10 wrong and might get even more but god is good and he's loving you he'll let us through there's a kind of legal approach to the law of god in the sense of trying to justify oneself the pharisees were like that they were desperately trying to keep the letter of the law to make themselves acceptable to god they thought if they could keep the law they could save themselves but jesus showed them how searching and how rigorous the law of god was and is think about matthew 5 matthew 5 in verse 17 we won't go there it's not the time to go there tonight jesus says in verse 17 in matthew 5 do not think i have come to abolish the law of the prophets i have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them you've heard that it was said to the people long ago do not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment but i tell you you can imagine the pharisees yes we have heard it said not murdering i haven't murdered anyone i've got a tick in that box and jesus said but i tell you anyone who's angry with his brother will be subject to judgment the faces fall or you've

[23 : 14] heard it said verse 27 do not commit adultery but i tell you says jesus that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart so jesus he presses the pharisees and he helps them to see how rigorous and how impossible it is to keep the whole law the law is deep goes to the heart not just about the outward behavior jesus shows the pharisees that and james follows that line of argument here in verse 10 he says for whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it for he who said do not commit adultery also said do not murder if you do not commit adultery but you do commit murder you have become a law breaker if lust is not your problem but rage as somebody who has annoyed you and the locality is you are a law breaker as am I one of the commentators said you look at the law thinking of it like a big sheet of glass big sheet of glass before you got the shatterproof sheet of glass you throw a stone it hits one precise point on the sheet but everything smashes and that's like a law one point everything tumbles down everything shatters and the reality is we know that we don't just break one law at a time we're honest and we look at our hearts every day we break

God's law if not in our actions in our thoughts in our hearts as we come to terms with us as James teaches what Jesus taught our response over understanding is to say I'm hopeless I can't do this the law is too searching it's too high the standard is too unattainable the law is too rigorous for me to be able to keep it and when we get to that point and we realise we can't save ourselves we look for someone to save us and we see Jesus because he is the only one who ever did keep the whole law he never sinned and yet he stood in the place of the sinner he hung in the place of the sinner he lived the perfect sinless life that we couldn't live for us he died the sinner's death that we deserve to die for us and if we believe in him he has promised that he will save us so believe in him the law is too rigorous for any of us to stand up to it but Jesus stood up on every point and he promises that if we trust in him his righteousness will be transferred to our account and our sin will be transferred to his so it's a royal law it's a right law it's a rigorous law and finally just very briefly it's a releasing law they might say well that's surely the end now of the sermon we've come to the point at which he always finishes and I could have finished there I was tempted to finish there because we've got two minutes but that doesn't deal with the conundrum of it's the law and

I'm obsolete if Christ has done it all and it's all about grace and faith in him is the law now obsolete the answer to that question is no not the means of our salvation it's not how we are saved but as those who are saved if we are saved God's law God's word God's way is the means of our freedom it's the means of our joy it's the means of our release and so the law is a releasing law verse 12 speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom release a couple of stories really to draw things to an end one is from a commentator called Jonathan Lamb to illustrate this point he says it is the law that gives freedom what is you listen to this story it is the law that gives freedom

Jonathan Lamb says we once had a goldfish in a small bowl in our kitchen his name was Julian just imagine that he wanted to enjoy greater freedom he could jump out of the bowl onto the kitchen floor but he wouldn't enjoy freedom he would go where all good goldfish go he would die but if he jumped from the goldfish pole into a stream or a lake then he would enjoy greater freedom he would still be living in the environment for which he was created so as for humankind we only discover freedom by living within the parameters which God the good creator has defined it's a great illustration I like how many people think that to know freedom is to jump out of the goldfish hole of Christianity and then after a wee while they're flapping about on the floor no way of to breathe no way of survival misery when they thought it was going to be satisfaction they weren't designed for that place they weren't designed to be apart from

God they were designed to live with God close to him walking in his ways think about toddlers we you know we two or three year olds they always want to go where they shouldn't always there's a fire rolling in the corner you can guarantee the two year old will be over trying to put his hand in the fire there is a sharp object in the room like a heat seeking missile he will find that sharp object and seek to do himself damage with it if there's a lump of coal sitting alongside the nutritious meal that's being prepared you can guarantee the lump of coal is down the neck so parents they try to protect the toddler they teach them don't put your hands on the hot hearth you're going to burn yourself don't try to swallow the coal it might choke you and even if you swallow it it'll do you no good don't touch the sharp knife it'll cut you why do they say that is it to spoil the experience of the child no it's because they love their child they know what's best for their child they want their child to have the best possible experience in life and God our Father has given us his royal law and living by it is the best way that we can live we were at a concert a few of us in stormy a few months back and the singer songwriter is a man called stephanie clout he was on the streets he was on drugs he was on drink he was homeless he trusted christ was saved remarkably began to sing glorify god with the gifts that god gave him living by god's law he knew great blessing then he started to drift he started to get far away from god he started to forget to be in god's law and he regressed into a miserable state and the thing that stuck with me from that night i'll never forget what he said he said having gone through all that he says i can tell you now i never knew there was such freedom in obedience and that's such a powerful testimony and that's the message that james is preaching the law doesn't save us jesus saves us but as those who are saved there is freedom there is joy there is life in obedience so trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in jesus but to trust and obey so let me finish tonight not by asking are you trusting jesus i asked you that this morning i want to ask myself and you tonight as we close are you obeying jesus are you obeying god are we living in obedience to his royal right law and knowing the happiness the freedom the joy that comes from that amen and have and