

FAITH AND FAVORITISM

The Devastating Gospel-Damage Caused by the Sin of Prejudice

“A Journey Through James” Sermon 6

Texts:

- **Dt. 10:17** *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.*
- **Leviticus 19:15,18** ¹⁵ “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. . . . ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.
- **Acts 10:34** *So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality.*
- **Romans 2:11** *For God shows no partiality.*
- **Matthew 22:37–40** *And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

- **James 2:1–7** *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² 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, ³ 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,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

- **James 2:8–13** *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

- **1 Peter 1:17–19** *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

Introduction

This morning we return to our journey through James, and to prepare our hearts and minds to receive the truth James puts before us from this text (2:1-13), we need to make sure we recall the important spiritual realities James has been driving home in chapter 1.

James reminds his readers that because of their association with Jesus the Messiah, they are the New People of God and are members of His Glorious Kingdom! However, while they are full members of this new family and wonderful community that belongs to Jesus, the time has not yet come for this majestic, glorious kingdom to be established on earth. For now, Jesus Christ has scattered them throughout all the little kingdoms of the world where they are to serve as His representatives and gospel ambassadors!

And the way they are to represent the values and priorities of the Messiah's glorious kingdom to all the little kingdoms of the world where they reside is to cultivate and display a living faith to a dying world! However, for this faith to accomplish God's purpose, it must be whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully trusting in Jesus and in the wisdom found in His Word.

This kind of authentic faith is strengthened by enduring trials (1:1-12), verified by resisting temptation (1:13-18), and sustained by responding meekly and submissively to the will of God revealed in His Word (1:19-27).

In other words, James' readers would make three important claims about themselves and their faith to those living in the little kingdoms of the world:

1. We are genuine followers of Jesus who embrace and believe the truth about who He is and what He has come to do as God's Messiah (2:1).
2. We are passionate lovers of God who love to hear His Word (1:22-25).

3. First and foremost, we are unashamed disciples and devoted servants of the High King of Heaven who is both our savior and Lord (1:26-27).

So far so good! In fact, this is what most of us would claim this morning! But James stops the journey, sits us down, and addresses an uncomfortable reality that existed in the lives and gatherings of his readers that was a major disconnect between their claim to be servants of Christ and the actual way in which they were serving. And this disconnect was so serious that it contradicted their claim to be servants; it discredited their faith; and it damaged the gospel they were called to announce to the kingdoms where they had been placed as ambassadors.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus said that when a disciple was fully trained and mature, he or she would be just like their master (Lk 6:40). James has reminded us that God, through His good gift of the Word of Truth brought us forth and made us first-fruits of much more to come (1:18). So, if anyone should be like God, it should be the people He willed to bring forth by means of His Word!

However, James is going to expose and confront behavior in the lives of these people so contrary to the nature and character of God it has the potential to invalidate their claims to be God's people, to discredit their faith, and to damage the gospel message they bear.

And the first of these devastating behaviors James lovingly, graciously, and firmly addresses is the sin of partiality that existed in their personal lives and corporate worship.

I think it is important to let Pastor James speak as frankly to us this morning as he spoke to his original readers. So, in order to avoid blunting his words, perhaps the best way for all of us to sit under this text (myself included) is to let James make five points this morning that we must consider, embrace, and act upon. So let's begin where James begins.

I. The Forceful Exhortation (2:1)

*My brothers, **show no partiality** as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*

A. **Their Committed Claim** – *as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus.*

- James' readers made a very passionate claim to be committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ (as do we).
- Their claim was, *“Our Lord Jesus is not just the Jewish Messiah the Old Testament prophets promised would come – He is actually a much greater personage; He is the Lord of Glory! He is the highest authority and most exalted person in a realm far greater than this one – He is the Lord of Heaven! And, we have the high honor and privilege to be his servants!”*
- However, the way in which these “glorious servants” were actually working out their service in this realm was totally incompatible with the service Jesus modeled himself and desired from His servants as representatives of His realm.
- Later in the chapter, James contrasts two people who claim to have faith and he insisted that what they are working out in their lives will validate or invalidate their passionate claim to have faith and to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ (2:14-26).
- In other words, James is observing that passionate words, even theologically orthodox ones, are not the evidence that validates a living genuine faith. What validates the presence of genuine faith in the heart of a person is what comes out of their life – what that faith actually produces in their conduct.
- And what was coming out in the personal and corporate conduct of these “servants” was the ugly sin of partiality – favoritism or to be even more blunt, prejudice.
- Put differently, James is confronting them with a massive disconnect between what they claim to be (servants of Christ) and what they do (sinning by showing partiality).

B. *Their Contradictory Conduct* – show no partiality.

- Pastor James pulls no punches with his beloved readers – they are sinning, and their sin must stop.
- The word James uses for “partiality” means to make judgements and show favoritism based on external appearance with the motive of gaining some personal advantage.
- The grammar James uses implies that this was actually going on as he wrote – “*Stop showing partiality or favoritism while you hold your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*”
- This is a very serious and sobering charge – imagine if James were writing this to us at PBC and one of the first things he said was to stop pre-judging people *based on what we perceive they can do or can't do for us.*
- The reason this charge is so serious is that partiality is something God abhors (Dt 10:17; Rom 2:11) and prohibits in the life of His people (Lev 19:15).
- **Dt. 10:17** *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.*
- **Leviticus 19:15** *“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.”*
- This must have been a shocking statement for his readers and surely many of them would do what we may be doing in our own hearts – surely James is not talking to me! I am not prejudiced. I am not a person who shows partiality or favoritism. It is an honor to be the servant of the Lord of such a glorious Kingdom and as His servant, I consider it an honor to serve others like he did when He was in this realm.
- James is going to lovingly challenge and confront this objection in the lives of his readers (and perhaps in our own lives). He is going to reveal that they were not serving in the manner that Jesus served, nor was their service driven by the motive that drove Jesus when He came to serve us as God’s servant.

II. **The Loving Confrontation (2:2-4)**

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,³ 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,”⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

A. The Context

- Two men visit their worship with vastly different appearances.
- One man is wearing clothing that clearly indicates he is an important and influential person in the community – wearing gold rings on his fingers and brilliantly white garments that are spotless and shining.
- The other man is wearing clothing that makes clear he is desperately poor. His clothing is tattered and shabby – the term literally means covered with filth.
- In James' day only the wealthy could afford a wardrobe filled with fine luxurious garments. Most common workers had at the most, two garments they would wear and wash. But the poor who lived from day to day may have only had one garment they wore constantly. This appears to be the kind of person who came to join their worship.
- So, how were these two persons received when they came to worship with believers who claimed to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and whose mission was to display a living, genuine faith to these two guests in a manner that would make the gospel credible?

B. Their Conduct

- When these two men entered, the believers in that assembly were quick to speak to them and to serve them – but they got very different words and a very different kind of service.
- As soon as they saw the wealthy man and realized the possible implications and advantages of his visit, they immediately ushered him to a choice seat of honor, worthy of someone of his status and standing.
- But the poor man, while not ignored or cast out, was quietly ushered to a place where he would not get in the way of their objective with the rich man. Welcomed, but not like the rich!
- In chapter 1 James had to warn them to use their ears to be quick here and to stop using their mouths to utter hasty and angry words. Here James addresses the wrong way they are using their eyes to make very wrong and sinful judgements about people.

C. The Conclusion

- James reveals their treatment of these two men has revealed two horrible things about them:
 1. They have created ungodly division in Christ's unified body.
 - Christ died to make us one before God – there is no distinction with God and there should be no distinction among ourselves when we come together to worship.
 - Wealth and status in the kingdoms of this realm have no standing or influence in the Kingdom of Christ. And when we introduce those distinctions in His body, it radically distorts His design and is supremely displeasing to Him.
 2. They were driven by evil motives that are incompatible with the nature, character, and will of their Lord Jesus Christ.
 - The reason they served the rich man in the way they did was because of what he could potentially do for them and how he could advance their goals and objectives through his influence and his power.
 - They saw a powerful and influential religious leader who could do something for them and immediately directed their energy and attention to him and neglected the poor person who had also come.

So, who is this rich man and who is the poor and why does James call our attention to their status?

- ***Who was the rich man?***
- Whoever the rich man is, he is obviously well acquainted with Jewish religion and worship practices (synagogue terminology). He loves the chief place of honor and the respect that comes with his position. He wears white linen garments and is adorned with wealth appropriate to his status.
- Can you think of any religious leaders Jesus described as loving to be called by certain titles, being shown deference and honor, having the choice seat at a banquet or the chief seat at a worship service? Jesus said they loved and craved receiving respect and honor from others (Mt 23:6-7).

- Furthermore, James states later that these same people oppressed and persecuted the followers of Christ (2:6; 5:1-6) and blasphemed the noble name of Jesus by which they were called (2:7). Based on this evidence, I believe the rich man who came into their assembly was a powerful and influential Jewish religious leader in their city, and they immediately responded by giving to him the honor and respect he craved – and James calls this the sin of partiality!

- ***BUT – who was the poor man they despised and ignored?***

- James uses a term to describe this man that is intentionally designed to get you thinking about a group of people that were very special to Jesus – “the poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3).

- This man was someone who loved Jesus and who Jesus loved and had chosen for great honor in His Kingdom (2:5).

- In other words, this poor man was a genuine believer who had come into their worship service along with this rich and powerful religious leader who craved honor and glory.

- ***And because some of these believers had cravings of their own,*** they made wrong judgments about who, how, and why to serve and they made those decisions for very wrong reasons.

- And this happens to us in our own day! How often do some of us make decisions about people based on what we see or perceive about their external appearance?

- How often do some of us pursue relationships with powerful and influential people ***because we crave something*** we believe they can give us, while we neglect our opportunity to serve those humble believers who don’t have much influence or status and who can’t advance our agenda.

III. The Patient Explanation (2:5-7)

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ ***But you have dishonored the poor man.*** Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

James has everyone’s attention at this point – “*Listen up! My beloved brothers!*” Earlier James instructed his readers to be quick to hear what God had to say in His Word – now James shows them how foolish, selfish, and wicked their

decision to show partiality to the rich is in light of who God really has chosen to honor.

A. *By showing partiality, you dishonor the one God has honored.*

- The person you dishonored is one who loves God
- who God has chosen – you chose the wrong person!
- the One who is truly rich in the realm that matters
- and who has been granted high status and honor as a ruling heir in the Kingdom where Jesus Christ is the glorious Lord!
- And you did this because you were impressed by the wrong status, driven by the wrong values, and craving things from the wrong kingdom – all in the name of being a servant!

B. *By showing partiality, you honor the one who dishonors God.*

- Instead of honoring the brother who loves and honors God, you chose to honor the wealthy religious leader who blasphemes the name of Jesus and oppresses and persecutes those who are called by His name – Christians.
- By the way, this isn't just a problem in the first century – how many of us are motivated to serve certain people as opposed to others on the basis of what we crave that we think they can give us or how they can advantage us?
- And when we do this, no matter how we try to dress it up in servant talk, we have actually dishonored a believer for whom Christ died and who Christ highly esteems.
- Christ served in a very different way – with a basin and towel.

C. *By showing partiality, you disregard the values of His Kingdom and discredit the glorious message of the gospel.*

- When we “serve” to get what we crave from someone, we are doing something very different than our Lord who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life for those who could give Him nothing in return.
- When we “serve” to get what we crave, we are actually operating from the values of this broken world and not those of the wonderful Kingdom to which we belong.
- When we show partiality in this way, we distort the gospel which declares that rich and poor will all face the same judgment for sin because God does not show partiality. And we distort the wonderful truth that there is forgiveness to all

(rich and poor alike) who will humble themselves and repent of their sins because God does not show partiality!

- So ... let's stop and catch our breath and reflect on how serious James is about getting us to recognize and remove from our lives the kind of serving that is driven by some form of partiality.

IV. The Convicting Revelation (2:8-11)

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹ But **if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.** ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

James makes a very gracious but clear statement under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that when believers show this kind of partiality in their service to others, they are violating the royal law of Christ's Kingdom attested to in the Scripture where Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

A. If your service to others is marked by Partiality, you are sinning against the Royal Law of Christ's Kingdom!

- When we determine how we will serve them based on what they can do for us, we are not loving ourselves and not our neighbor!
- When we decide who is acceptable to God and who isn't based on how they affect our comfort in worship or how we feel things should be in an area of preference, we are actually deciding who can and can't serve based not on what God sees and values but on what we see and value.

B. When you sin in this way, you break the whole law and stand convicted by the Law as a transgressor.

- The reason this is so serious for a believer, is that to violate the royal law at this point is to be guilty of breaking the entire law.
- This is so because the Law is the unified, undivided moral will of a unified, undivided Lawgiver, God!

- The Pharisees had compartmentalized the Law into 635 parts – and had assigned different levels of value to each of the part so that breaking one part (like showing partiality) might not be as bad a breaking another part (murder and adultery).
- James explodes that thinking by stating that to break one part of the law is to break the whole law – (like breaking one part of a windowpane is to break the whole window).
- And breaking the law and being found guilty as a transgressor had very serious ramifications before the judgment bar of God!

V. The Grace-based Solution (2:12-13)

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.***

So, what am I to do if I am honest about my sin of serving those who can serve me and ignoring those who need my service? How do I deal with the sin of partiality in my life?

A. ***Acknowledge its root*** – selfish pride that looks to others to get what only God can give!

B. ***Deal with its fruit*** – an unmerciful heart, an unsubmitive spirit, a critical mouth, and a demanding controlling attitude that is more concerned about my own things and not on the things of others.

C. ***Remember the Gospel and Receive God's Grace! Mercy Triumphs over Judgment!***

- The gospel is the wonderful announcement that God sent His servant to do what we could never do – fulfill the demands of the Law perfectly. And this Servant went on to suffer what we should have suffered – a horrific violent death for our crimes against the Law and against the Perfect, Just Lawgiver!
- And He did this for one reason – so we could experience something we could never obtain on our own merits or by our own efforts – MERCY!
- We stood in the place of the poor man, dressed in garments filthy with our sins, justly condemned to eternal death – without help or hope until someone spoke – the Lawgiver opened His mouth and commanded that our filthy garments be removed and that we be washed, and a perfect garment of blazing

white linen be placed upon us and a crown be put upon our heads! Instead of condemnation we were given entrance and standing as co-rulers in His glorious kingdom! We were taken from the place of dishonor and led to the best seat in the Universe – the Mercy Seat! There we received a crown and were seated at His right hand with the One who came to serve us so that we could rule with Him!

- Mercy Triumphs over Judgment – which is why it must mark our lives and flavor our worship in this realm!

Conclusion

- So, what are we to do with this sermon? I think the best way I can sum up how I should respond is to tell you how God dealt with me as I prepared it.
- (Illustration of the olive wood piece of Jesus washing Peter's feet)
- I had to admit the sin of partiality was in my own heart and in the motives of my own service – and it was very disturbing and disconcerting. I could either resist God's prompting or I could humble my heart and admit I needed grace enabled help to repent. Will you do the same?

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Introduction

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And the way they are to represent the values and priorities of the Messiah's glorious kingdom to all the little kingdoms of the world where they reside is to cultivate and display a living faith to a dying world! However, for this faith to accomplish God's purpose, it must be whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully trusting in Jesus and in the wisdom found in His Word.

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I. The Forceful _____ (2:1)

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A. **Their Committed _____** – *as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus.*

B. **Their Contradictory _____** – *show no partiality.*

Partiality means to make _____ or show favoritism based on _____ motivated by the hope of gaining some _____.

II. The Loving _____ (2:2-4)

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,³ 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,”⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

A. **The _____**

B. **Their _____**

C. **The _____**

● James reveals their treatment of these two men has revealed two horrible things about them:

1. They have created ungodly division in Christ's unified body.
2. They were driven by evil motives that are incompatible with the nature, character, and will of their Lord Jesus Christ.

III. The Patient _____ (2:5-7)

***Listen**, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

James has everyone's attention at this point – “*Listen up! My beloved brothers!*” Earlier James instructed his readers to be quick to hear what God had to say in His Word – now James shows them how foolish, selfish, and wicked their decision to show partiality to the rich is in light of who God really has chosen to honor.

A. *By showing partiality, you _____ the one God has _____.*

B. *By showing partiality, you _____ the one who _____ God.*

C. *By showing partiality, you _____ the values of His Kingdom and _____ the glorious message of the gospel.*

IV. The Convicting _____ (2:8-11)

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James makes a very gracious but clear statement under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that when believers show this kind of partiality in their service to others, they are violating the royal law of Christ's Kingdom attested to in the Scripture where Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40).

A. If your service to others is marked by Partiality, you are _____ against the _____ of Christ's Kingdom!

B. When you sin in this way, you break the _____ and stand _____ by the Law as a _____.

V. The Grace-based _____ (2:12-13)

*So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.***

A. Acknowledge its _____ – selfish pride that looks to others to get what only God can give!

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- The gospel is the wonderful announcement that God sent His servant to do what we could never do – fulfill the demands of the Law perfectly. And this Servant went on to suffer what we should have suffered – a horrific violent death for our crimes against the Law and against the Perfect, Just Lawgiver!

- And He did this for one reason – so we could experience something we could never obtain on our own merits or by our own efforts – MERCY!

- We stood in the place of the poor man, dressed in garments filthy with our sins, justly condemned to eternal death – without help or hope until someone spoke – the Lawgiver opened His mouth and commanded that our filthy garments be removed and that we be washed, and a perfect garment of blazing white linen be placed upon us and a crown be put upon our heads! Instead of condemnation we were given entrance and standing as co-rulers in His glorious kingdom! We were taken from the place of dishonor and led to the best seat in

the Universe – the Mercy Seat! There we received a crown and were seated at His right hand with the One who came to serve us so that we could rule with Him!

- Mercy Triumphs over Judgment – which is why it must mark our lives and flavor our worship in this realms.