

Overcoming Prejudice

Epistle of James

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: James 2:1-13
Preached on: Sunday, August 27, 2017

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Turn with me in your Bibles to James 2 continuing our exposition of the book of James, James's letter. Here we come to the second chapter this morning. We're going to see that the first 13 verses of the second chapter really form one unified message or concern on the heart of James the apostle as he writes to Jewish Christians. We've noted he's writing to Jewish believers in the first century, about the middle of the first century around 47-48 A.D. He's writing to Jewish believers who have been dispersed by persecution throughout the Roman Empire from Palestine, from Israel out into the surrounding areas and he writes this letter to encourage them to holiness and to faithfulness and the main theme of the book is to be doers of the word not merely hearers, not just knowing theology but living out the difference that the Gospel makes. The Gospel transforms us and James says let that be seen. As I was mentioning, letting your light shine before men is what Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." That's essentially James's heartbeat. Let your light shine by manifesting it in good works and so he addresses various areas that we need to consider as areas that we need to make adjustments in, real practical adjustments.

So we come this morning to these first 13 verses and the title of the message is "Overcoming Prejudice." Overcoming prejudice. James's focus is the issue of partiality, personal favoritism, judging people by external appearances and acting on that. You know, judging a book by its cover. The old saying, don't judge a book by its cover, well, prejudice is when you do that. Partiality is when you do that. And that's the concern that James is addressing, that believers, as Christians we have the tendency to be affected by our world and our own sin nature and that we can manifest a spirit of partiality or prejudice.

One of the most profound and perplexing problems facing humanity is the problem of prejudice. The history of man is the history of racism and mistreatment of others. No matter where you go you see this. Every land deals with this. You know, in Europe various people groups against one another. We saw this in a real profound way in the 90s with the Bosnians and the Serbs and the Croats, Yugoslavia, three different people groups and when Yugoslavia fell apart, there was just this tremendous antipathy and hatred that vented itself in an attempted genocide. So we saw it there. We see it today in places like the Sudan. We saw it in the 90s also in Liberia where tribes were murdering one another,

trying to annihilate whole people groups all rooted in racial prejudice. The Sudan, it's happening even now. South Africa, apartheid. In Asia, you have it as well, the Japanese and the Koreans.

In fact, one humorous anecdote from some years back, we had a young man in our church named Chul Yu. Many of you still know Chul, he's pastoring, ministering the word of God in Washington, DC and pray for him as he continues to preach the Gospel and minister for the Lord. Well, he was with us for a few years back in the early 2000s and one Sunday I was out and a man named Dr. John Carrick was preaching for me and John Carrick was a professor at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary so he's a Presbyterian guy preaching the word. Now, Chul is a Korean brother, okay, so born in Korea, raised mostly in America. So Chul made an error that I would've made too easily because I'm not that discerning with my ear, he hears John Carrick, the Presbyterian professor, British Presbyterian professor from Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, he talks to him afterwards and says, "So Dr. Carrick, what part of Scotland are you from?" And Dr. Carrick was an Englishman. It was a pretty good assumption, though. Most Presbyterians, British, are Scottish and so Carrick retorts, "Well, what part of Japan are you from?" Koreans and Japanese don't get along. Scottish and English don't get along. Sinclair Ferguson tells about how when he was raised as a young Scott that his mother had all these different rules. You know, you do this and, "Why do we do this, mom?" "Because the English do it the other way." Everything was like because the English do it that way, we do it this way.

Well, some of that is humorous and there are differences just because of our backgrounds, but when it comes to the body of Christ, that has no place in the body of Christ. It's completely inconsistent with the Gospel. We see it in America today in a painful way recently in the events in Charlottesville. Race and division over various differences between people is something that plagues humanity and it has since the fall. We saw this last January or so when we were preaching through a series on reconciliation. We saw that the problem, the reason we need to be reconciled to one another is because when sin came into the world it divided us from one another. You see this in Genesis 2 and 3. The man and woman were in perfect harmony, naked and unashamed in Genesis 2:24. Complete transparency and unity. No fear in their relationship and then when sin enters the world, there is immediately a division. Blame shifting. The man blaming the woman. And then there is conflict in their relationship as a consequence of sin and the very next thing you have happening in the unfolding of Genesis is Cain killing Abel, brother killing brother.

So prejudice, racism, are things that are indigenous to fallen humanity and we in answering the question that was asked by Rodney King, you remember the man who was beaten by the LA police and that sparked the LA riots in the 90s, "Why can't we all just get along?" That is the question. Why can't we all just get along? And the answer the Bible gives is because we cannot get along with one another until we begin to be reconciled to God. We cannot be reconciled to one another until we are reconciled to God. Sin divides. Sin divides us, creates a chasm between us and God. Our fellowship is broken with him. We become arrogant and proud when we should have been humble and

loving, and in our arrogance and pride, we are the centers of our universe and every single person who does not know Christ is the center of their universe and therefore they are going to be in conflict with one another. And we feel safer with those that look like us, relate to us, and that pride feeds into that, that wicked pride of the human heart feeds into these issues and James is going to put before us that the one place where there should be no prejudice, the one place where there should be no partiality is in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ; that the Christian life, it is completely incompatible to be prejudiced and a Christian. It is completely utterly inconsistent to have a commitment to be saying, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ," and yet walk in a sense of prejudice and partiality and James in this passage is going to say that forcefully as he is wont to do, everything he talks about, to say it with great force and fervor.

So let's hear these verses. We're going to read verses 1 to 13. We're going to begin unpacking it today and probably be here for another week or two after today. But let's begin reading James 2:1.

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling 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 and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit 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 judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we exalt your name and we ask now that you might open for us the word by your Spirit, open our hearts to receive it, and then help us to submit to it, to obey it, and to love Christ more, and we pray this in his name. Amen.

Overcoming prejudice. The key word in the passage is translated by the NASB "personal favoritism" in verse 1, "an attitude of personal favoritism." It's translated "partiality" in the ESV, and the idea is to look at someone and to distinguish based on external appearances the way that you respond to them. That same word, it's a noun in verse 1, "personal favoritism" is used in verse 9, "But if you show partiality," that's the same underlying Greek word there, that's the verb form, though. If you show partiality. So James is calling us, his point in these first 13 verses is to show favoritism to people based on external concerns, to show partiality is completely wicked and ungodly and ought not be in the life of any Christian and ought not be in the life of the true church of Jesus Christ. I remember hearing a quote some years ago that the most segregated place or the most segregated time in America was Sunday morning. That used to be true and we pray that that would never be true again; that the most un-segregated time in America ought to be Sunday morning and that is God's desire for us and that's our desire to give him glory in that way.

Now, what I want us to do as we look at this passage and we look at the way that James wants us to practically overcome prejudice and here he is dealing with the prejudice between the poor and the wealthy and so he wants us who are judging again from external appearances and then making allowances for that, but what we want to do is apply this across the board in all of our relationships. What we need to do, first of all, there are two points this morning, two main points. The first is we need to acknowledge the problem. The first point this morning is to acknowledge the problem.

When he says, "do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism," he's essentially stating that we have this problem and he understands that the believers to whom he is writing have this problem. In fact, there are three subpoints under this first point. Acknowledging the problem, the first subpoint is: the problem stated. The problem stated and its stated here in verse 1, because you could translate that verb, "do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ," you could translate that better, "stop holding your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." That is, you're already doing it, stop doing it. It's a present tense Greek verb and so the idea of holding your faith is continuing to hold your faith, so when you put the negative before that, don't go on continuing to hold your faith in an attitude of personal favoritism; essentially, stop holding your faith with an attitude of personal favoritism. The ESV translates that phrase "show no partiality as you hold the faith." The King James, "don't hold your faith with respect to persons."

So the idea is favoritism, partiality or prejudice. In fact, the essence of the word translated here "personal favoritism," it's important for us to see this, it's a Hebrew idiom that's coined in the New Testament. It's not found anywhere else. It's a Greek word, we're in the Greek New Testament, but the Greek word is found nowhere else in Greek literature. It's only found here in three places in the epistles of Paul: Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, and Colossians 3:25. And basically what James and Paul did is they took two words and they put them together and coined a new word and the two words they put together were the word for "face" and the word for "receiving or accepting someone." To accept the face, and so it's a Hebrew idiom that you find in the Old Testament, the idea to see someone's

face and to accept them, to lift up your countenance upon someone is to accept them. So apparently, they are trying to bring this Hebraistic way of thinking about the way that we relate to one another and they coined this term.

To lift the face upon a person. Now what does that really mean? I think what he's getting at is, at least as you think about this, imagine you're walking, you're in the grocery store and you're walking down the aisle and you're looking for what you're looking for and you see people, right? You know, sometimes if you're aware and maybe thinking as you ought to be thinking, you know, I smile at someone or, "Hi. Excuse me." You know, whatever, you're acknowledging other people. It's important for us to do that. You know, there are other human beings out here. But if you're walking through the grocery store and suddenly you see someone you know, a good friend, what happens? Your countenance is different than it was to say, "Excuse me. Hi. Or hello, how are you doing?" No, it's, "Hey!" Do you see that? There is the lifting of the countenance, the recognition that someone special is here. It's not that you've been rude to the other people, it's that this person is someone special. And there's a place for that clearly in life. You know, it would be stupid if we didn't acknowledge that. You know, if you're walking through the grocery store and then, "Hello. Hello," and then somebody that you haven't seen in years comes up and says, "Hey, I went to high school with you and I haven't seen you in 25 years." "Yeah, whatever." And you walk on. That would be very rude, right? No, you lift up your countenance, "Wow, I can't believe it!" And you think to yourself, "Man, you don't look anything like you did when you were in high school. That means I must not either. How did you recognize me?"

But lifting up the countenance upon. That's the idea. Seeing someone and lifting up the face, the smile that comes. You see, that's the word that's used here twice in the passage and he says, "Listen, we have a tendency to do that in a superficial way." That's what he's getting at, that basically looking at the face of the person, looking at the externals, we give and confer the blessing or the honor based on the externals, not looking at the heart. We look at the outer man. That is a problem for fallen people.

Back in 1 Samuel, remember what the Lord says to Samuel as he's getting ready to choose the next king of Israel. He says, "You wait. I'll tell you which one of Jesse's sons is going to be king for man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. I'm looking for a heart that is right." But we have a tendency to look on the outward appearance, to judge by external matters and James is basically saying, "Stop judging by externals and then relating to one another accordingly." You and I have a tendency to let surface issues govern how we relate to one another. We lift up the countenance upon one another based on surface things, appearances, and that's really the essence of prejudice. What is prejudice? It's to prejudge. It's to decide before you really know what someone is like and to be partial based on that.

So that key word in verse 1 and verse 9, "show partiality, personal favoritism," that's the same Greek word and it means "to lift up the countenance," and the idea James is dealing with is based on external appearances merely. That's a problem. And he continues to show what our problem is when he says in verse 4 after he talks about the illustration of

the rich man and the poor man that come in, the difference that is shown to them, he says in verse 4, "have you not made distinctions." The NASB says, "have you not made distinctions among yourselves." The NIV says, "have you not discriminated among yourselves." The King James, "are you not then partial yourselves." If you do this, if you treat the poor man, basically the rich man comes in and you say, "Sit here. This is a good place," and to the poor man you say, "Just go and sit over there. Stand over there. Or sit down here by my footstool, have you not made distinctions?" In fact, the word here is a word which means "to judge and to separate." In fact, the word "judge" actually means "to separate." This is a form of the word "judge, krino," it's "diakrino," which means "to judge and separate thoroughly." So have you not made distinctions, have you not judged and separated thoroughly based on merely external appearances? You've just looked at the outward appearance and you have made fundamental distinctions and separations. In fact, the word is used in a lot of places to mean you look at a circumstance and you make a thorough judgment and you withdraw from. So what he's saying is our problem is we look at the surface and we give ourselves to some people and we hold back from others and that's when you're making the distinction, when there is a holding back.

Now, he's not saying we can't have close friends in the body of Christ. Please understand that. He's not saying that we can't have closest friends in the body of Christ. In fact, this is clear when you look at Jesus in his own life. He had three very close friends among the disciples: Peter, James and John. He invited them to places he didn't invite the other guys. They were closer to him as friends than the other apostles and disciples. There is nothing wrong with that but he didn't make the kind of evil distinction. It's not evil to have closer friends. What he's talking about here is when there is an unwillingness to give yourself at all to certain people based on external conditions. As we are going to see later, Jesus was not a respecter of persons.

So the problem is stated, he's saying, "Stop doing this." The implication is you're already doing this, stop it. James knows, I love his pastoral heart and his kindness, and he starts off, "My brethren." He says that 15 times in the book, "My brethren." Sometimes he says like he does in verse 5, "Listen, my beloved brethren." He wants us to know and wants them to know and us to know he loves us, he understands, he is not exalting himself above us. He knows we have this problem, that as fallen people we tend to judge books by their covers, we tend to focus on externals, and we tend to withdraw from some people because of that.

Now remember, he's talking primarily, he's talking about the body of Christ. We should be kind to all people. We are supposed to love, we are supposed to honor all men, love the brotherhood, but here the focus is on the assembly, it's on the Christian community, and so he is saying the Christian community is no place for prejudice, no place for partiality. So that's the problem stated. The first main point is acknowledge the problem and I said the first subpoint is: the problem stated.

The second subpoint B of acknowledging the problem is: the problem illustrated in verses 2 and 3. He gives an illustration. "I know that you have struggles with personal favoritism, with partiality, with prejudice, and let me give you an example that you can

examine yourself by. If a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes. Do you pay special attention to the rich man in fine clothes?" The picture, actually fine clothes and dirty clothes, the word translated "fine" is a word which pictures shining, bright, brilliant clothing; and the word "dirty clothes," filthy, worn out clothing. So you have someone that comes in with new bright clothing and a gold ring and someone else comes in with filthy clothing, it's not attractive, it's worn out, the implication possibly there is odor. Do you treat the one person different than the other? Is there in your mind, in your heart, and then in your actions, in your words, a distinction made? If that's the case then we are being completely inconsistent.

Now, this was an important point, especially in James's day so it's an important point in our day, especially with the issue of poverty and wealth. In the first century when James writes this, he's writing to mostly poor Christians. In fact, the early church was mostly poor. You see this even as late, I read in one of the commentaries the writing of one of the Roman historians in the late second century in 185 who was talking about Christians and he was basically saying how despicable they are. They are the lowest caste of society. And he used metaphors like they are like the worms in the muck. The idea was it's the poor people. We don't want anything to do with them. A Roman writing about Christians, and that was a lot of how the first centuries were and in James's writing to Hebrew Christians who had been displaced and many of them are in poverty, so there is the temptation though to look to the rich man who comes in with special favoritism. Why? Well, part of it is just carnal desires. The wealthy can be a blessing to you and so we show them a special care and concern. Or there can be fear of the wealthy as he talks about. The wealthy are the ones who drag you into court. We'd better be nice to this guy, he's got money and power and James says this is evil. You're acting with evil motives.

You know, it's not just wealth, as I mentioned, race or ethnicity, but we can also show favoritism based on status, education, just common interests. We can find ourselves expressing love just to those people who are like us and who like the same things we do. We can even prejudice people based on theological positions, someone that agrees with our theology more along the lines, "Hey, I reach out and lit up the countenance on them," and the person that is not yet there in this area, holding back. Sometimes we give too much confidence and the church can be tempted, we can be tempted as we vote for leaders to think about this in an ungodly, unbiblical way, that wealth and success means spiritual blessing. That's not how the New Testament sees it. Who are those that should be leaders in the church? Those who not externally look a certain way but it's the inward character. God looks on the heart.

So think about your own relationships with other believers and think about it not from how other people treat you, that's not the point here. It's not for us to get mad at other people that treat us a certain way. That's not James's point at all. James's point is what are you doing to love others, not what are they not doing. It's what are you doing. Are you showing favoritism. Are you making distinctions. Are you favoring some because of wealth or status or education, socioeconomic position, race or ethnicity.

So he states the problem, acknowledge the problem, our first point. The problem stated. The problem illustrated. And the third subpoint C: the problem evaluated. He gives us God's evaluation of this. How ought we to see this? We ought to see this the way God sees it and James is quite candid in telling us how he sees it and therefore under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he's telling us how God sees it.

He says in verse 4, "have you not become judges with evil motives?" He doesn't say, "You're just not seeing this right." He says, "You have evil motives." He never sugarcoats it, does he? You have evil motives. The reasonings in your mind. The word "motives" actually, some translation say "thoughts," it's actually a word which speaks of inward calculations, deliberation, dialogizomai. It's the word we get our English word "dialogue" from and so it's an inward dialogue that's happening in the mind. As you're thinking through things and he says the inward dialogue, your thinking about this is evil if you show favoritism. So you need to change your thinking completely.

Verse 5, he's going to say that this kind of favoritism is completely ungodly. It's unlike your Father. Verse 5, "Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith." Did God look down upon the poor? No, he has chosen the poor. Why would you act so completely inconsistently with how your Father acts?

Then in verses 9 to 11, he's hammering it home that partiality, he says, "if you show partiality, you are committing sin and you are convicted by the law. You are a transgressor." In verse 10, "you are guilty of all the commandments." This is a place he picks to show us that if you violate one commandment, you can violate all of them. He says, "Listen, if you are messing up in this area of favoritism, you're guilty of everything in the law."

Now he says "My beloved brethren, stop showing favoritism. Stop showing favoritism." There is a way out. It doesn't mean that we are not believers because we struggle with these things, he's saying it's understandable but it's unacceptable. I mean, the reality is, you know, we should not be surprised by things like Charlottesville at all. What would you expect unbelievers to be like? Why would we expect that they would be any better?

I heard John MacArthur, part of a Q and A he did last week or so, some of you may have seen it. He was asked about Charlottesville and he basically was asked, "How do you understand this? What do you think about this?" He said, "Well," and I'm condensing down what he said but essentially, he said, the real problem that we have is that man is a sinner and that the people involved in extremism are sinners. There is no place for racism and white nationalism and all those things, but those who are reacting to them in violence, that's really what's motivating them is not justice, it's their own arrogant desire to sin and to be violent and angry. It's the wickedness of the human heart.

And he pointed out how when you think about it today, there are three ways God restrains evil in the world. The first is through conscience. He has wired us with a conscience. We have a conscience. We were created in his image and there is a sense in which he has written the law on our hearts, Romans 2. Everybody has that, but then you

have to inform your conscience and so we have a society of people whose consciences are being lied to every moment of every day. They are being told it doesn't matter what you do, there is no moral standard, it's all about you, it's all about you, it's all about you. So their consciences are becoming seared so that first way of restraining evil, the conscience, is being just blown apart in our society. The second restraint on evil is the family, the rod of discipline that drives evil out of the heart in Proverbs in so many places. Well, the breakdown of the family means that these people who are being taught in the schools, their consciences are being seared, not being restrained in the home. And the third is the government, the police, and there is such an undercurrent in our society of disrespect and dishonor for government and for police authorities. You put those things together, we should be amazed that more is not happening. It's the grace of God.

But as Christians, James is saying, "Don't worry about what's going on out there." I mean, you can pray for the peace of the nation. You can do the little bit that you can don't fret over it. Worry about what's going on in here and ultimately in here. That's what we worry about. And in reality, as the world gets darker and more and more angry and divided, what an opportunity for us in the church. Jesus in his high priestly prayer, what did he pray the night before he was crucified? Read John 17, "Father, I pray that they may be one even as we are one. I in you and you in me, that they may be one so that the world may know that you sent me." He's saying that the life and the love and interconnectedness and oneness of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in person, one in essence, loving one another, affirming one another, delighting in one another, he says that's what I want the body of my believers to be like. And when that happens, the world will say, "Surely God sent Jesus. He's the Messiah. He's the Christ. He's the Son of God." We have an opportunity as the world gets darker. Don't be undone by that, let's work together to be one in here in the body of Christ with the others who really love Jesus and reaching out to those who don't so they can come and share the love that God has given for us.

So the evaluation: it's evil, it's sin, it's ungodly. That's acknowledging the problem. Acknowledge the problem first by he states it, he illustrates it, he evaluates it. Now, the second point this morning, our last point: recognize the contradiction. Recognize the contradiction. He's saying this is completely absurd and ridiculous to be in the body of Christ. This is how we ought to see it. For us to show favoritism is completely absurd and inconsistent and a complete contradiction. And he says basically, he encourages us to recognize the contradiction by looking at three things. There are three subpoints under this second point too. Recognize the contradiction by, first of all, looking at God. He says, "Look at God." That's point A. Recognize the contradiction by looking at God. That's what we talked about just a moment ago when he said, "did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" Look at God. Look at the way he treats people.

One of the things that you see is that God is impartial. It's virtually an attribute of God, his impartiality, another example of how his attributes are not shared by us inherently. We are partial, we are naturally partial, God is not. In Romans 2:11, the Apostle Paul, this is where he uses that same word I mentioned that we have for "personal favoritism."

There are four times its used, once in James, three in Paul. Romans 2:11 is one of those times. He says, "there is no partiality with God." He is going to render to every man according to his deeds. There is no partiality with God. In Ephesians 6:9, he says, "Masters, give up threatening, knowing that both your Master, their master, the servant's master, the slave's master, and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him." He's talking to slaves and masters and he says, "Listen, you guys, understand that the Lord is the judge of everyone. He's going to judge you and he's going to judge your servant and there is no partiality with him. He doesn't give you points for being in the position, the social position that you're in." Colossians 3:25, "he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality."

The Lord is impartial in all of his dealings. In fact, this is shown vividly in Acts 10, that God doesn't judge by external appearances. This is the story of Peter and Cornelius. Remember the story of Cornelius the centurion who was a God-fearer who had come to follow and started worshiping the God of Israel, Yahweh, though he was a Roman centurion and he was a friend of the Jews? He had helped them and so he has a vision in the beginning of chapter 10, an angel appears to him and says to him, "Cornelius, you are to send someone to Joppa to find a man named Simon Peter. Send for him and he will come and show you the way of salvation." So he sends his servants right away to Joppa to find Peter and remember the story, Peter, it says he goes up on the roof and it's almost lunchtime. It's the sixth hour which means 12 noon. It says Peter was hungry. I love that. Peter was hungry as he goes up there and he fell into a trance and in that trance the Lord is speaking to him through this vision. He sees this sheet come out of heaven with all kinds of unclean animals, that is unclean animals according to the Old Testament dietary laws, things that Jews could not eat under that administration of God's covenant. You know, things like pigs, shrimp. He didn't know what he was missing. He was about to find out, though. But anyway, that sheet comes down and the Lord says, "Peter, take, kill and eat." And I love this, he says, "No, Lord. I've never eaten anything unclean." The vision happens three times, three times he receives that instruction, take, kill and eat. The vision has just finished that third time and he wakes up and there is a knock at the door downstairs. Somebody is looking for Peter and the Spirit tells him, "Someone has come. I sent someone to come to talk with you. Go with them." He goes downstairs. He tells them who he is, "I'm Simon Peter, the one you're looking for." And then later that next day they go back to Cornelius and he goes in to Cornelius and he begins talking to Cornelius. He says, "I want you to certainly understand that now I most certainly know that God is not one to show partiality." A Jew wasn't supposed to go into a Gentile's house but he goes into the house because he knows God has taken that which was unclean and made it clean and he is not to judge by external appearances anymore because God is not a God of partiality.

That is the God of the Bible, the God who desires to fill heaven with men of every tribe and tongue and kindred, singing praise to his Son in complete oneness and delight, those whom he has made in his image. Some of you may have gotten the email from Dr. Mack that had, they just had a conference in South Africa. I mentioned South Africa and apartheid, remember earlier in the message? Dr. Wayne Mack, a good friend of our church, a missionary, he's a missionary in Johannesburg, Pretoria, South Africa, actually,

and he's been there for 12 years. He retired from ministry and went on the mission field. He's now in his 80s. They had a conference in Pretoria, South Africa, "Racism: Healing the Divide," and they had African pastors, white South African pastors, black South African pastors, white and black American pastors preaching the Gospel. What a powerful display of the reconciling power of the cross. He sent all those messages and so if you're interested in hearing them, I haven't had time to listen to any yet. I'm looking forward to listening to those messages to hear these brothers coming together and saying that Jesus in Christ, we are one, and only in Christ can we be one.

So recognize the inconsistency, look at God. That's the first subpoint, 2A look at God. Secondly, look at Jesus. Recognize the inconsistency, the contradiction, recognize the contradiction of being partial or prejudiced and a follower of Jesus. It is a completely ridiculous reality that you would say or I would say, "I'm a follower of Jesus Christ," and yet to be prejudiced and partial.

Look at Jesus, the way Jesus ministered. In his commentary, John MacArthur comments, listen to this, he said think about the Lord Jesus Christ and how he treated people. He said, "During his Incarnation, Jesus was the glory and image of God in human form and like his Father, he showed no favoritism, a virtue even his enemies acknowledged. It made no difference to Jesus whether the one to whom he spoke or ministered was a wealthy Jewish leader or a common beggar; a virtuous woman or a prostitute; a high priest or a common worshiper; handsome or ugly; educated or ignorant; religious or irreligious; law-abiding citizen or criminal. His overriding concern was the condition of the soul."

That's what you see in the ministry of Jesus. In fact, I mean, from the Pharisees' vantage point he was a companion of sinners. They couldn't understand that. An adulterous woman weeping at his feet, washing his feet with her tears, now knowing the joy of forgiveness and the Pharisees are wondering why doesn't he know the kind of person that is there. And of course, he knows everything about her. He says to Simon, "Simon, when I came into the house, you didn't give me any water for my feet. This woman has not stopped washing my feet with her tears." He who is forgiven much, loves much. She has been forgiven much and she loves much. The Pharisees condemned him for being a friend of tax gatherers and drunkards. People that were known to be sinners would suddenly be hanging around Jesus and Jesus wasn't joining them in their sin, he was hanging around sinners because sinners were people that knew they needed to be healed and they were coming to him and he was telling them to go and sin no more and they were being changed.

So he didn't look at the outside and make judgments. In fact, as you look at his ministry, I mentioned the centurion earlier, there is another centurion that we meet in Matthew 8. Remember the centurion that says to Jesus, "You don't need to come to my house, just say the word and my servant will be healed"? He had a servant who was ill, near death and Jesus was going to come and he sent word, "No, don't bother yourself troubling yourself to come to my house for I too am a man under authority and I say to this man go and he goes, this man come and he comes, so I know that you just have to say the word."

Jesus marvels and says, "I tell you, I have not seen such great faith in all of Israel." He's not worried about the fact that this guy is not a Jew, he's looking at his faith. He's looking at the content of his character and he says this is exceptional. Or the Syro-Phoenician woman. After her faith in coming and clinging to him, he says, "Oh woman, great is your faith." You don't find many commendations like that. You find him saying to the disciples, "Oh, ye of little faith." He calls it like he sees it.

He doesn't judge by external appearances. Now think about this: James says, it's interesting how he introduces this whole thing, "do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." He doesn't say, "Stop showing favoritism," even though the ESV and the NIV translate it that way. It really says, "don't hold your faith with," the verb is, "don't hold your faith with an attitude of favoritism or partiality or prejudice." The issue is "hold your faith." He doesn't, the verb is not "stop being partial." That is what he says in verse 9, it's a verb if you show partiality. The issue is he's saying, "You say you have faith in Jesus, you are holding faith in Jesus and yet you're living inconsistent with that. Don't hold that confession that you have of who Christ is in such an inconsistent way."

He says, "do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." Interesting, this is actually a place where I think the ESV and the King James get it better than the NASB in when they translate, the NASB translates "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." In the Greek, it literally says this, it says, "My brethren, do not in an attitude of partiality hold your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory." That's what it says in the Greek. Don't hold with an attitude of personal favoritism, hold your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory. It's the glorious one. And so the King James and the ESV add a word in there, "the Lord of glory," which I think captures it a little better than the other translations. Isn't it interesting that when he starts telling us how we need to treat one another he says, "Listen, remember who you serve and who you say you follow. You say that you are following the Lord Jesus Christ, the glory of God, the Lord of glory."

And what an interesting thing, he says, "Don't be prejudiced. Don't judge by external appearances," and he reminds us of Jesus, the Lord of glory. How inconsistent it is for those of us who have come to understand who Jesus Christ is, this is the faith that we have, if you're a believer, the faith that you have is contained there in verse 1, "the Lord Jesus Christ." Do you believe, if you're a believer, if you're saved, you believe that Jesus is the Christ, that is, that the man Jesus of Nazareth born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, did miracles throughout Judea, Galilee, died on a Roman cross in Jerusalem, you believe that he is the anointed one of God, God's chosen Savior, that there is no other one to whom we must go to be saved? Jesus is the Christ. He is the one the whole Old Testament pointed to. The King of kings and the Lord of lords. He is your Lord. It's not just that you believe that he is the prophet and the priest and the king, that he's the one who redeems sinners, the only one who can redeem sinners and bring us back to God. His blood washes us. His resurrection, his bodily resurrection transforms us. He got up out of the grave and because he did, you can be saved. But it's not just that you believe that Jesus is the Christ, you also call him Lord. He is your Master. To be saved, you must

submit your will to Christ. You must stop walking your own life the way you want to live it and start following Jesus. And this Lord Jesus Christ is the glory of God.

Now think about this. Think about Jesus Christ and his external appearances. Think about what he looked like from the outside, his physical appearance. Isaiah 53 prophesied 700 years before Jesus was born: he has no stately form or majesty that we should be drawn to him. He doesn't look like the King. Look at his genealogy. In his genealogy you find some checkered events. You find an incestuous relationship between a father-in-law and his daughter-in-law, Judah and Tamar. Rahab the harlot and Ruth the Moabitess all in the line of Christ. To sensible Jews, those things were all bad. He was born in Bethlehem. He wasn't born in Jerusalem. He was born in the small out-of-the-way village of Bethlehem. His first crib was a feeding trough for animals. That's the manger. He lay on a bed of hay. The King of kings and Lord of lords has entered into time and space and if you had happened upon that stable that day you would have thought anything other than that the King of kings had come into the universe.

Not only that, he was raised in Nazareth. He went from Bethlehem, he went from bad to worse in Nazareth, in Galilee. I mean, you read the New Testament, especially in John's Gospel he makes it so clear. Remember Nathaniel says, they say, "We found the Messiah and he is Jesus of Nazareth," and Nathaniel's first response is, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" That's like, "Can any good thing come out of Mississippi?" Actually, Mississippi is all right. But can anything good come out of Nazareth? Then you find in John 7, that's in John 1, John 7 twice they say the crowds are looking at him and they are saying, "Can the Messiah possibly come from Galilee?" That's the region now. "No way." The Pharisees say, "Search the Scriptures, there is no prophet coming from Galilee." In Acts 2 when Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is given and the apostles are preaching the Gospel in all these different tongues of the nations, the people say, "Are these not Galileans?" I mean, these Jews that had come from other places are like, "Man, the one place you don't want to be from is Galilee." The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth of Galilee. And how did they know they were from Galilee? It's not like you wore a badge that said, "I'm a Galilean." They must have had an accent. It must've been like a southern accent, they were northern. Maybe they sounded like they were from Brooklyn or something. "Oh, those Galileans."

You look at his disciples, they weren't impressive, fishermen. They weren't learned men in nice clothes. Look at the followers. If you were in the first century and you're hearing the Gospel, the people that are preaching to you are not the people that look so impressive. Now, there were some wealthy people but they were a small number. You had Joseph of Arimathea who, remember, helped secure the tomb for Jesus, a wealthy man. Lydia. Crispus. Other people in the New Testament that were men of means or wealth, but by and large God chose the weak things, the poor things, the things which are not to shame the things that are.

If you look at Jesus by his surroundings, he was rejected by the majority of the people. He was rejected by the religious establishment. If you judge by surface appearances, you would not be a follower of Christ, but if by God's grace you kept looking at Jesus and you

keep looking at him and you keep evaluating him for who he really is and what he truly says and what he truly does, if you will look at him, you cannot help but fall down and worship him. He is very God of very God. He will stand up to the scrutiny of anyone who will look at him seriously and consider his claims. If you will look at him, you will see there has never been a man like Jesus of Nazareth. He doesn't look impressive from the outside and that's because the outside we are all blind and we can't see. And as Jesus himself said, "Broad is the way and wide is the gate that leads to destruction and many, the crowd, goes into destruction. But narrow is the way and narrow is the gate that leads to life and few there are who find it." So don't judge by taking an opinion poll. That's a foolish way.

Look at the man Christ Jesus. Look at him himself. Look at his claims. He lived a perfect life. The people who knew him best said things like John says in his book in 1 John 1, "The one that we have handled, the one that we have heard and seen, we have come to believe he is the Word of life. We beheld his glory, glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." If that is the case, if we come to Christ by not looking at external circumstances and we see the beauty of who he is by looking into his heart, looking at his actions, looking at his words, then how are we to relate to one another? The surface doesn't matter and we of all people ought to know that. May God help us to pursue oneness and show the power of unity that Jesus brings.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for so great a Savior, that Jesus Christ was willing to come in humility and lowliness to show us how much we need to see our own lowliness. He had to come all the way down so that he could lift us up because we were so much lower and worse off than we ever imagined. So when he came down and bore our sins and bore your wrath on the cross and became accursed for us, it was because we deserved to be accursed forever from your presence. We are so grateful, Lord Jesus, you were willing to do that. We marvel for we deserve nothing good from you and yet you have given generously and your call still rings out, "Come unto me you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved but the name of Jesus. Lord, help us live lives worthy of the calling of which we have been called. Help us grant honor to one another based on what Jesus Christ has done. We pray this in his name. Amen.