

Faith Loves  
James 2:1-2:13

This passage brings to mind two of my more memorable preaching experiences!

- **First Kenner, Temple** (“Well they will never invite you back!”)

These reactions are not surprising....

- To be fair, these churches received the instruction remarkably well: they didn’t kill me at Kenner, and at Temple they actually asked me to become their pastor!

But prejudice and discrimination among races (or in James’ case, classes) are ongoing human problems, and the subject often makes us very *uncomfortable*.

They’re not just problems in the “South” but problems in “the Sinner.”

The **biblical narrative** shows us what has happened, and how Jesus came to remedy it.

- In **creation**, God made us in his image. And we believe that every person of every race and background has equal value, dignity, and worth.
- But there has been a **fall**. Sin has alienated us not just from God, but from people. Division and hostility now exists between races, classes, ages, and tribes.
- However, through **Christ**, we can be reconciled to God, and to one another – to people of different races, tribes, and classes. Such unity testifies to the power of the gospel. Jesus breaks down walls.
- And one day in the **new creation**, all things will be made new and we will experience glorious unity amid beautiful diversity around the throne.

So our great need is to apply the gospel to this problem; to live with a kingdom worldview; to remember the mercy God has shown us; and to remember where history is headed. We need to James to pastor us through these things.

**Context: True Religion 1:26-27, Controlled Tongue, Compassionate Ministry, Clean Life Favoritism/Partiality violates all three elements of true religion!**

- **Compassion for the Poor:** True religion serves the poor; partiality insults the poor.
- **Controlled speech:** True religion blesses others with edifying speech; Partiality shames the poor degrading speech (2:3, 2:12)
- **Clean life** (“unstained from the world”): True religion doesn’t adopt the world’s values; Partiality reflects the world’s values.

**Widow/Orphan/Poor/Partiality**

**Deut. 10:17–19**

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> He executes **justice for the fatherless and the widow**, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

## Leviticus 19:15b, 18

<sup>15</sup> “You shall **not be partial** to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.... 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.

**God’s people are to reflect God’s own character.**

So here’s the big idea from our text:

**Genuine faith (or true religion) leads to deeds of love not acts of favoritism.**

- **Faith and love** are tied together throughout Scripture, and we see them tied together here in this passage, as well as next week’s passage (2:14-26).
- One of the major obstacles to practicing neighbor love is favoritism.

This is convicting passage, and that’s good.

We should experience **conviction** as a believer – not condemnation – but conviction that leads us to repentance and change.

- It’s good chance for us to apply last week’s sermon about receiving the word w/ humility (**1:21**) - not self-justification!
- And to look into the mirror or God’s word, and make changes. (**1:22ff**)
- God has brought us to life (**1:18**); we have the power to live in obedience to God.

## 3 Parts

1. Exhortation: Don’t Show Favoritism (1) [I’ll use *partiality* and *favoritism* interchangeably]
2. Example: Showing Favoritism the Assembly (2-4)
3. Explanations: Why We Must Not Show Favoritism (5-13)

### #1: Exhortation: Don’t Show Favoritism (2:1)

Faith in Christ and favoritism are completely **incompatible**. They don’t mix.

**Social snobbery and faith in Christ are incompatible.**

“**Favoritism**” – a fascinating word because it looks like the early Christians invented it (they invented many words). They didn’t have a word in Greek for this OT word.

- It means, “**to receive the face of someone.**”
- Literally James 2:1, “Don’t receive the face.”
- Meaning: **Don’t discriminate on the basis of mere externals; don’t judge by outward appearances.**

The term is also **plural**...meaning don’t show any **acts** of favoritism.

**We are tempted to show partiality/ favoritism in many ways:**

- **Physical Appearance** (Race, Looks)
- **Accent** (Galileans)
- **Age** (1 Timothy 4:12 ... “treat each other like family” 5:1-2)
- **Affluence** (This Text)
- **Ancestry** (Name)
- **Affinity** (hipster (Portlandia), gangster, country-western, techy, athlete, artist)

- **Achievement** (education, accomplishment, vocation, popularity)

None of these matter to God ultimately!

- **David, 1 Samuel 16:7. God looks at the heart!**
- You can be beautiful and powerful externally, but be a walking disaster zone like **Potiphar's wife.**

The gospel message obliterates worldly assessments, and any **feeling of superiority to a particular social group.** (See also Gal 3:28; Acts 10:34-35)

How do you get beyond fawning over people?

Notice James mentions faith in “the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

**Only Christ has all the glory.**

- Don't idolize the affluent, attractive, etc. – worship Christ.
- Be in awe of Jesus, the glorious one.
- Look at real glory – it's not in the rich, the powerful, the popular, it's in the Lord of Glory.
  - If you are captivated by Jesus' glory, you won't fawn over people.
- Look at his humiliation – the King of glory, humbled himself (**2 Cor 8:9**)
  - As followers of Jesus, then, let us then “not be haughty, but associate with the lowly” (Rom 12:16).
- Look at the future – The King will have a diverse people! So celebrate it!
  - **Birthday song this week from various nationalities – made my week...** From our American, Dominican, Venezuelan, Filipino, Peruvian, Honduran, Brazilian, Indian and Irani people!!

**#2: Example: Showing Favoritism in the Assembly (2:2-4)**

James now shows us a picture of this: snubbing the poor in a corporate gathering.

- The situation involves an “**assembly.**”
- The Greek word is *synagōgē*, which shows you how early James is.

Most commentators agree that this is probably a typical weekly worship gathering of the Christian community.

- So a guest **comes in looking like Tom Brady, with his five Super Bowl rings, and they're like** – oh, come sit her.
- And “**put the the poor on the floor.**”

This kind of thing is ingrained in us – **our sinful impulse is to give preferential treatment to those we think can benefit us.**

- Sometimes you see it not in the seating of the wealthy and powerful, but in **the leadership of churches** – the people with the money run the show.
- When money is giving that kind of pride of place, the glory of Jesus will soon depart!

The fact that the poor have to be told where to sit may mean that these people were **“visitors.”** (Moo)

- We know that visitors attended Christian worship gatherings (1 Cor. 14:23).
- Another option could be that they were new converts.
- They are clearly poor.
- **Luke 14** – Jesus rebukes the guests for wanting good seats, and then he rebukes the host for not inviting the poor and marginalized.

If we understand grace, then we will show grace.

In His autobiography, **Gandhi** wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered becoming a Christian. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find **the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India** (hereditary rank, profession, or wealth). So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby Church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. However, when he entered the sanctuary, **the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that “he go worship with his own people.”** Gandhi left the Church and never returned. He wrote, **“If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu.”** (H Robinson, *Daily Bread*, 1994).

This is not just bad hospitality. James says: **“This is evil.”** (4b)

### **#3: Explanations: Why We Must Not Show Favoritism (2:5-13)**

As a good Father, we get *reasons*, not just the command. He doesn't discipline us with a whip, but with his Word.

#### **A. It Doesn't Reflect God's Grace (2:5a)**

**Favoritism contradicts God's work of grace.**

- God has chosen many of the poor to become “rich in faith.”
- “Not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26-31)
  - God chose the poor/weak/low/despised

This was certainly true of the early church – the gospel was exploding on the fringes of the societies in major cities.

- In A.D. 178 the philosopher Celsus (opponent of early Christianity) mockingly wrote of Christians: **“We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the most uneducated and vulgar persons.... They are like a swarm of bats, or ants creeping out of their nest, or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in mud.”**

#### **Welcome to the worm convention!**

Many early Christians were on the margins of society.

- And in the gospel, we know that we are not here because of our strength, but precisely because of our weakness.
- We are on level ground with the poor. In the gospel, we are the poor.

To be clear, **the rich are not excluded**, but they must come “poor in spirit” (Matt 5).

- You don’t come to Christ “**rich in spirit**” or “**middle class in spirit**” but with nothing.

Don’t forget that God welcomed you when you were poor.

“**Shabby**” (2) is the same root as the word in 1:21 - “**filth.**”

Here is the problem: **the church has forgotten their own filth.**

- **Sinclair Ferguson tells the story about a friend who was named Scots woman of the year. She and her husband ran a rescue mission for all sorts of down and out people. She however thought more of her husband than herself. She told Ferguson one day, “You know, Hugh can stand next to the worst stench in the universe coming from a person, *and not even flinch.*”**
- **Ferguson said if you would have asked him, ‘How do you do that? Do you have a poor breathing apparatus?’ He would have said, ‘I know the Lord Jesus stood next to me, in my own spiritual stench, and he didn’t flinch. And I want to be like Him.’”**

The church here forgot that they were the poor, miserable, smelly people before Christ cleansed them and clothed them with his beautiful garments of grace.

Remember how Paul said we should welcome others: “Welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed you [graciously, mercifully], for the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).

## ***B. It Doesn’t Reflect God’s Kingdom (5b-7)***

### **5b: “heirs of the kingdom”**

- In the kingdom of God, every thing is turned upside down.
- God has reversed the poor Christian’s status. (Lk 1:53)
- And one day, the full truth will be revealed about the most honorable of saints.
- **There will be some surprises on the last day! We may find that the poor janitor, the poor farmer, the struggling single mother, will receive more honor than the elite, or the big named pastors.**
- The church is to be a little embassy of the kingdom of God.
- We are to show the world what the kingdom is like. It’s different than this world’s system.
- **Only in the church would you have a poor person, with no formal education, mentoring a brilliant doctor from Duke -- who just became a believer!**

**5c:** “Those who love him” – not all the poor have this status, but many do love Him. This is the second time in two chapters, James has mentioned that genuine faith involves **“loving God”** (1:12).

- Do you love Him, rich person, poor person, dark person, white person, young person, old person, educated person, less educated person?
- If so then you will receive the crown of life, you will inherit this kingdom.

**6-7:** The rich were mistreating Christians – dragging them into court, slandering them, besmirching Christ’s name – so James asks why the Christians would want to give preference to the rich?

- Why would you dishonor the poor, given the fact that many believers are poor, and the rich are oppressing them?
- James says this makes no sense.
- James is saying, you should be living with a different worldview if you belong to the kingdom, and that involves honoring the poor, not dishonoring them.

**V. 7:** You have been “called” (more grace) to glorify Christ’s honorable name – do that as you honor the poor.

### **C. It Doesn’t Reflect God’s Royal Law (2:8-12)**

**Royal** – It’s a supreme law.

- Previously he said that we bear the “Honorable name.”
- **We have a royal name, and we are to live by the King’s royal law – to love neighbor as ourselves.**
- Jesus taught us that these neighbors included foreigners and our enemies.
- Moo: “James is in line with Jesus’ teaching as he argues that love for the neighbor, the heart of “**the royal law,**” *forbids the church from discriminating against any who might enter its doors.*”

**9:** Violation – James says we *sin* when we don’t welcome everyone.

**10:** Total Violation (10) – He says we are breaking the whole law.

- The law is united.
- You aren’t loving God and neighbor when you show partiality – and everything hangs on these two.

**11:** Total Violation Against God Himself – Notice the switch to “**He**” who said...

- The law reflects the Law Giver.

**12:** We will be held accountable for our words and deeds

- So speak and act in view of God’s judgment (12)
- We must live with an eye toward the judgment to come.
- Don’t think snubbing the poor is a small thing to God.
- The Lord is taking all of our words and deeds into account.

We are judged under the law of liberty.



- For the believer, we know that we are accepted in Christ.
- We are Christians not because of our performance, but because of Christ's performance.
- There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.
- But this doesn't mean we set the law aside.
- It means we have a new relationship to it.
- The law is no longer a threatening, confining burden.
- No, the will of God is now something that we joyfully pursue in the power of the Spirit.
- Obedience is liberating for the Christian; whereas sin is enslaving.

**The person to be pitied in James' example is the usher who is fawning over the rich.**

- That person is actually enslaved!
- If he would be practicing real neighbor love, he would experience liberty.

In the evil practice of slavery, it's not just the slaves who were enslaved. At a deeper level, the owners, and promoters of slavery were enslaved. **They were enslaved to sin.**

Paul and Silas are imprisoned in Acts 16, but their hearts soar in worship because the gospel has set them free.

The real slave in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife is Potiphar's wife.

- She's a slave to her lusts.

When you live a life of obedience, empowered by the gospel you find real freedom.

#### ***D. It Doesn't Reflect God's Mercy Toward Us (13)***

This has OT echoes of showing mercy to the weak and powerless:

**Zech 7:9–10:** "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor.' "

**13a:** James transforms Jesus' beatitude—"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (Matt. 5:7)—into its opposite: **"Cursed are those are not merciful, for they will not be shown mercy."** (Moo)

If James' audience remains on this path of showing partiality, then they will find at the end of their lives a judgment **"without mercy."**

**13b:** I think this has an echo of the sort of thing we read in **Matthew 25.**

- Believers' acts of mercy will mean that they are vindicated at the final judgment.
- **God's mercy in them, gives way to acts of mercy from them, and they will triumph over God's judgment.**

- **But for some people, the last words that they will hear from the lips of the Lord Jesus will be these:**

### **Matthew 25:41-46**

<sup>41</sup> “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ <sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ <sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ <sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

**One test of true religion is how you treat the poor, the widow, and the orphan. You won't treat them with compassion and grace until you apply God's grace, live with a kingdom worldview, practice real neighbor love, and reflect God's amazing mercy toward you.**

**So it all comes back to the gospel.**

**It's about being brought into this family that bears Christ's honorable name, and living to honor his name by allowing that grace and mercy to transform the way you think about yourself and everyone else.**

**Recipients of grace can say the following of the Savior:**

- **When I was hungry, Jesus satisfied me.**
- **When I was thirsty, Jesus became by living water.**  
**When I was naked, Jesus' righteousness clothed me.**
- **When I was homeless, Jesus' welcomed me.**
- **When I was in prison, Jesus freed me.**
- **When I was sick, Jesus healed me.**
- **When I had no right to his table, Jesus seated me, and made me his son.**

**Love others in light of what the Savior has done for you.**