

James 2:1-13

Favoritism Condemned

Please turn in your Bible this morning to James the 2nd chapter where I'm going to be reading the first 13 verses. And I'm going to ask you to stand, out of respect for God's Word, as I read our sermon text this morning.

Read James 2:1-13

So far in our study of this book, James has been talking about our reactions to things.

- Our reaction when we find ourselves in the midst of **trials** or **temptations**
- Our reaction to **God's Word** and what it has to say about how to live our lives. We specifically talked about spring boarding off of God's Word to go "*beyond the rim*." And I want to congratulate many of you who I've had conversations with that took that to heart and are looking at ways to allow God to stretch you and go beyond what's necessarily safe or comfortable for the sake of God's call to love others. And I want to encourage you more and more in that.
- Today, James is talking about our **contrasting reactions** to the **rich and poor** among us or preferential treatment of others.

In light of today's focus I want to share with you a great example of this that happened just yesterday in Indianapolis, Indiana. Perhaps some of you heard of **Sarah Cummins**. Sarah was engaged to be married to Logan Arajo until a week ago when they called off the wedding. However, this was too late to be able to cancel many of the wedding related events, which totaled about \$30,000. The bride to be decided to not let this be a total waste and invited people from 4 area homeless shelters to come and partake in the reception that was planned, which included tasty plates of salmon and wedding cake. Other people within the community heard about this and got involved as well, donating suits and dresses so those attending could dress up for the event. It turned out to be a fabulous night when for once those less fortunate in life were able to be treated extravagantly. Sarah was quoted as saying, "*For me, it was an opportunity to let these people know that they deserved to be at a place like this just as much as everyone else does.*"

I think what Sarah Cummins and her fiancée did was a fantastic thing. But I'm kind of curious as to how they would have reacted if their wedding would have gone on as planned and someone from one of these homeless shelters had showed up dressed in their normal shabby clothes, how would they have reacted then. Would they have been equally as hospitable or would they have kicked them out?

Apparently this disparity in how we treat others not like us was a problem in the early church and can easily creep into our attitudes towards others today as well. We seem to inherently treat those like us quite well and am often quite impressed with those who are better than us. But those who are worse off than us, we often tend to snub our noses at and look down on. But James is going to address this and a quick summary would be: God doesn't look down on the poor and therefore neither should we.

Did you notice how James begins this section:

James 2:1 (NIV) *My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.*

There are only two times in this whole letter in which James refers to Jesus. The very first verse and now in the opening to this section, and it's important to take careful note of what he says. Here he doesn't just refer to Jesus Christ. He says, "**believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.**"

I think James, the half-brother of Jesus, at one time wasn't that impressed with his brother. He thought he was out of his mind parading around as the Lord and Messiah. But after Jesus' resurrection everything changed for James. And now he's much more than his oldest brother, he's his Lord and not

only that but he's **glorious**. And James point throughout this section and the whole letter is that if Jesus is really glorious to you, then it should dramatically change the way you live your life. For James it couldn't be business as usual and neither should it be for us as well. When Jesus begins to grip your mind and heart and you see him as much more than just an historical figure, but see him as Lord who lovingly came and died for your sins, then everything should change. Your reactions to trials and temptations, to widows and orphans and now to people, both rich and poor should change because of the place Jesus has in your life. And if your life and actions don't change dramatically, then it begins to call into question the reality of your commitment to Jesus and the ways that he's changed or not changed your heart and life.

The word, in the Greek, for "**favoritism**" is a combination of two Greek words.

1. The one means "**to accept**" and
2. the second means to "**judge according to one's face.**"

So favoritism means to give someone preferential treatment based upon their status within society or what they look at on the outside. And of course this is quite different than how God looks at and treats a person.

Remember when God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint David as king over Israel, God sent him to Jesse's, David's father's house. But before the whole process began of Jesse parading all of his sons before Samuel to choose the next king of Israel, God cautioned Samuel with these words first:

"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV) He was preparing Samuel that not the most impressive of his 8 sons would be the next king, but rather the one tending the sheep in the pasture, the one that Jesse almost forgot about, this was the one God wanted, not because he was impressive to look at, (they'd been there done that already with Saul) but because he had a heart that God could use for His glory.

And that's what God is all about – having a heart that He can use. He can take care of everything else if you can just chase after God with your heart, soul, mind and strength.

All the way through the Scriptures God reveals His love and concern for the poor. Throughout the laws of the Old Testament he set in place safeguards to make sure that the poor were taken care of through things like

- **the Sabbath year** (every 7th year the poor people had their debts cancelled so that they wouldn't go deeper into debt).
- **The Jubilee year** (every 49 years) all slaves were given their freedom.
- **Harvest left-overs** - the Israelites were instructed by God to leave the corners of the field unharvested so that the poor could gather food from that portion of the field (remember this is how Ruth met her future husband Boaz).
- **Interest free loans** (God forbade charging interest to poor people loans)
- **Redemption from debt** – if a poor person got into debt, a brother could redeem him by paying his debt.
- **Employed by a neighbor** – if a poor person was out of a job, his nearest neighbor was to give him a job.

These were all part of an expression of God's love and concern for the poor.

Many Old Testament Scriptures reveal God's heart for the poor and hence ours should be as well. (**Deuteronomy 10:17-18 & Proverbs 19:17**).

When we come into the New Testament we see that Jesus wasn't swayed by the social status of individuals and even his enemies recognized this unique characteristic of Jesus. (**Mt 22:15-16**) In the early church, Peter wasn't entirely convinced that Gentiles would be fully acceptable onto God until God gave him this repeated vision in which he was commanded to eat of unclean animals and then

this was followed up quickly by the conversion and outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentile, Cornelius and his household. Peter's response was that he was now convinced that *"God doesn't show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."* (Acts 10:34-36)

So, when James begins this passage by strongly commanding each of us to not show favoritism, it's because it ought to be the natural overflow and attitude of hearts that have come into alignment with that of Jesus. As we become more and more transformed into the likeness of Jesus, our attitudes and actions should be more and more like that of Jesus and not that of the world. Three times in this letter, James cautions us to not be like the world but to be like Jesus instead. And that's the challenge in our culture today, is it not? It's so easy to fall into behavior like the world instead of standing out for Jesus. That's the whole point of Peter's call to live lives of holiness in 1 Peter 1:14-16

1 Peter 1:14-16 (NIV) *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

And then right after that he lists what this ought to look like practically speaking.

1 Peter 1:17 (NIV) *Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.*

When it comes judgment time and we each stand before God, no one is going to get preferential treatment because of their race or talent or money. Everyone is going to be equal before God. The other night Connie and I were driving and I got pulled over for speeding. I was so nervous that when the officer asked for my license I began to hand him my credit card instead. Later, Connie and I were laughing about that and said that I should have accidentally pulled out my "chaplains" card instead to see if he'd give me a break. That won't cut it with God. Everyone will be judged impartially with God.

To drive his point home, James gives a practical illustration that everyone could relate to. He says suppose that two people come to church next Sunday. The first one is a wealthy individual, as evidenced by his fancy clothes and the gold ring on his hand. In that culture, people prided themselves on showing off their wealth and one of the ways they did this was by wearing rings. So much so that there were stores where you could go rent rings to wear if you wanted to impress someone. And when this person shows up you quickly give him a choice seat. But then when the poor person arrives you make him sit on the floor. In fact, this disregard is so blatant that the host is not even willing to give up his own seat for this individual. Churches do this when they treat certain members better because of what they can give to the church.

I serve on the Pine Haven Camp Board and recently we were offered a generous donation by a certain individual, with the condition that we would use it a particular way and name this addition to the camp after them. After much discussion, we declined the offer stating that we'd love to accept their donation but with no strings attached.

James goes on and asks why they are acting like this since it's the rich that are dragging you into court and blaspheming you and using their power and money to get their way.

Then in verses 8-11, James has really strong language when he states that showing favoritism isn't just a bad idea but that it's actually sin and he equates it with murder and adultery. Pretty strong language. Sometimes we tend to rank sins and if we did we'd certainly put adultery and murder towards the top of the list and showing partiality somewhere down toward the bottom. But James doesn't buy into that sort of ranking. Because showing partiality cuts at the heart of the value of an individual. Partiality ranks people according to what they look like or their power of money – basically what you can do for me. And if you're not going to be able to benefit me then I will put you on a much lower level. As much as murder or adultery it sets up a whole different set of criteria to determine the value of a person than what God does. And if you're doing that, then you're not reflecting the heart of Jesus to the world.

James ends this passage with a power house statement:

James 2:12-13 (NIV) *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Now being judged by the law doesn't sound very freeing does it? The anticipation of being judged would be very restricting. Because none of us wants to fall under God's judgment without mercy do we?

But the reason that the anticipation of being judged by the law is freeing is because of James' last statement: *"Mercy triumphs over judgment."* Sin is the great equalizer before God. According to **Romans 3:23** everyone has sinned, without exception. But Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for all of our sins, God's judgment was poured out on him on that day. And because all of God's wrath toward our sins was poured out upon Jesus, when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we now receive God's mercy instead of his wrath and judgment. Therefore, when we come under the Law, we are freed to live life with an outpouring of God's love upon everyone, rich and poor alike. Do we mess up – sure. But when we do we don't come back under God's judgment but we continue to live under God's empowering grace. God not only tells us how to live but through the Holy Spirit He empowers us, He equips us to live a life of love. He transforms our hearts and minds to be more and more like Jesus and as that happens we begin to see everyone differently. We begin to see everyone through the lens of Jesus' eyes and heart and we see everyone as equally as valuable and deserving of God's love flowing through us.

Since God looks at everyone impartially, He offers everyone this same gift of mercy and grace to have their sins forgiven and to live life fully alive and free – equipped to love people extravagantly with God's love flowing into them and out of them.

Responding to partiality.

As we consider how to properly respond to this teaching of James there are several possible responses.

1. Be awed by his final statement that "Mercy triumphs over judgment" in the person of Jesus Christ. Realize that you deserved God's judgment, because of your sins, but Jesus took all of God's wrath and judgment upon himself when he died on the cross. And now you are offered this incredible opportunity to come under God's mercy by accepting Christ's death on the cross and begin to live your life for Jesus instead of for yourself.

For those of you who've already accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior there are two possible positive responses to this teaching.

1. Go home and do some self analysis, with God's help, and discover areas that you are showing favoritism and try to put into place actions which will help you change that. And hopefully you'll be strong willed enough to effectively change.
2. Go home and realize areas that you're showing favoritism. Ask God for forgiveness in those areas and then intentionally begin to focus on the glory of Jesus Christ. Become overwhelmed with the fact that he didn't show favoritism and thankfully he didn't because he might not have died on the cross for you and your sins. But Jesus loves you so much that he was willing to die for you and now lives for you to help you live the same kind of life that he did. He's called you to live a life free from prejudice and favoritism and live a life consumed with love. Become aware, through God's help, of areas that your judgmental or showing partiality but spend the vast majority of your time and energy focusing on the gloriousness of Jesus, just as James did. And as you focus on Jesus, allow the Holy Spirit to change your heart and mind until your instinctive reaction to people is one of love rather than judgment.

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Favoritism Condemned

Recap:

So far James has been talking about our reactions to:

- _____ or _____
- God's _____
- People (rich and poor and everyone in between)

What would you have done if you were in Sarah Cummins predicament?

James 2:1: What's significant about how James begins this section?

"Favoritism" =

1. To _____
2. To judge according to _____

What criteria does God use to judge individuals?

God's concern for the poor:

- The _____ year
- The _____ year
- Harvest _____
- _____ loans
- Redemption from _____
- Employed by a _____

According to 1 Peter 1:14-17 what's a sign of being holy?

Is showing favoritism just a bad idea or is it a sin?

How does the Law give freedom?

Why is the statement "mercy triumphs over judgment" good news for you?

In what ways do you tend to show favoritism?