

Title: James – Don't Show Favoritism

Text: James 2:1-13

Turn with me again to the Letter of James in the NT today.

-We are spending the summer with James this year.

James was one of Jesus' own brothers,

-who was skeptical about Jesus' ministry while Jesus was  
alive,

-but who became a devoted follower of his brother Jesus  
after Jesus' death and resurrection.

James would become the leader of the Jerusalem Church,

-and a highly respected leader of the church world-wide.

And it is to that world-wide church that James addresses this  
letter.

-It is written not to one particular church, but to disciples of  
Jesus spread across the Roman Empire

-And so even all these years later, there's a very real sense  
in which it is a letter addressed to us as disciples of  
Jesus all these years later.

Today we come to chapter 2 of James letter, and we'll be  
reading verses 1-13.

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"My brothers and sisters," James begins, "as believers in our  
glorious Lord Jesus Christ..."

Did you hear that? "...as believer in our glorious Lord Jesus..."

James begins with the premise that the people to whom he is  
writing were already Christians.

-They are believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

-They have been justified by faith in Christ,

-cleansed of their sin

-and declared righteous in God's sight,

-They have been adopted as sons and daughters of God  
and are members of God's own household.

James is talking to people whom he considers to be family.

-He calls them brothers and sisters here in verse 1,

and in verse 5 he calls them "dear brothers and sisters."

I mention this because as we read James' letter and all of his  
exhortations and admonitions on how to live,

-he is not writing to non-Christians about the way to be

saved.

-He is writing to those who are already believers and writing about the way of discipleship.

As we saw in chapter 1, James' whole purpose in writing the letter is that his readers might grow to spiritual maturity and so receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

And two weeks ago James called us "as believers" to see our trials and tribulations as one of the primary methods God uses to help us grow to maturity,  
-so he calls us to rejoice in those trials because of how God will use them to refine and transform us.

And last week James called us as believers to learn to listen to others and listen to God,  
-especially when what they are saying brings us conviction.  
-Be slow to talk back and slow to get angry.  
-As Christians, keep a tight rein on our tongues James says.

He's calling us, you see, to a life of discipleship.  
-To grow up in the faith that is ours, and become more and more like our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Today James has another simple, down to earth exhortation for us:  
-As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus:  
don't show favoritism!

And what he means by that is illustrated in verses 2-3.  
-Suppose two different people come to your worship gathering: one is obviously wealthy, and the other is obviously not.

James wants us to think about what kind of a reception and welcome they would each receive at one of our gatherings.

Would we automatically defer to the well-to-do person?  
-Greet her warmly, make sure she gets a bulletin,  
offer to take her coat and hang it up for her?  
-All of those are good things which I hope we would do.

But James wants to know if would we do the same for the person who looks like he or she just came from the Malden Warming Center?

Would we treat this person, too, in a way that communicates

they are welcome here and we hope they will come back?

Or would we subtly communicate that we kind of hope this person doesn't act out in some inappropriate way during worship,  
-and we really kind of hope they don't come back again?

And James' point here is that we humans make these kinds of distinctions in the way we treat other people all the time.

We often do not treat people equally well.

- We often DO show favoritism.
- We quite often cater to the well-to-do, thinking they are worthy of special treatment,
- and we quite often ignore or try to avoid the downtrodden acting like they are somehow beneath us and not worthy of attention.

And I am sure the reason James is writing this is because he actually saw this exact scenario played out at Christian gatherings in his day.

And James might also have said that he has seen Christians in his own church at Jerusalem showing favoritism for all kinds of other reasons besides wealth, too.

- His Jerusalem Church had a history of showing favoritism to Jews over Gentiles, that was just in-bred in them from birth.
- They even had a tendency to look down on Jews who had not grown up in Israel,  
-but had grown up in other parts of the Roman Empire.
- Those Jews could hardly speak Hebrew, and were more culturally Greco-Roman than they were Jewish.

These were the in-bred prejudices that Jewish believers in James' own church had to wrestle with,

- along with an inbred hatred of Samaritans,
- and a rather low view of women.
- James himself knew how hard it was hard to let those prejudices go.

But he writes here categorically saying, "We all need to cut it out. In Christ, those categories have all been set aside."

Now in our day, we are right in the midst of a major reckoning with racial inequalities that have plagued our country for 400

years.

-People of color are saying to our culture at large exactly what James is saying here: “Stop showing favoritism! “Please just treat people of color under the law exactly the way you would treat white people.”

And in theory, I believe we would all agree that this is the way this great American democracy of ours should work.

-And in theory, I believe we would all agree that this is the way that the church of Jesus Christ should work.

But we all know, just like James did in his day, that it’s not yet true.

-It’s not yet true of the culture in which we live, and it is also not yet true of the church which bears Jesus’ Name.

So let’s see what James says here about how to combat such in-bred prejudices that lead to showing favoritism to some people as opposed to other people.

1. First, I want you to notice the fact that James uses the word “glorious” here in this context to describe the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is always a certain inherent irony when we use the word “glorious” to describe Jesus.

-Because, in fact, Jesus never came across as “glorious.”

In fact, it was his glory that he left behind when he was born into this world to become one of us.

-He was born in a barn, after all, and to a peasant couple from the backwoods of Galilee.

-And he lived most of his life as a blue collar carpenter in that little village.

-And then he spent three years wandering around Israel preaching to Jewish people about the Kingdom of God.

-And he ended up getting crucified on a cross with only the robe on his back as his personal property.

By all the world’s standards, this was not a glorious life, and it was certainly not a glorious death.

-His story is not a tale of the rich and famous.

That’s the first reason we are not to show a worldly kind of favoritism in the church that bears Jesus’ name.

-The word glory does not mean the same thing to Jesus that it means to the world.

-Glory is not at all about outward appearances, or social status, or wealth in the bank.

Jesus gave up all the riches of heaven for our sakes and became poor himself.

Jesus, though he was Lord of all, came not to BE served, but to serve others.

-His “glory” was found in the way he constantly offered himself back to His heavenly Father as a living sacrifice.

-And when Jesus walked into any Synagogue in any town in his day,

-he would have looked more like the poor man in James’ illustration here, than like the wealthy man.

So my friends, for the Christians who follow Jesus, there is no place to be showing favoritism to people because of any kind of cultural standard by which we measure people.

-Because Jesus himself wouldn’t have met that standard.

-He intentionally wouldn’t have met that standard.

2. And this brings us to the second reason we are not to show favoritism: because of the very character of God which Jesus displayed in everything he did.

In v. 5, James writes, “Listen, dear brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love Him?”

My friends, James is reminding us that from cover to cover of the Bible,

-God has always revealed himself to us as the God of the downtrodden.

-The God who cares for the needy, sets free the captives, gives sight to the blind, provides for the widow and orphan.

In Deuteronomy 10:17 for example, God speaks through Moses to His people and says, *“The LORD your God is the God of gods and the LORD of Lords., the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.”*

You see, this is how God defines Himself.

-And it was how God had personally revealed himself to the people of Israel.

- He is the One who had rescued them when they were slaves in Egypt.
- He is the One who pulled them up from poverty and homelessness.

And He says to them at various times, "I didn't choose you because you were a powerful and wealthy nation. I didn't choose you because you were better than other people groups on earth. I chose you in your helpless estate, so that you might be a display of my glory, which is seen first and foremost in my saving help for people who are helpless."

So James says, "My brothers and sisters, if this is the very character of God, to seek and to save the lost, to care for the poor and needy, to rescue the oppressed who have been treated unfairly by the power-brokers of the world, -then why in the world would the people of God show favoritism to the well-to-do, and scorn the poor and needy?"

It just doesn't make sense.

- Particularly for God's people.
- And particularly, James says, when you consider that the wealthy and powerful people of the world
- are usually the ones who give God and all the rest of us the most grief.

They're the ones who try to throw their weight around and act as if they are god.

They're the ones who exploit and manipulate people for their own ends.

They're the ones who drag people into court and sue them for the slightest thing.

Why would the people of God favor such people?

- If anything, James says, you'd think the people of God would show favoritism to the poor person,
  - because God does.
- And show favoritism to the oppressed person, because God does.
- And would show favoritism to those who have been unfairly treated, and even killed for no reason,
  - because Jesus was treated that way by the power brokers of his day.

But James doesn't actually go that far in these verses.

- He calls us not to show favoritism at all,
  - Not to the rich, nor to the poor.
  - Not to the white or black, or male or female, or gay or

straight, or any other societal grouping.

James simply calls us in verse 8ff to love our neighbors as ourselves.

- He calls this the “royal law of Scripture,” and I like that.
- As children of the King of kings, our job is not to sit in judgment on other people. That’s the King’s job.
- Our job is to obey the King’s royal law: to Love the King with all our heart, and to love other people as ourselves.

That simply means showing our neighbor, no matter who they are

- or what the color of their skin
- or how much money they have or don’t have,
- or even what they believe, or don’t believe.
- The royal law of our King is to show them the same kind of respect, compassion, mercy, grace, consideration, and fair dealing,
- that the King has shown to us.

For, James says, judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful to others.

- But mercy will triumph over judgment.

So my friends, because of who God is, a God who seeks and saves the lost;

- And because of who Jesus is, the One whose glory is exhibited most clearly in his willingness to give up glory and humble himself even to death on a cross.
- And because God is rich in mercy and gives it to us freely,
- let us not show favoritism to any,
- but ask for God’s help to walk humbly, and love mercy, and act justly toward people, all kinds of people.

It’s the way of discipleship.... to actually follow Jesus.

Let’s pray.