

The Offence of Favouritism

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Date: 17 September 2023

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[0 : 0 0] So for the past three weeks, we have been going through the letter of James. We've just gone through the introduction, the chapter one of the whole of James. One thing we were looking into was the letter of James, the half-brother of Jesus.

And he's a pastor of this church, and he's writing this letter to Christians that had to flee their home because of severe persecution. And because of the severe persecution, they were going through trials and sufferings, financial problems, and all sorts of things.

And to these people, James is writing as a pastor, and he's encouraging them in the gospel. He's reminding them of this amazing gospel that they had put their faith on.

But at the same time, he's challenging the Christians in how they were responding to these trials and struggles. And last week, we were looking into this question.

We were thinking about, hey, does it matter how I respond to suffering and trials? And the answer was, yes, it does. Because in the way we respond to trials, it actually grows us either into maturity and the likeness of Christ, or either it grows us into gross sins in us and brings up death in us.

[1 : 1 7] So, and at the same time, James also called us last week to turn to Jesus and his word, the word that frees us to obey him, that gives us freedom to be who he created us to be. And so with all of that, this time, we come into chapter 2.

And after all that introduction, now James, what James is going to do after this is that he's going to actually address specific issues that the Christians then were not responding well when they were suffering.

And all of these things we actually find in chapter 1, verses 26 and 27. I think you'll find that in your bulletin or your Bibles. If you look at chapter 1, 26 and 27, he says, Hey, if anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before the God, the Father, is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world. And James actually tells us what he will be talking about from chapter 2 onwards and write this two verse.

So if you look at verse 26, he talks about tongue and speech, which he talks about later on in chapter 3. Verse 27 talks about our attitudes towards the poor and for us to keep ourselves from being worldly, which he actually talks about in chapter 2 and chapter 4.

[2 : 3 4] So today, as we dive into chapter 2, James deals with our attitude towards the poor, particularly in the way we show favoritism, or in other words, partiality, as you will find in the Scripture today.

So with that said, let me call Iris, who will come and read God's Word to us. So over to Iris. Good morning, Watermark.

The Scripture reading comes from James chapter 2 this morning. Please follow along on your Bible, on the screen, or on your bulletin. Starting in verse 1, we read, My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, or you say to the poor man, you stand over there, or sit down at my feet, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

[4 : 01] But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder.

If you do not commit adultery, but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak, and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. And this is the word of God. Thanks, Irish.

[5 : 10] Hey, can I pray for us? Father God, we come before you this morning. Just in awe of your mercy and your grace, as we were singing, Lord, how great is your mercy over us, God?

How great is the chasm and how amazing that you have poured out your love and grace in our lives. So father, as we dive into your word, father, help us to see our own hearts this time. And at the same time, help us to see the amazing mercy that you have shown us.

And father, we pray that your spirit would be among us to reveal your word to us. And may your name be glorified in Jesus name, we pray. Amen. So I'm sure as the scripture was being read, one of the first thing you noticed is this vivid example.

James gives us of what was happening in the church then. So let me just modernize that for us. Imagine it's watermark Sunday morning and a man comes up to church wearing the latest fashion or super branded clothes, maybe like Gucci and Armani or something.

He walks in and he drives up in Ferrari. You can hear his car right from the hall. And then you have people all gathering, like you, people are welcoming him. You're connecting with him. And you say like, we've got to follow up.

[6 : 24] We've got to have coffee afterwards. You give him the full on watermark package. And later on, at the same time, another man walks in. He's wearing torn clothes that has not been washed.

He smells a little funny. And he doesn't look really smart or anything. And he just walks in and he's lost. He's trying to find his seat. And soon he just gets lost, faded away in the crowd.

Now you might be thinking, no way that is watermark. Alan, Alan, you just did not describe watermark right now. We watermark, we are the best in welcoming people. We are best in community.

Alan, I think we can just skip this chapter. Let's move on to the next part. Forget James chapter 2, 1 to 13. And that's what we think, right? But actually, if you look, if you stop and think, if I can stop us and think, the issue about favoritism or partiality, and stop and think that there's something that's going, something going on really beneath this thing.

And if you think about it, if this was a problem for the first churches at that time, it's definitely going to be a problem for us in this time. And our church Christianity history actually testifies to that, doesn't it?

[7 : 37] You know, where churches had places for the rich people to sit and the poor people to sit, where the churches had events where the only the rich people could attend. And especially in a city like Hong Kong, where your financial status or your job title is, is a big factor of whether you get a good interaction or a good service or not.

I mean, in my own life, I've been treated with contempt in shops and events in schools and colleges, just because of my nationality and my financial status.

I mean, even within church, I have seen people that were of lower income and, and people that does not have a grand job title, just cast out to the side and their problems, their life challenges, really not thought about.

And then while the focus was more on normal people that were from the same walks of life, that were easy to talk with, and you see this kind of partiality and favoritism all over the place.

And if you think about it, favoritism is terrible. It makes you feel like you have no value. It makes you feel like you're not even a human being. And it's terrible.

[8 : 45] We all know that it's terrible. But the fact is, and yet it seems to flourish in our city. It seems to flourish at our jobs, in our relationships, in our friendships, in schools and colleges and universities, and at times in churches and in our hearts.

And what James is doing here this morning is that he's taking the sin of favoritism and is ripping off the mask of this favoritism, and he's actually showing us that there is something that lies beneath the sin of favoritism.

And what he's giving us is he's going to tell us three things that are behind the offense of favoritism. So let us dive into God's word today. The first thing is this. Look at verse 1 to 7.

When we show favoritism, the first thing is we don't understand the glory of God. On your bulletin, on your Bibles, let's look at verse 1 to 7. So what he does is he begins by telling us, hey, do not show partiality, do not show favoritism in verse 1.

And then he gives us an example of how the church was doing it. And look at verse 4. What does he say? He says, hey, when you do all of these things, have you not then made distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

[9 : 59] Now what James is saying here is that when you show, when anyone shows favoritism, what they are basically saying is that if you're worthy for the world, then you're worthy for the church.

Or if you're worth less to the world, then you're not worth much to the church too. And it basically judges a person's soul as better than another person's soul, all based on external stuff and worldly criteria.

And James does not hold back. He's not like, oh, just don't do favoritism. No, no, he does not hold back his word. I mean, look at the next verse. James says, it's judging with evil. I mean, he says he's judging with evil thoughts.

And he uses quite a strong words. Which is a very strong and uncompromising word. He says, this is evil. This is not like, like a pat on your hand when you do something wrong.

This is not like, favoritism is not discouraged. Favoritism is not just, oh, it's a bad thing to do. Favoritism is evil. And that should cause us to think, hey, are there times when we look at someone that you really don't like to speak to?

[11 : 10] Maybe it's because the way they speak, maybe the way they look, maybe they speak too loud, too long, too fast, too slow. Maybe the way they look, they smell. And do we just walk away?

Or let someone else handle this person? And honestly, I know I have done that. I've done it in my, when I was working in a school, I've done it with my colleagues, colleagues that I did not really want to speak with.

I've done it with students. I've done it in church. When people, I know that I can't really have a normal conversation with, I've just walked away and let someone help handle them. And what James is saying is that, that's evil.

And usually it's an unconscious decision, right, to do this, of where my heart is sinful and evil. Favoritism leads us to make distinction among people and judge them with evil thoughts.

But James does not just stop at that. And in verse 5, what James does is he almost grabs our face, but with his two hands, he looks deep in our eyes, and he says, almost he's asking us, hey, are you forgetting something?

[12 : 20] And look at verse 5. What does he say? He says, listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, has God, God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

Now what James is saying is that, in other words, hey, have you forgotten how God works? If you think about it, in this letter, most of the readers of this letter were poor.

Majority of the Christians back then were poor. The church back then were not exactly filled with rich and influential people. Now this does not mean that God does not save the rich people, but there is a particular way that God is calling the poor people.

And that same pattern is true in today's world too, right? The combined church all around the world is actually overwhelmingly poor. Many places where the gospel is advancing the fastest is actually poor.

I mean, even in my country, Nepal, we collect monies, maybe once in a month, to send money to these pastors, pastors who have to minister in, like on from one mountain to one mountain.

[13 : 33] They would travel for days to reach another mountain, just to minister to people. And they don't have salary because the people they minister are poor. And what they get in return is milk and cows and goats.

And there's a funny story that this one pastor, he was ministering this to a whole village, and everyone gave him boiled egg. And you can imagine by the end of the day, his washroom experience was not great.

So, overwhelmingly poor, the church is, even in today's world. There are a lot of poor people coming to Christ.

And it seems that the reason for that is, it's because the physical poverty seems to reflect very closely to our, everyone's spiritual poverty.

That's in all of us. Whether we are better off financially or not, we all are spiritually poor. In fact, Ephesians tells us that we are spiritually dead.

[14 : 34] Now again, this is not to say that God does not save the rich, but what we are seeing here in this verse is, is that James readers were actually rejecting the very people that God was choosing to bless.

And if you think about that, when we choose to ignore that person, that just, that we just don't feel like talking to, because of anything, race, financial, smells funny, looks funny, talks funny, it actually apparently seems that that person is the exact one that God wants to reach out to.

I mean, it's so easy for the poor and the poor people and people from the lower income backgrounds to be ignored, right? I mean, they're already fighting a battle against the whole world, but God has chosen this, who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and ears of the kingdom.

And this is what James is saying is that, hey, you are rejecting the people that I'm calling. By the same time, James is also reminding us of something. And that is this, he think about ourselves.

Remember, not only about how God works, but our, ourselves too, because if we are in Christ, and I'm 100% sure it's not because we were impressive and rich.

[15 : 53] Because if we are in Christ, it's actually because we have come to realize that we are spiritually broke, and that we are in dire and desperate need of Christ Jesus to save us.

Because maybe we are wealthy on earth, and that's completely a God's grace, but whether we are wealthy or not, we all are still in dire need of Christ Jesus to save us.

And James is reminding us here of how God works, but at the same time reminding us of who we are in front of God. And James says, you're rejecting the very people that God is saving, but welcoming the people that abuse you.

So he just does not stop there. Look at verse 6 and 7. He says, yeah, you are rejecting the people, but at the same time, ironically, you're also accepting the people that abuse you. He says in verse 6 and 7, but you have dishonored the poor man, rejected the poor man, but are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the one who dragged you into court?

Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? Now, the natural question that arises from this verse is that why are the readers of James honoring the ones that were oppressing them and dishonoring the name and blaspheming the name of Jesus?

[17 : 12] And if you think about it, it's actually quite simple, right? The readers were mostly poor, Christian refugees, persecuted socially, socially outcast.

And it's quite natural for anyone in that position to look for people that would benefit them, to look for people that would support them in those situations. And what was happening in this situation was that they were putting their hope and security on this rich people, but ironically, this rich people were the ones that were oppressing and took the Lord's name in vain.

And the fault was this, and the fault was this, that they were putting their hope in the people rather than putting their hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's not all.

What is happening here is that they were dealing with people according to what these people might benefit them. Let me say that again. They were dealing with people, choosing people, according to what people would benefit them.

And isn't that quite common in Hong Kong? You scratch my back, I scratch your back. You help me find a job, and I'll owe you one. I mean, and what that leads us is, that leads us to have relationships that are completely based on what the other party can benefit us, rather than a sacrificial love that God has called us to do.

[18 : 41] Church, do we treat our bosses differently than we treat our colleagues and our juniors? Do we treat people that are below us differently than the way we treat people that are above us?

But at the same time, remembering that this letter was written to a church, so as a church, are we aware of the people that come inside this door that are left behind, left aside, not really knowing where they belong, and we just choose to go into our own small circles?

As a church, are we aware of that? Because there are times when people come in and they just fade away in the crowd and they disappear after that.

Now, we've been talking about all these reasons of why favoritism is evil and not good. But James actually gives us the ultimate reason of why favoritism is evil, and it's actually found right in the beginning of this chapter.

So if you go back to chapter, sorry, verse 1, what James says is, my brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

[19 : 59] Now, why does James describe Jesus as the Lord of glory? And this is the only time you'll find the word glory in this letter, or this is the only time you'll find James describing Jesus as the Lord of glory in this letter.

Now, James, who is a master of the way he uses his word, is not just putting this word there because he felt like it. He's actually very particular in the way he speaks and writes.

So, the reason James describes Jesus as the Lord of glory is actually because whatever we have talked about from verse 2 to 7 is actually, all of those things actually stands in complete contradiction to the glory of Jesus.

It stands in complete opposite of to the glory of Jesus. Now, the question begs, so what is this glory? What is this glory that stands in complete contradiction of whatever we have talked about so far?

Before Jesus was arrested and went to the cross, in John chapter 17, he prays to the Father. He says, Father, the hour has come.

[21 : 17] Glorify your son so that the son might glorify you. And one of the places that we see the glory of Jesus is in who he is, what he became, and in what he has accomplished on the cross and on this earth.

You see, think about it. We made distinctions among the rich and the poor. We made distinction according to what people can benefit us. But we see the glory of Jesus when though we were all poor, he did not just cast us out.

We see the glory of Jesus though when we were all spiritually broke and poor and evil, he did not cast us out or treated us the way we treated other people.

In fact, 2 Corinthians 8-9 tells us that though he was rich, for our sake became poor so that by his poverty, we can become rich. We used people that benefited us thinking what we can gain, but we see the glory of Jesus when he welcomed us in.

Though we were poor, though we had nothing to offer to Christ, he called us in to be heirs and children of the kingdom. James shows us here that when we show favoritism, what we fail to see is that we fail to see the glory of Christ Jesus who actually treats us with such incredible grace and mercy and love.

[22 : 57] Church, do we see that? Do we realize the amazing grace and mercy that God has poured out for us? And does that impact the way we treat other people?

Now, we might be thinking, okay, Alan, great points. Yep, favoritism is evil and I need to get my life together. Maybe you're thinking like, okay, I do it once in a while and I should get myself together.

And being honest, I don't think favoritism is something we all take very seriously, right? Like compared to the sin of adultery or murder. We don't take it as equally as that.

But now what James points us to is that favoritism is actually a very serious sin. And what he tells us in the next section is that he tells us that, hey, favoritism is serious and actually it breaks the law of God.

Which takes us to the second point is that when we show favoritism, we break the law of God. Now, let's look at verses 8 to 11. And James, what basically says here is that if you really fulfill the royal law, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, then you are doing well.

[24 : 03] And he's saying that, hey, if you're not showing favoritism and you're fulfilling that, you're loving your neighbors as yourself, then great job, guys. You're doing well. And he calls this law the royal law.

And what that means is, it's a law that belongs to the king. And that's quite not surprising because it is the law that Jesus quoted, right?

When Jesus was asked, hey, which is the greatest commandment? Jesus quotes, love your God and love your neighbor as yourself. It is the law that Jesus, the king of all kings, talks about.

Now, and if that is the royal law, if that is the law, the greatest law, what James is telling us is that, hey, if you are showing favoritism, then you're breaking the law, the law.

I don't know which one it is. The law? The law, thank you. You're breaking the law. So that means, this is not like breaking the law when you're crossing the red light on the street.

[25 : 03] This is not a small thing that we should be like, oh, don't worry. Just don't do it again. James is actually taking it quite seriously here. And so much so, that if you look at verse 10 and 11, he says like, hey, if you keep all of the law, but even fail in one of it, then you are guilty of all of it.

Can you hear what James is saying? Even if you break one of it, then you're guilty of all of it. And Sam Albury has this example, that image that might help us understand that.

Imagine that you were called for jury duty in Hong Kong, and it's a murder trial. And you go into the court, and then the session is happening, and you're kind of disappointed because they don't have all the dramas and twists like you thought they would, like in a Netflix show.

And as the trial is going on, and you see the evidence is massive against this defendant. It's definitely true that this guy is guilty of murdering the person. And you see this, the evidence is going on, and finally it is time for the inevitable verdict to be announced.

But the defendant stands up, and he says like, I want to make a last statement before the verdict is out. So the defendant comes up in front of the judge and the jury, and he says, you know, just last month, there was this old lady on the street, and I helped her cross the road, even though everyone was ignoring her.

[26 : 28] And just after that, I went to the MTR stop, and I actually gave my seat up to this pregnant lady, even though everyone was ignoring her and trying to look away on their phone and ignoring her. But what's more, I'm such a faithful husband.

I've never watched porn. I've never looked at any woman lustfully. Actually, I've always been committed to my woman. And the jury's going, oh, that's so true. Yeah, he murdered a man, but this guy's such a good guy.

Yeah, it's fine. He's such a faithful husband. Now, you don't have to be a super lawyer to see the flaw in that, right? Because there is no excuse to murdering a man.

It doesn't matter whether you're a good man or a good husband, but the fact that you murdered a man cannot be excused. And what James is telling us here is that once the law is broken, the law is broken.

Church, do we take favoritism as seriously as James is making it to be, right here? It is not a simple matter of not talking to certain people.

[27 : 38] It's not a simple matter of ignoring people and just walking away. It's actually a matter of law and the breaking of the law. And that's serious.

But James does not just leave us at that. Now, look into verse 12. Look at how James describes this law. He calls it the law of liberty.

In other words, he says, this is the law that brings freedom. If you think about it, if we were to obey every law of the past, it would be an impossible task and a massive burden.

And why? It's because we are slaves to sin. We naturally sin. We naturally rebel against God. And not only that, we are dead in our transgressions. But this law of liberty, the one that brings freedom, in other words, it is the good news of Jesus.

It's the gospel as we were looking at it. The gospel, the law of liberty that brings freedom, it actually frees us from the slavery of sin. It makes us alive to live in the way that God has created us to be.

[28 : 51] Completely fulfilling us, fulfilling our hearts because He's the one who created our hearts. In other words, Jesus frees us to obey the law, not so that He can put us under bondage.

In the same way, a football match has tons of law, not because to put the players under bondage. It's there because, so that the players can enjoy, they can play freely. In the same way, Jesus frees us to obey the law so that we can be fully who He created us to be.

And so James says, in the next verse, he says, in that same verse, sorry, he says, so speak and so act as those who are to be just under the law of liberty. What he's saying is, speak and act as people that have been freed by the gospel.

Now what James is doing here is that, he's reminding the readers and all of us this morning of the gospel that has freed us to love our neighbors as ourself, which is the opposite of favoritism.

He's actually reminding of the gospel when we deal with people. So what he's saying is, hey, favoritism is not only bad, to be nice, to treat everyone in an equal manner is not only good, he's actually, he's reminding us of the gospel.

[30 : 08] He's actually in light of what God has done for us. And think about it, in our interaction with people, whether you are at church, whether at jobs, whether with your boss or colleagues or juniors or in universities with other people, do we actually remember the gospel when we go out and reach out and speak to them?

Now gospel can be, a word can be quite vague and quite general, right? So the question is, hey, what about the gospel are you calling us to remember? But the answer is all of the gospel, but James actually picks up something from the gospel to remind us.

And James reminds us something in the gospel that stands, that stands in tall opposition to favoritism and it is the mercy of God in the gospel.

Which leads us to our last point. When we show favoritism, we forget the mercy of God. When we show favoritism, we forget the mercy of God.

Let's look at verse 13. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. And mercy triumphs over judgment. And the opposite way to say is, blessed is the one who is merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

[31 : 32] It's interesting that right after talking about the gospel, the law of liberty that frees us, James reminds us of the mercy of God. After James talks about the gospel, he says, hey, think about the mercy of God.

Think about the gospel and the mercy of God. Think about it. I want us to think about this. Where do you and I stand in the gospel? Where do you find ourselves in the gospel?

We stood in rebellion against God, slaves to sin, rejecting him as God, and though he was our creator, we chose to worship ourselves and other created things and idols.

And it would be truly deserving if we were judged and condemned. and though we had nothing to offer, though our good and our best works were completely marred, completely dirty and stench and marred with sin, God chose to reach out to us.

Think about the man that was suffering with leprosy and skin disease and all the people outcasted him because of fear and disgust, but Jesus chose to go out of his way and touch this man, hold on to this man, a man that might have been deprived of any physical touch his whole life.

[33 : 04] And in the same way, we stood before God, disgusting with our sins, stench, smelly, poor, with nothing to offer before God. And God reached out.

He sent his one and only son to come, to touch us, to be with us, to speak with us, to go down on his feet, to wash our feet, and to ultimately to die for our sins, for our rebellion, and to pay the price that none of us could pay.

We stood before God with nothing to offer. And in return, what do we get? We get the mercy of God. And everyone who comes to him in faith receives the mercy and this amazing mercy of God.

Isn't that an amazing grace? What an amazing mercy we all have received in Christ Jesus. And with that insight, how can we not show mercy when we have received such a mercy like this?

One of the many ways a Christian grows and lives is in the way they show mercy because of this amazing mercy we have received. It's not because talking to people and the poor and needy is a good thing to do.

[34 : 26] That's not the reason why we do it. The reason why we do it is because of God's amazing mercy that though we were poor he has shown it to us. Christians naturally move towards the needy and the poor because that's how God treated us.

Whether they are physically poor or spiritually poor we naturally move towards them. I mean look at think back to verse 27 in chapter 1 that religion that is pure and defiled before God is this to visit orphans and widows people that are isolated people that are needy people that are broken because favoritism treats people by their works and judges but that is not how we want God to treat us and that isn't how God treats us.

Favoritism happens when we forget and have stopped being captivated by the mercy of God. So church let us remember this amazing grace.

Let us remember this amazing mercy that Christ has shown us that he became poor so that we might be rich through his poverty. He did not use people as we do but he gave himself for us so that we are free to love him and love the people around us.

Let us remember the gospel that showed us such amazing mercy and grace so that we would go out and show no partiality as we hold our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of all glory.

[35 : 56] Let us remember who Jesus is and the way he treated us so that as we go out and treat people we treat people in light of the way God has treated us which is such amazing grace and such amazing mercy.

God bless you Elias and thank you good minded we did not work so happy and thank you for having a break and through and thank you for having a break and also for giving a know that every lihat is great on the way through and so you also, we'reHere that!