

No Room for Favouritism - James 2:1-13

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[0 : 00] 1 to 13, and Pete is going to come and read for us this morning. Okay, so if we've got the church Bible, it's on page 1213.

So it's James chapter 2, verse 1 to 13. My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man comes in filthy old clothes, also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, here is a good seat for you, but say to the poor man, you can stand there or sit on the floor by my feet, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

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

But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

[1 : 45] If you really keep the royal law found in scripture, love your neighbour as yourself, you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said you shall not commit adultery also said you shall not murder.

If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Thank you, Pete.

So let's keep our Bibles open at James chapter 2 and we're going to pray. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.

[3 : 08] Do what it says. Father, give us your Holy Spirit, we pray, so that we listen carefully to your word, so that we submit to its authority, that we accept it, but also so that we may do what your word commands.

For we know that this is not only good for us, it is good for each other, and it is good for the world in which we live.

So, Father, help us now, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, what's your favourite in a box of chocolates?

And don't tell me you don't like chocolates. Strawberry cream, Turkish delight, velvet fudge.

Well, last Sunday, after I'd come home, I was over at my brother's, and there were a few others there, and we opened up a box of milk tray after dinner.

- [4 : 30] Well, by the time the box came round to me, all that was left were the ones that nobody really likes, hazelnut whirl, coffee cup. Well, I broke the golden rule, the one my mother always told me I mustn't do, and went straight for the second layer.
- Salted caramel, my favourite. Now, just as we all have our favourite chocolates, we also have our favourite people, don't we?
- We choose and pick the people we like, while we ignore and discard the ones we don't. Look at verse 1 of chapter 2.
- My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.
- If we're believers, if we're claiming to follow Jesus, there must not be a hint of favouritism. Look back with me to chapter 1, verse 21, where James commands us.
- [5 : 45] He says, Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.
- Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Now, the evidence that we accept the word, listen to the word, and do what the word says is not showing favouritism.
- If I am a Christian, I will not have favourites. I will treat each and every person without prejudice or discrimination. You see, the sad reality is we all show favouritism.
- Look at verse 2. Suppose a man comes into your meeting, to your gathering on a Sunday morning wearing a gold ring and fine clothes. He's got all the bling and the latest fashion.
- And a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in and he's got a half-drunk Heineken can stuck in his pocket. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, Oh, please, sit with me.
- [7 : 10] But say to the poor man, You stand there or there's a chair at the back. Why don't you just sit there and keep quiet?
- Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Or suppose a sporting celebrity family comes in and visits one Sunday morning, just like one of the Munster players did a few years ago, you may remember.
- Well, they were the star attraction, the focus of attention. We were like bees round a honeypot, wanting to talk to them. Now suppose a family from the travelling community arrives.
- Well, it's all a bit noisy and a bit disruptive. There's no rushing over to chat. Instead, there seems to be a collective sigh of relief when they leave the building.
- We ignore the family from the travelling community, but rush straight to the celebrity family. Well, of course, we don't have to wait for travellers or celebrities to arrive to expose our favouritism.
- [8 : 31] We do it all the time. Just think about how we operate on a Sunday morning as we come in the door or as we take our seats.
- We choose who we sit beside, making sure it's somebody that we can relate to. We decide who we talk to over coffee, being careful to avoid the one that we find particularly awkward.
- We pick who we invite to our homes, calculating who's more fun and who will be more acceptable to our neighbours if they should see them coming.
- Verse 4. Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? It's quite pointed, isn't it?

When we show favouritism, we are making judgments on each other. We're saying, this person is more valuable than that person and the visitor who walked in, well, they're more important than the other visitor.

[9 : 48] It's called discrimination. Sometimes it's called racism. James, through God's word, tells us it is evil.

Verse 4. And it's lurking in the hearts in the hearts of each one of us. This one, not that one.

I like them, but I don't particularly like them. He's strange, but she's a lot of fun. They're Irish.

They're not. Well, I know them, but I can't stand them. Every Sunday, as we walk through the doors, perhaps subconsciously, we choose, decide, and pick.

We show favouritism. We become judges with evil thoughts. Like the box of chocolates, we pick who we like and discard the ones we don't.

[10 : 57] Verse 1. Look at verse 1 again. My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.

Now James goes on very helpfully to give us three reasons why we should not show favouritism. Here's the first one. God chooses the humble poor.

God chooses the humble poor. Look at verse 5. Listen, my brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

You see, when it comes to choosing people, the world does so on the basis of categories like wealth, success, looks, your education.

If you've got a well-paid job, if you look beautiful, you look fit, you've got a good figure, if you're popular among friends, well then you're the person who's chosen every time.

[12 : 20] You're selected. You are somebody. In the eyes of the world, you're deserving. You've made it. You're everyone's favourite. But that's not how God and the gospel works.

Do you see what it says in verse 5? God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith.

God chooses the nobodies, the losers, those who have nothing and are nothing, the rejected and the disregarded.

The Apostle Paul helpfully shows us the same thing if you keep your finger in James chapter 2 and go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

1 Corinthians chapter 1. If somebody's got a page number there, they could call it out and I can help you along. 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

[13 : 36] Are we all there? So here Paul is reminding the church in Corinth just how God has worked amongst the people.

Look what it says, chapter 1, verse 26. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards.

Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him.

It's quite clear, isn't it? Let's go back to James chapter 2. The foolish, the weak, the lowly, the despised, they are the ones that God chooses.

[14 : 48] Jesus. When I was in Ghana just last week, we travelled up to the northern region of the country, heading up towards the edge of the Sahara.

It was very, very hot. And there we went into a small village that was way out into the country. It was about an hour's drive from the town that we were staying in.

We arrived in the village, no electricity, no running water, nothing to offer, no employment. But yet, in that small little village, there was a thriving church of about 60 people crammed into a small little building.

They don't have work. Every one of them was living off the land. in the eyes of the world, this bunch of people were materially poor nobodies.

Weak, lowly, despised. But in the eyes of God, spiritually rich in faith, inheritors of the kingdom of God, it's like they had received the equivalent of the spiritual Euro millions.

[16 : 12] God chooses, verse 5, those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith. Nothing in their hands of material worth, but inheritors of the kingdom of God, the new heavens and the new world.

Riches beyond our imagination. Now, we might get confused as we read this section in James and think that God is showing favoritism to the poor.

That God chooses the poor over the rich. But I don't think God loves poor people more than he loves rich people, or that God ignores rich people more than poor people.

I think the point that James is driving at is this, that we all need to learn from the poor. In fact, we need to become like the humble poor.

You see, the materially poor have nothing. They are dependent on outside help. They need people to give what they don't have.

[17 : 30] And that becomes a model, it becomes an example of how we should all come to God spiritually. We come as hopeless and helpless, dependent and completely reliant upon God's grace that we have nothing in our hands to bring before him.

We have nothing to bring before God. So when someone comes into the church gathering and I think that I'm above that person, God is saying to me, Johnny, do not ignore them.

In fact, Johnny, I want you to learn from them. Johnny, I want you to become like them. I want you to become like the humble poor, because they know what it is to come with nothing and to receive God's free gift of grace.

Look at verse 6. But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?

Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? It's so telling, isn't it?

[18 : 55] written 2,000 years ago, but we still operate on the same level. All through the week, we give our attention to those we deem to be successful and wealthy in the hope that somehow they will notice us and maybe they'll give us that little bit of promotion or we'll get an extra rise in our salary or somehow we'll become part of the in crowd, the in group, and we look up to the successful in the hope that they will kind of pull us up.

Well, the irony is that those who we look up to don't actually help you. They use you and abuse you to get to where they want to get.

While those we look down upon who think they can give us nothing, they are the ones who can help us because they are the ones who can teach us.

James is so clear, don't ignore the poor, the nobodies and the losers, those who are considered of no value in the world's eyes.

James is saying, listen to them, learn from them, I want you to become like them. spiritual poverty coming with empty hands so that we receive the riches of God's grace.

[20 : 32] The other reason, the second reason why we should not show favouritism is because God commands the church to love. Look at verse 8. If you really keep the royal law found in scripture, love your neighbour as yourself, you are doing right.

But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law breakers. On one occasion, in the Gospels we read this, one of the religious leaders came up to Jesus in a discussion and asked him, of all the commandments that are in the scriptures, which one is the most important?

Do you remember what Jesus said? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And the second is this, love your neighbour as yourself.

And Jesus says there is no greater commandment than these. You see, for Jesus, loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself was a summary of all of God's law.

In fact, of all the laws that were in the scriptures, the one that Jesus quoted and talked about the one the most is here in verse 8.

[21 : 57] It's what James calls the royal law. It's the king's command, his command to his subjects, to those who follow him.

Christian, love your neighbour as yourself. And, well, it's quite simple. If we obey God's command, if we do love our neighbour, well then, there won't be favouritism, there won't be discrimination, there won't be prejudice, there won't be racism.

When there is love, and when love grows and flourishes within God's people, then favouritism dies. It disappears. And that's not a problem in the church, is it?

Because we all love our neighbour, don't we? Don't we? Don't we love our neighbour, as God has said? Well, behind my points here, I like to think that I love my neighbour.

I take pride that I love people in the church, and when a visitor comes, I seek to show love. But remember where this love command first came.

[23 : 17] You might have a note at the bottom of your Bible there, it says Leviticus 19, verse 18. That's where the love, love your neighbour as yourself, first was written.

It was given to God's people Israel just after they were rescued from Egypt, and were on their way into entering the promised land. And God says to them, love your neighbour as yourself.

In other words, they were to love the nations that were going to be around them. They were to love those who were not like them, those who spoke a different language and ate different kinds of foods.

They were to love their enemies, those who had wronged them and attacked them. They were to love the rejected, the outsider, the wanderer, those who didn't have a place to live.

Love them. Now, I don't have a problem loving those who are like me, because there is only one like me, and that's me.

[24 : 22] It's easy to love me, isn't it? It's easy to love people who are like me, people of my culture, my class, my background.

The problem comes for me when other people are not like me, and that's everybody else, really. Verse 9, knows him.

He tend to be are not I can take pride that I give attention and take time with 90% of the people in the church.

You can feel pleased with yourself that you spend 90% of the time with every visitor that comes in and you say hello to them and welcome them.

But you know what? If you or I exclude one person out of discrimination because their skin colour is different to mine, or if I exclude one person out of prejudice because, well, they're not as educated as me and they look a little bit awkward, I am as guilty as if I have not loved anybody.

[25 : 50] That's what James is saying. Verse 11. For he who said, you shall not commit adultery, also said, you shall not murder.

If you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. That's like a man being arrested for murdering his wife and then standing up before the judge and claim, well, I'm actually innocent of murder because, well, I didn't have an affair.

Maybe you should let me off. It's ridiculous. Fail at one point of the law and you are guilty. You are under the law and you will be judged by it.

Fail at one point of the law.

And I think it's wonderful as we shared tea and coffee together, the conversations, the chat with one another, welcoming, extending mercy and grace, being conduits of God's love to one another.

[27 : 24] Favoritism dies as love grows. It's wonderful to see. It's wonderful to be part of a church family where we love our neighbour as ourself.

So James is quite clear and it's really hard hitting, isn't it? No favoritism because God chooses the humble poor.

No favoritism because God commands the church to love. And then his third reason, no favoritism because God acts in mercy towards us.

Look at verse 12 as he brings things to a conclusion. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

There's two things about the law, two sides to the law. There's the law that brings freedom. If we follow God's law and do what it says, well then it helps us thrive.

[28 : 37] It helps us to become the kind of people God has called us to be. If we follow God's law, it's good for us. It's best and right for us. It creates the right kind of environment in which we live and flourish.

It brings freedom for how we should live. But then there's the other side of the law. Not only does the law bring freedom if we follow it, the law is also the basis on which we will be judged.

Do you see what it says in verse 12? Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law. Now, I hope I don't need to remind us all again that the problem as we've gone through this section in James is, well, we don't obey God's law.

Rather than love our neighbor, we often show favoritism. We pick and choose those who we like and reject and ignore those we don't like.

We need God's mercy. Where we fail to love as we should, we need God's mercy.

[29 : 55] Look at verse 13. Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Now, here's the logic of verse 13. Follow along with me. If we've received mercy from God, we will now show mercy to others.

If we've experienced the mercy of God who does not judge us as we deserve, then we will be merciful to others and not become judges with evil thoughts.

I want us to get that. I'm going to say that last line again. If we've experienced the mercy of God who does not judge us as we deserve, then we will be merciful to others and not become judges with evil thoughts.

You see, at the heart of the gospel is God's mercy. Mercy is his unconditional grace and compassion. It's the opposite of favoritism.

[31 : 06] Rather than show prejudice, God shows grace. Rather than discrimination, God has compassion. Let me show you how God has mercy upon us.

First, he became poor. Look at the beginning of verse 5 of chapter 2. Verse 5. Listen, my dear brothers and sisters.

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?

You see, for us to become spiritually rich, Christ first had to become spiritually poor. Look at the quote on the screen from 2 Corinthians.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

[32 : 13] Christ was rich, perfect in righteousness and purity, yet he became poor, taking on our impurity, and in its place giving us his riches, his purity.

Christ takes on our spiritual poverty so that we might receive his spiritual riches. Now that is mercy.

That is mercy triumphing over judgment. That is the grace and compassion of God towards discriminating, prejudiced people like you and me.

That is mercy. But not only has he become poor. He has loved us. Look at verse 8.

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, love your neighbour as yourself, you are doing right. Christ was the only one who came into this world and as a man kept the royal law.

[33 : 24] He was the only one who loved the neighbour as himself, perfectly. And this is how we know of his love. Look at the screen again.

Here is a quote from 1 John 3.16. This is how we know what love is. Christ laid down his life for us.

Christ was treated as a lawbreaker for you and for me. When Christ was nailed to the cross, he was treated as a favourite-picking, discriminating, discriminating, prejudiced, unmerciful sinner, racist, for us.

He was treated as a lawbreaker. And in place of the lawbreaking, what was credited to our account was his perfect law-keeping.

So that we might be welcomed in. So that we would never be pushed out, but become part of his family. That is mercy.

[34 : 33] That is mercy triumphing over judgment. That is the grace and compassion of God towards people like us, who, and let's admit it, judge with evil thoughts.

Verse 13. Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. You see, the evidence, the evidence that we have received and experienced God's mercy in our life is that we are now merciful to others.

Instead of showing favouritism, we now show unconditional grace and compassion. As our lives are filled afresh with the mercy of God, as we bow before him in worship for all that we have received, so mercy, grace and compassion will bubble up and overflow and we will be conduits of God's mercy towards one another.

And we will point people to the most merciful Saviour, Jesus Christ. I want to leave us with two questions.

[36 : 04] just in the quietness to think about these two things. If you've got the notes that were handed out, the two questions are there.

And here's the first question. Have I experienced God's mercy? Do I know what it is to come with absolute spiritual poverty, not claiming anything, empty hands, empty hands, and just come to him and say, Lord, fill me with your mercy.

I have nothing to bring, nothing to claim. I need your mercy. Have you experienced the depth of God's mercy in your life?

The second question is this. Who do I need to show mercy to this week? Is there somebody I'm avoiding at work?

Is there somebody who I just don't talk to on a Sunday? Where am I showing favouritism? Lord, help me to show mercy and compassion and grace.

[37 : 23] Let's pray together. And as we pray, let's answer those two questions. The end