

Loving People

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Date: 06 April 2025

- [0 : 00] The Book of James, Chapter 2, verses 1-12. My brothers and sisters, believing in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, must not show favor to me.
- Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man with filthy clothes also comes in.
- If you show special attention to a man wearing fine clothes and say, here's a good seat for you, which say to the poor man, you stand there or sit on the floor by my feet.
- Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts? 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.
- But you have dishonored 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 : 25] If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing right. But if you show of favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-begles.
- 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 law-breaker. 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. Amen.
- Thanks, John. And I'd invite you to keep that open in front of you as we spend time in God's Word together.
- [2 : 36] If you've been with us in this letter of James, you'll know that in the first chapter of the letter, what James does is he presents a number of different topics.
- And he gives us a little bit of teaching on each topic. And then as the letter unfolds, he circles back to these topics and gives us a little bit more depth on the same subjects.
- And so, for example, you'll remember from chapter 1, verse 9, that James had been teaching us about believers in humble circumstances. And in verse 10, about the rich who should take pride in their humiliation.
- And so he mentioned in chapter 1, the rich and the poor. And here in what John read for us, he circles back to us.
- Here, though, he's not so much speaking about the rich and the poor in the church believers. He is thinking or he's not so much speaking to those who find themselves in lowly circumstances or humble circumstances and in wealthy circumstances.
- [3 : 46] But he's speaking to the church in how they treat those who are poor or rich. And I'm sure even as it was being read for us, you realize the temptation that it is for us to treat people differently based on how they look.

That's a real temptation for us. And James wants to help us to overcome that temptation, to not give in to that temptation, to not treat people the way so many in the world around us would treat people based on appearance, based on status, based on wealth, based on career or those kinds of things, but to treat each other in a far different way.

And so what James does for us is helps us with this temptation. And so as we open this up, what we want to do, first of all, is just to ask this question again, who is James writing to?

So who is James writing to? And as we ask this question, we need to realize with James that his letter is kind of like an iceberg. Now, icebergs are famous for two things.

First of all, that they sink big ships. And then second of all, that most of the iceberg is beneath the surface. And you only see the bit that's above the surface. And that's only a little bit of the iceberg.

[5 : 06] With James, what we see throughout his letter is mostly the stuff that's above the surface. Here's how we live. Here's what we should do. Here's how we should act.

Here's how we should speak or think. But it would be wrong to think that with James, there isn't this deep theology under the surface that's propping up. All the things that he's telling us to do.

And so you have to be careful not to gloss over the deep theology that James is keeping in mind below the surface. And we keep that in mind as we ask this question, who is James writing to?

James is writing to believers. He says that in verse one. This is believers that he's writing to. My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

So he's writing to people who have heard about Jesus, heard the good news of Jesus. They have repented of their sin and they've turned to Jesus in belief or in faith or in trust. Turned to Jesus as their savior.

[6 : 06] Turned to Jesus as their Lord. But to put it in one way, they've been dazzled by the brilliance of Jesus. James speaks about Jesus as the glorious Lord Jesus Christ or Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

And when you hear him saying that, you maybe realize that James doesn't actually talk about Jesus very often in his letter. He only mentions Jesus twice in the whole letter.

And you're thinking, does James not have a high view of Jesus? But as we read through the letter of James, you realize that James's teaching is immersed in the teaching of Jesus.

He just oozes Jesus teaching. And not only that, when he does refer to Jesus, he could not refer to him in higher terms. He is the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

So he's the Lord. He is the Christ that is the chosen king. And he is glorious. He has died. He has risen from the dead.

[7 : 15] And God has raised him up to be seated at the right hand of God. Jesus has been glorified. He is the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord. James couldn't describe Jesus in higher terms here.

And James, so, is writing to those who have believed in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. He's writing to a first century people who have been scattered all over the place as a result of persecution in Jerusalem, it seems.

But of course, if you are somebody who has repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, then what he's saying here about these believers is also true of you as a believer in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

And so amazingly, not only are we believers if we have repented and trusted in Jesus, but we are also beloved brothers and sisters.

[8 : 22] This is why we were singing, bind us together, Lord, earlier. Because we have been brought into this family through the blood of Jesus. This relationship language between brothers and sisters is being used because we have been brought into God's family through Christ.

He calls us brothers and sisters in verse 1. And in verse 5, he says, my dear brothers and sisters. And that translation, dear, is a little bit weak.

It's a little bit shy because what James actually says is, my beloved brothers and sisters. That would be a good way, wouldn't it, to greet one another on a Sunday morning? My beloved brother, my beloved sister.

James says, we've been brought into this family of God through the blood of Christ that we will never be kicked out of. God is not going to throw us out of his house, those who have been bought by the blood of Jesus.

Not only are we beloved brothers and sisters, but we are those who love God, as we see at the end of verse 5. James says that God chose those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith to inherit the kingdom.

[9 : 34] He promised those who love him. And when you hear that, you realize that we love him because he first loved us. You think of Jesus speaking to the apostle Peter on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and he says, do you love me?

And three times Peter says, Lord, you know that I love you. And that echoes our hearts towards Jesus. If Jesus was to stand here this morning and say, do you love me?

If you're a believer in Jesus, you would say, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. And so not only are we beloved brothers and sisters, but we are those who love God.

Not only are we those who love God, but we are those who are chosen by God. Verse 5, my dear brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world?

Now, James here is speaking specifically about those who are poor in the eyes of the world. But James isn't saying that it is only those who are poor in the eyes of the world that God has chosen.

[10 : 40] When you track his sentence along, it's those who love God in response to God's love for them that God has chosen.

And this reflects what we see elsewhere in the New Testament, where we have been chosen by him before the foundation of the world. That he has set his love on us, not because of how great we are, not because of how lovely we are.

Though we are made in the image of God, we are fallen short of that. Though he has set his love on us because of his loving character, his gracious and merciful character.

And so James says we are chosen by God. And he says we are rich in faith. Verse 5, God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith.

And again, James is focusing on those who are poor economically and drawing this contrast with how they are rich spiritually. But of course, this is true of all who believe in Jesus, that they are spiritually rich.

[11 : 46] You think of what the Apostle Paul says. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.

And when Paul says that, he is not talking about financial wealth. He is talking about spiritual riches, that everyone who has turned to Jesus in repentance and faith has every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

And James says this is true of us, that we are rich in faith. Not only are we rich in faith, but we are heirs of the kingdom.

Verse 5, those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom. He says that we are heirs of the kingdom like the son or a daughter of a great king with a great kingdom.

And we know that once the king passes away, that everything that he has will be ours. James is saying, of course, God or Jesus never pass away.

[12 : 59] Jesus won't die again. But we are heirs of the kingdom in the sense that his kingdom has been promised to us. We experience a little bit of it now as we live for him. But one day it will all be ours to enjoy fully and forever.

And James says we are heirs of the kingdom. Not only are we heirs of the kingdom, but we belong to Jesus.

Verse 7, are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? We have been bought at a price.

We are not our own. We belong to Jesus. We belong to Jesus. Not only do we belong to Jesus, but we are to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

Verse 12, speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

[14 : 02] What will happen? We will be judged on the basis of the finished work of Christ. And what will be true of us now, what is true of us now will be true of us then.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And our works will be judged as well where we can never please God apart from Christ. But if we have trusted in Christ, we can do things that are pleasing to him.

In the strength that he gives. By faith in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do things that are pleasing to the Father. Our works are never perfect, but they can be pleasing to God.

And of course, we can displease God with how we live as his children. We can grieve the Spirit by how we live as his children.

Paul picks up on this idea that he says, our work will be shown for what it is on that day. Either burned up as simple chaff which is worthless in light of eternity.

[15 : 10] Although we are saved. Or it will be refined to shine forever and ever like the stars in heaven. Imagine the things that we do and say and think now might have eternal consequences as the children of God.

That a word spoken to encourage a brother or a sister. That a conversation had. That a kind act done in the name of Christ could have eternal consequences.

And we will say, of course, as we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, I can only stand here because of Christ. And we will say, as we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, anything that I have done that is worthwhile or meaningful or significant has only been by the mercy of God.

And we will feel so unworthy. And yet God will say, yes, this has been my power at work in you.

And this is who James is speaking to. He's speaking to believers who are beloved brothers and sisters, who have faith in Jesus, the Lord of glory, who are chosen by God, who are heirs of the kingdom, who love God, who are called by the name of Jesus, who have received mercy.

[16 : 29] And if this is who we are in Christ, James says, and love people because you are loved.

Love people because you are loved, he says. Verse two, my brothers and sisters, sorry, verse one, my brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

We must not show favoritism. We are to love people because we are so loved. And this is a very tangible example of how we don't love people when we play favorites.

What does it look like to show favoritism? Well, in verse two, James gives us a very tangible example of that. He says in verse two, suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in.

Now, this is a situation where people look different. They appear different. And you can imagine the scene, the guy who comes in with the watch and the suit and the shoes and the sunglasses and the smells and the handshake and the smile, the confident smile, because he always gets his way.

[17 : 42] And then another guy comes in with the watch, no suits, no clothes unwashed, no handshake, not meeting your eye. And of course, you notice the difference immediately, at first glance, first impression.

And it's okay to notice these things. James isn't calling us to be blind to what we see around us. But what's not okay is when we treat people differently because they look different or because their bank balances are different, which is evident in how they look or can be evident in how they look.

So James says, if you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, here's a good seat for you, but say to the poor man, you stand there, sit on the floor by my feet. That's treating them differently, not on the basis of who they are in Christ, not on the basis of the fact that they have been created by God in his image, but simply on the basis of them appearing differently.

And this being evidence of them, one being rich and one being poor. And of course, this different treatment of different people in this scenario is evidence that we think differently about them.

Verse 4, have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? You can see the temptation. More likely, the rich man would be a blessing to the church.

[19 : 16] Or more likely, the rich man might become a believer or is a believer. This guy would be a nice addition to Corp Baptist Church is the temptation.

I mean, we heard it with the disciples in the Gospels where the disciples are shocked when Jesus says it's impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. And they're like, okay.

Okay. And then he says, but what's impossible with man is possible with God. So he's not saying it can't happen. But he's saying that if somebody has riches, if somebody has wealth, they are used to not needing anything from anyone.

And so the idea that they would need a savior is that little bit more far away from their minds. And so James here is not wanting us to write off rich people.

But he's telling us that we need to treat people not on the basis of how they look. He says it's very serious when we do this, that we've become judges with evil thoughts.

[20 : 30] James doesn't pull his punches here. He's still speaking to people who are believers, brothers and sisters, chosen by God, heirs of the kingdom, and so on and so forth. And that's what makes it all the worse.

When we, of all people, would treat others differently on the basis of how they look. And of course, this different treatment actually dishonors people.

Verse 6, you have dishonored the poor. You've dishonored the poor. And you know, it's often the case that somebody who is struggling will recognize their need for a savior more readily than somebody who is not struggling financially.

Paul picks up on this idea as well. He says, 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.

He doesn't say not any, but he says not many. 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.

[21 : 44] And so James says when we treat people differently based on how they look, we dishonor them. And what we do is we honor the one that dishonors us.

Verse 6, you have dishonored the poor. But 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?

Super. Well, just to remind us where we've been, James has been talking to us about how we are brothers and sisters.

How we're loved. How we are heirs of the kingdom. How we have been chosen by God. God and he has layered and layered and layered these truths about who we are on us and in light of all of this James says it's unthinkable then that we would go on to not love people well that out of this love that we have we want to love others and so he has been giving us an example of how we can sometimes base our way of interacting with people on how they look if they look different we treat them differently and if we treat them differently that is a sign of us thinking differently about them which James says is just not right it is evil thoughts to discriminate in these ways about people and so the way in which to avoid this and we don't want this we don't want to treat people differently based on how they look and so the way to avoid this is by loving people because we have been loved by recognizing God's great love for us and treating people in the same way whether or not they're believers whether or not they're brothers and sisters in Christ that we would be so dazzled by the glory of our savior that we wouldn't be dazzled by somebody walking in with a fancy ring or the appearance of wealth that we would not be dazzled by that but that we'd be dazzled by Jesus glory and as those who follow a suffering savior a savior who had nowhere to lay his head a savior who did not have much in this world in this life that we would be those who would honor those who are poor or suffering and so on and we can see of course how this doesn't just apply to people who are rich and poor as we see them differently or attempted to see them differently it also applies to other appearances so that we want to avoid treating people differently based on skin color based on accent based on career based on anything external anything that would cause us to treat them differently we want to love people because we are loved by God and let's just think briefly that we want to love people because we love God we want to love people because we love God

James speaks about this royal law in verse 8 and he says if you really keep the royal law found in scripture love your neighbor as yourself you are doing right it is a good thing to love our neighbors as ourselves and when James speaks about the royal law we need to realize what the royal law is is the law of the kingdom the law of the king so he has already described us as heirs of the kingdom and it's the same word that he uses to describe this law it is the kingdom law it is law under Jesus as our king and it is loving our neighbor as ourselves but it is more than that it is all that Jesus has commanded and so as in heirs of the kingdom we want to live according to the law of the kingdom which is good his laws are for our good and we recognize even as we hear it when James says to us we're to love our neighbor as ourselves we want to recognize that Jesus is the one who has defined what our neighbor is we remember in the gospels how

[26 : 00] Jesus says neighbor is not just a fellow israelite and in our context neighbor is not just a fellow irishman neighbor jesus says can be the foreigner or even an enemy somebody who's totally other or totally different to us whether rich or poor whether employed or unemployed whether a homeowner or a homeless person somebody who doesn't have a home as one author puts it in obedience to their king jesus christians are to build among themselves a genuine counterculture in which the values of the kingdom of god rather than the values of this world are lived out and so we want to love our neighbors as ourselves instead of dishonoring as we are tempted to do based upon appearances this is a good thing when we do this james says in verse 8 we do well when we love our neighbor as ourselves we do right and you know when we don't do this when we fail in this it isn't a good thing and the reason it isn't a good thing is because where the law comes from so james brings us back upstream from this commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves and what he does is he says when we treat people differently we're not loving our neighbors as ourselves and so what he tells us is that to do that is actually against god's law against the royal law favoritism is a sin james says in verse 9 he says if you show favoritism you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers so he says we're convicted we're not condemned because of what christ has done but the law shows us jesus law shows us this is not good this is wrong the temptation of course is that we're tempted to think well this isn't such a serious thing this isn't such a bad thing to do but james says well when you break one law you break the whole law in verse 10 he says 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 law breaker and you can see what james is doing there he's saying if we're guilty of favoritism or treating people differently based on how they look and if this is breaking the law it's not just breaking a law it's breaking the whole law i remember years ago playing tennis and the tennis courts that we played tennis in were beside a golf course and we were in the middle of a game and the next minute a golf ball sails over the wall into the tennis court and lands beside me and i'm thinking well i'm going to send this back where it came from and so i picked up my tennis racket and whacked the golf ball back out of the tennis court and of course what happened was the string in my racket broke and so i uh brought it to the guy in the shop and i said this a string is broken but of course in a tennis racket all the strings are interconnected with each other you pull out the whole thing it's all one it's all united it's all interwoven you break one string you break them all and james says if we break one law we break them all and the reason is because the law is personal the law is this expression of god's character it's this expression of god's heart so that when we are in eternity with our savior in whom there is no condemnation it will be a place where no favoritism is shown it'll be a place where people do not murder it'll be a

place where people do not commit adultery it'll be a place where people do not steal because it is an expression of god's character in god's heart when we read his law and so we need to hear it we need to hear that favoritism or partiality is not just a sin against the poor or against whoever it is we're playing favorites with but it's actually a sin against god our father it's actually a sin against jesus our savior and so james calls us as chosen as beloved as children of god to live accordingly as heirs of the kingdom to live according to the royal law when we fail to do that it is not good it is bad when we fail to do that when we fail to do that we need to seek forgiveness again from our savior because he has dealt with that sin but we need to hear this as one author puts it god's gracious acceptance of us does not end our obligation to obey him it sets us on a new footing no longer is the god no longer is god's law threatening confining burden for the will of god now confronts us as a law of liberty an obligation we discharge in the joyful knowledge that god has both liberated us from the penalty of sin and given us in his spirit the power to obey his will and so if you're here this afternoon and you don't know jesus as your savior if you haven't trusted in him if you haven't turned from your sin and put your faith in jesus as the only one who can deal with your sin that's the first thing you need to do there's no point in trying to keep all these things that james is telling us to do without the power that only jesus provides without the forgiveness that only jesus gives but if you know him as the lord of glory if you have been dazzled by him james says it's unthinkable then that we would treat people with favoritism or that we would continue to do this in light of where the law comes from and so james calls us as brothers and sisters not to show favoritism to realize the seriousness of it when we do it and he calls us as brothers and sisters to live in a way that reflects the love that we have experienced in god to love others because we have been loved and to love others because in so doing we actually love our father as we keep his commands wouldn't it be amazing won't it be amazing when this law is perfectly kept in heaven forever where we never experience somebody being prejudice against us based on how we look or how we think or how we speak but we are treated for who we are as beloved brothers and sisters in christ and won't it be amazing when we are able to do what we long to do out of the love that god has given us that we would love others like this it is a beautiful picture that james paints and this is why he warns us against straying into territory that is not good that is evil that is sad and so james calls us to live out of this love that god has shown us

and he finishes wonderfully by saying mercy triumphs over judgment and the question for us is well who's mercy and who's judgment and you could say well as uh he has been speaking to brothers and sisters maybe he's saying that in a church family mercy triumphs over judgment that we would have mercy on one another rather than judging them with evil thoughts and you know that is true but i think james is also echoing a greater truth that it is god's mercy that triumphs over judgment because it is on the cross that jesus has dealt with the good judgment of god paid the price for our sins satisfied god's justice in a way that we never could and it's on the cross that we can see the mercy of god displayed that we would know god's forgiveness through the blood of jesus so that we might be welcomed into his family as brothers and sisters as heirs of the kingdom as chosen by god as those who love god and so this is what we're called so let's pray and ask god to help us to do what he has called us to in light of his love for us father we do ask that you'd help us to be people and a community a church family that is very aware of when we're tempted to show favoritism lord based on how somebody looks or speaks or acts lord help us to be a community where there is no favoritism but we are brothers and sisters and sisters and live out of that great love that you've shown us father help us to realize that when we do sin lord it is not just against a brother or a sister or another human being but it is against you ultimately and father even then thank you that mercy triumphs over judgment that as we stand before your judgment seat on that great day lord we will have no condemnation if we are in christ jesus and lord that on that great day we will say it wasn't me but it was christ and his strength in me and so empower us enable us lord to do what you've called us to do in jesus name amen