

Be a Welcoming Church (James 2:1-13)

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Preacher: Brett Sanders

[0:00] Amen. Amen. You may be seated. Children, we are ready for Children's Church at this time. You may make your way back there to see Miss Savannah. We are excited that you're here to worship with us today.

This week during our Wednesday night life groups, the topic that we were discussing was becoming a welcoming church and making sure that we're intentional about being a welcoming church. It was part of the series, the Love Your Church series that all of our life groups on Wednesday nights are going through. And actually some of our Sunday school classes on Sunday morning are going through as well. But it was a really interesting topic, a great week of discussion as we think through what it means to be a welcoming church.

And in that session, during that chapter, the main passage that was used was James chapter 2 verses 1 through 13. Well, guess what? Today, our main passage is James chapter 2 verses 1 through 13.

Now, I wish that I could say six months ago we planned this out and, you know, we just had it in mind all along. That's not the case. But I am really thankful that it worked out this way because it does, it's very helpful for us this week in thinking through this passage.

[1:16] In thinking through what it means to be a welcoming church. Now, there's a couple of areas that we need to be aware of when we think about becoming welcoming or being a welcoming church.

A few pitfalls that I think are easy to fall into. And one of those is one that you would typically go to. I think that everybody would recognize. And we sometimes find ourselves becoming unwelcoming because we feel that we are being inconvenienced.

Our preferences or our comfortability is being challenged. And we can find ourselves showing preferences in an unbiblical way.

We can find ourselves not becoming welcoming because all of a sudden these new people, it changes the dynamics. It changes different things. And I think we all recognize that we must push back against that.

We must not let that become what is important to us. That we must be on guard against this. But there's another way that we need to be on guard as well.

[2:19] And sometimes we like the idea of being welcoming. But as long as it is someone else who's doing the welcoming, right? We like the idea of being a welcoming church.

Nobody wants their church to be known for not being welcoming. Nobody wants that. But at the same time, we don't want to actually be the ones who are making people feel comfortable.

We don't want to actually be the ones who are putting ourselves out there. And when I think about this, I'm reminded of a church that I was serving in at one time. Not here, but it was a church that I was serving in.

And there was this group of teens that was playing basketball in the parking lot. And somebody comes in. They says, somebody really needs to go out there and invite these teens in.

They need to invite them to church. Because it was obvious by their actions, by the language that they were sharing with one another, that they weren't typically people who go to church.

[3:15] And so we had someone come in and he comes right up to me. And I guess because I was on staff there, say, somebody needs to go invite them to church. And so I go out there and invite them to church. But then I began thinking about, you're right, somebody does.

But that's something that we all need to take responsibility for. That's something that we all need to be a part of. This is a command that we must all take responsibility for and actively participate in.

And so our passage today addresses the issue of showing partiality and favoritism. James, a leader in the early church, wants to make sure we know that in the kingdom of God, there's no place for partiality.

There's no place for favoritism. And so if you have a copy of God's Word, I want to invite you to open with me to James chapter 2. And we're going to read the first 13 verses.

So James chapter 2 verses 1 through 13, this is what the Word of the Lord says. It says this, My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

[4 : 25] 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 you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing, and you say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there, or sit down at my feet, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers, has God not 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?

But you have dishonored the poor man, and are not the rich ones the ones who oppress you, and not the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you are 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 of transgressors.

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

[5 : 48] If you do not commit adultery, but you 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.

Now there are so many things that we would love to take the time to cover this morning, and we're not going to be able to hit on every single thing.

But there are a few questions that I want us to ask ourselves as we think through the problem that James addresses here, this problem of partiality.

And the first question that I want us to look at today, this morning, is this. What are you captivated by? What are you captivated by? What are we captivated by?

And we see this from James 2, 1 through 7 here, but I want us to pay particular attention to James 2, 1. It says, My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

[6 : 55] Much of this section, verses 1 through 13, can be summed up with this one verse. Don't show favoritism or partiality to anyone because Jesus is the Lord of glory, the only one who is worthy of glory.

You see, when we ascribe glory to people based on their financial status, we are being captivated by the things of this world and not the one who created this world.

If we start showing and ascribing glory to people and giving preference to those who have means, then what we're doing is we're putting more glory on the things of this world than the one who created the world.

And in our passage, James goes on to give an example of what this would look like. He says, Imagine that two people come into your assembly. One of these people that comes into your assembly is dressed in really fine clothing.

And in fact, he's got rings on all of his, gold rings on all of his fingers. And we know from history that this was a status symbol where everybody would look to, Oh, that person's a person of means.

[8 : 01] And in fact, there's rumors that are told that, that there were places where you could go and rent gold rings to wear if you were going somewhere to try to impress somebody. I guess much like people use enterprise or in a sports car to go to their high school reunion.

And so, and so you would rent these things and you would, you would go and you would show off and say, look at me. Look how rich, look how wealthy I am. Look at all the things that I have done. Look at, look at me.

And so this person, imagine this person coming in and everybody wants to welcome him. They roll out the red carpet for him. He gets to sit with everyone. He's invited to every Sunday school class

we offer.

He's given his own parking place and make sure that he gets a guest back. Everyone wants to invite them to lunch, to go with them. Then there's another person that walks in and this person is dressed in shabby clothes, that it says.

This person doesn't look as impressive on the outside as someone who, who maybe can contribute to life. This is not a person of means. It's never going to be a large contributor of finances to the church.

[9 : 07] And instead of rolling out the red carpet, you ask the person to stand over there in the corner. Why don't you, if you need to, you can sit down here at my feet. But you don't welcome them in.

You have one person who feels incredibly welcomed and glad that they are there. And somebody else who, who really probably will never come back because they don't feel like they belong. They don't feel like they are welcomed there.

And so as soon, and then you have this take place and soon the worship service begins. Or does it? And I say this because what are we really worshiping at this point?

What are we really worshiping if we're trying to make these distinctions between, what are we elevating in our services if we begin to make these distinctions? Because it's not Christ that's being elevated.

I believe that God is far more concerned with our heart as we come to our worship service than he would ever be about how we are dressed. Now you may object and say, well, Brad, this is not a true story.

[10 : 12] James is just, he's speaking in hyperbole here. No one calls themselves a Christian would actually act this way. There's no way that this would actually take place if only that were true.

It's been a few years since I was in Greek, but I'm not sure that I would have even picked up on this because what I had was just the very basics of it. But numerous commentators this week noticed the language of verses two and three, as well as the context that is given here, indicates an actual happening in the early church.

James probably witnessed this tragic event himself. And again, I'm not a Greek scholar, but sadly, I don't find this hard to believe.

There's a real danger that if we are not intentional, then we can fall prey to showing partiality. Tony Morita, he notes that this word for partiality is actually a plural term that is meaning that it can be used in a number of forms, saying that the Christian must not show any act of favoritism regarding clothing, wealth, skin color, background, or external aspects of a person.

Now, hopefully not, but some of you may think, is this really a big deal? Is this really an issue that we need to spend a whole week talking about? And yes, it is.

[11 : 36] Why? Because it is far from being like Christ, the example that we have, the example that he's set for us. Martin Lloyd-Jones, he says, the Christian is meant to be like God.

He is meant to manifest in his daily life, in this cruel world, something of the characteristics of God himself. He is meant to live as the Lord Jesus Christ lived, to follow the pattern and to imitate that example.

You see, when we set our eyes on Jesus, when we see him as our greatest treasure, then all of a sudden, the things of this world, they don't seem to be as big of a deal.

When we set our eyes on Jesus, and we see him as our greatest treasure, then all the things that the world says are important, all of a sudden start paling in comparison to who Jesus is.

We must be more captivated by Christ and his glory than anything else in this world. If you want to put partiality, if you want to put favoritism, if you want to put prejudice, if you want to put discrimination, or whatever you want to call it to death here, then keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.

[12 : 50] Ed Welch rightly said, he says, when we see people as bigger, that is more powerful and more significant than God, then we give other people the power and right to tell us what to feel, what to think, and what to do.

Once our eyes are fixed on him, then how we view this world is brought into the right perspective.

Once we fix our eyes on Jesus, then all of these other things are put in their proper place.

But where do we go from here? What's the next step that we find ourselves? And the next question I want us to answer is this, what do we do with our partiality? What do we do with our partiality?

And we see this is in verses 8 through 11, but specifically 8 and 9 right here says, 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. So to give a quick answer to what do we do with our partiality?

[13 : 56] We put it to death. We do what we do with all of our sin. We put it to death and we repent. Now, if there's any doubt in our minds at this point, is this a sin or not?

James removes all that doubt by saying, but if you show partiality, you are committing sin. He tells us that this is a sin that we must repent from. Now, repentance is a really interesting thing because repentance doesn't just mean stop doing something.

It means turning from it, right? It's not just that we stop doing something, but it's we turn and we start doing something else. And so it's a stop and it's a start. It's a turn and going in the opposite direction.

Ephesians 4 gives us one of the clearest examples of how this plays out in the life of a believer when it says this in Ephesians 4. It says, It's assuming that you have heard about him and were taught to him as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, to stop doing these things, which belongs to the former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness.

And so in this passage, Paul's saying that repentance is twofold. It's to put off your old self and to put on the new self. Put to death all those things that the world says are important and to put on what it is that God values.

[15 : 30] And then he gives us a beautiful example of how this plays out when he goes on to say this. He says, Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor doing honest work with his own hands so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

This shows not just a changed behavior, but it shows a new affection. It's not just a changed behavior that God is after. He's after a new affection. And so the thief, you know, if you were discipling this man, this thief, if you were discipling him and trying to help him grow in his relationship with God, I think if we started that process, we would all be thrilled to death if this thief just stopped stealing.

We'd be like, Wow, you have made incredible progress. You've stopped stealing. That's fantastic. But Paul says that there's more to it because it's not just the action that we're after to be changed. It's after a new heart, a new kind of obedience that desires to follow God. And so here he's saying, let the thief no longer steal. But what should he do? He should do honest work with his own hands so that he can have something that he can do what?

That he can give to others. And so what you see here in the example of the thief is a changed heart. He's gone from a heart that is greedy where he's trying to take and take and take.

[16 : 53] And now he's given a heart that is generous so that he can give. So that he can give to those in need. And so what we see in repentance is stop doing something, but it's also a move in the opposite direction.

It's a turning from this. We must not only show, not stop showing partiality and favoritism, but we must be actively opposed to it.

Actively opposed to these things. You see, evidence of revival in the movement of God is always characterized by repentance of sin. One of the things that we know from church history and the different revivals that have taken place is one key characteristic that is evident in all of these.

And I would say is probably the main characteristic of evidence that revival and a movement of God is taking place. And it is that the effect of the revival is this repentance from sin.

One pastor I was reading said it like this. He says, some so-called revivals have been characterized by exotic experiences without much emphasis on repentance.

[17 : 59] People go like tourists to such places to see what is happening. I wonder whether we could call that revival, he says. After the revival of Asbury College and Seminary in 1971, many students came to the bookstore to return things that they had taken without paying.

He says, that is a powerful sign that they have become right with God. Can you imagine being in the bookstore and all of a sudden all of these students start coming in, yeah, I took this from you but I want to give it back to you now. You know, I want to pay for this.

I took this, used it, now I want to pay for it. It is my hope and prayer that as a church we want to see God move in a mighty way. That we want to see revival take place.

That we want to see God move throughout our community. But one of the ways that that must, that one of the things that must be in place for that to happen is this repentance.

Is this turning from sin and following God. One thing that is clear is that, that is clear evidence to God working is repentance. And so as a church we must see others in light of the royal law that is talked about in this passage.

[19 : 09] To love your neighbor as yourself. We must be a church that welcomes others. If you had a chance to read chapter 2 this past week of Love Your Church, there is a quote in here from Pastor Ray Ortlund that just really spoke volumes and I think it was one of the favorite places at least for our men's group that we landed and was as we thought about this chapter.

And this is what Ray Ortlund, he is a pastor in Nashville, he gave the following welcome to his church one Sunday morning. He said this. He says, Welcome to church. Now here is the one thing I invite you to understand.

You may have noticed when you walked in that the doors out there are painted red. That is an old church tradition, Christian tradition, because we enter into the church through the blood of Christ. Out in the world where we live the rest of the week, we never measure up. Our lives are never complete. We never fully belong. And then we come into the church through the finished work of Christ on the cross.

And what makes the difference here? The reason why we belong is that we're walking into completeness already prepared. Therefore, we can be weak.

[20 : 24] We can be honest with ourselves, with one another, and with the Lord. And he says, We belong. Welcome. So to all who are weary and need rest, to all who mourn and long for comfort, to all who fail and desire strength, to all who sin and need a Savior, the church opens wide her red doors in the name of Jesus, the friend of sinners.

Welcome. I'm glad you're here. I'm going to be honest with you. It really makes me think about painting our church doors red. I mean, this is just an incredible opportunity, incredible witness of saying, what is most important?

This should be our heart, that we do away with all partiality and open wide our doors and say, because of Jesus, we're glad that you are here.

But we must understand what causes this change and it's this repentance, this new affection, and it is the gospel that does this. It's the gospel that changes us.

So the final question that I want us to answer this morning is this. How does the gospel change us? How does it change us?

[21 : 38] How does the gospel change us in our lives? Verses 12 and 13 says this, 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. Now, at first glance right here, it appears that James is saying show mercy so that you can receive mercy.

After all, he says, for judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. However, James is saying the exact opposite of this.

He's not saying that you have to show mercy in order to receive mercy, but rather, if you have received mercy, then you're going to show mercy. Sam Alberry, he notes that by showing mercy, we will expose the kinds of lives we have led and whether or not we have been impacted and shaped by a real faith in Christ.

Obedience to Christ, Christ's ways, is the sign that we have been saved by him. That his death and resurrection have truly gripped us. That we have truly come to a saving knowledge of who Jesus is.

[22 : 54] It will be evident in the way that we act. James is about to show us in this next section that we'll look at next week that true faith changes us.

He's not saying that you must do acts of righteousness in order to gain righteousness. He's saying the exact opposite. He's saying the exact opposite of this because that is the exact opposite of the gospel.

What he is saying is that once you have received God's grace, once you've received his mercy, then you will show mercy. And this goes right along with the theme of James that we have been saying over and over again thus far.

Faith in Christ produces faithfulness to Christ. Faith in Christ is going to produce in us faithfulness to Christ.

This idea is not unique to James. In fact, we find it all throughout Scripture. We find it all throughout the Bible that once we truly understand who God is, then it changes our actions. You can't enter into a life-changing experience with Christ and it not change your life.

[24 : 01] But this is also one of the most notable places that we see it is in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus in Matthew 18 told the parable of an unforgiving servant. Now in this parable, Jesus begins by sharing a pretty bleak scenario in Matthew 18 starting in verse 23 where he says this.

He says, Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servant. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

Now, I realize 10,000 talents may not mean very much to us today. We have no frame of reference for what a talent is, but a talent was actually an incredibly large amount of money.

One talent would be equivalent to 20 years of work for an average laborer. And so, if somebody worked 20 years and they never spent a dime of the money that they earned, then in 20 years they would have saved up a talent.

And he's saying that imagine this servant has been given 10,000 talents, now he has to repay this back. And so, in other words, this is the equivalent of 200,000 years of working for someone.

[25 : 18] This is an incredibly large amount of money, something that we can't even really begin to comprehend. Well, it came time to collect on this loan and the servant didn't have the money.

And so, the king ordered him and his wife and his kids to be sold into slavery until the loan could be repaid. Now, think if you were this man. If you owe this money and then the king just tells you that you, your wife, your kids, everything you own is about to be sold, what would you do?

You begin to beg and plead for more time, right? You say, just give me a little bit more. Please don't sell my whole family into slavery. Please don't put me into slavery. Please don't take everything that I own and sell it.

Give me more time. Give me a little bit more time to come up with this. And in the moment that would have astonished everyone listening, Jesus says this.

He says, and out of pity for him, the master of the servant released him and forgave him the debt.

What? That's crazy, right?

[26 : 24] You mean to tell me this king just forgave a debt that is so large that we can't even begin to imagine that kind of money. Everybody would have just been confused by this.

Obviously, the man would be relieved, and so he just had a debt that he had no chance of repaying forgiven. And so he goes out and he runs into a man that owes him 100 denarii.

Now, that would be equivalent to 100 days of labor for a worker, which is a far cry from 200,000 years, right? In fact, if you were wondering, I did the math, it's 0.00014% of the loan that he had just been forgiven.

You would think that if someone had just been forgiven 10,000 talents, he would forgive 100 denarii. But he doesn't. He begins to choke the man and demand that he be repaid.

Now, when his fellow servants hear this, what are they going to do? Oh, they immediately run back to the king. They immediately run back to the master and told the master, and Jesus says, then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me, and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you.

[27 : 44] And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also, my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Just like the servant didn't understand mercy of what had been given to him, James is telling us very plainly, if we show partiality, if we judge people on their appearances, turn up our noses, and not show mercy to them, then we truly don't understand what has been done for us.

We truly don't understand what has been paid for us. Now, this doesn't mean that we'll never mess up, that if we do, then maybe it means that we're not saved. No, that's not what this is saying.

This is going to be something that we struggle with. In fact, Peter, one of the early church leaders, he struggled with this at times. He began to show partiality, and Paul called him out on it, and then shortly after Paul called him out on it, we ended up having the Jerusalem Council, where everybody comes together to try to discuss this matter, and James, the author of this book, is the one who's

presiding over this Jerusalem Council.

So, no, this is a struggle that many people have with even Peter, one of the leaders of the early church, struggled with this. But what James is making very clear to us is if you have received mercy, if you have come to faith in Christ, then there is no room for partiality.

[29 : 17] There's no room for favoritism. There's no room for racism. It is simply incompatible with a true follower of Jesus. And so, as you have received mercy, you extend mercy.

But the opposite of this is also true and tough for us to hear. David Platt, he put it this way, he says, if we do not extend mercy, we demonstrate that we have not received mercy.

You can't earn mercy. It's mercy because it can't be earned. This text is saying you can tell who has received mercy from God by the way they show mercy to others.

Now, if this is a foreign concept to you, then I've got wonderful news. You can receive God's grace and his mercy today by placing your faith and your trust in him.

You can be forgiven of far more than 10,000 talents. You can be forgiven of a debt that is impossible to pay back. And one of the evidences of that forgiveness is the way that you begin to look at others.

[30 : 23] The way that you begin to treat others. The way that you begin to see them in light of who God is. Church, I hope that we can walk away from this passage with not only an understanding that we are called to be a welcoming church, but that in order to do this, we must take responsibility and we must do this individually.

We must, it's not, it's one thing to desire to have a welcoming church, it's a whole other thing to desire to be a welcoming church. And that's what I hope is our desire.

That it's not just this idea that's out there, but it's something that we take to heart and we want to be a part of that. Heavenly Father, I thank you so very much for the many ways in which you bless us each and every day.

Lord, I thank you for this passage and as difficult as it is to hear at times, Lord, it's something that's necessary for us. And Lord, I pray that you give us a desire not only that we have a welcoming church, but that we are a welcoming church, that we are a part of that, that we seek as individuals, followers of you, to be a part of something that is far greater than ourselves.

And so, Lord, be with us. Help us to understand this in a greater way. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on you because that's what makes the difference.

[31 : 44] When we see you as our greatest treasure, then the things of this world get put in their proper place. And Lord, I pray that there's somebody here that has never experienced your grace and mercy, that's never experienced that life-changing relationship with you, then today would be the day that they go from death to life.

And so, Lord, thank you so very much for the book of James, the book that your brother wrote.

Lord, I thank you for what it teaches us about how we should live our lives.

And so, Lord, I pray today that it wouldn't just be something that we hear, that wouldn't just be knowledge that we have, but it would be knowledge that gets applied, that changes how we view our actions and how we view those around us.

So, Lord, thank you so very much for all that you do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I'm going to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation. If God is speaking to you this morning, won't you respond as we stand together and sing?