Resist Partiality Firmly

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[0:00] Our scripture lesson this morning is taken from James chapter 2 verses 1 through 13 and can you please follow with me as I read.! My brothers 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 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 while you say to the poor man you stand over there or sit down at my feet. You have not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts.
Listen my beloved brothers has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him.
But you have dishonored the poor man and not the rich the ones who oppress you and 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.
[1:20] 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 it all.

Has become guilty 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 the one who has shown mercy.
Who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Amen. Thank you very much Michelle.
Well this morning we are concluding our five part sermon series in the book of James.
It will be titled Wisdom for Life. And this morning's sermon is titled Resist Partiality Firmly. I want to begin with a question.
[2:27] Are there people or types of people whom you prefer over other people? And by that I'm not meaning personalities or temperaments.

Instead what I mean is physical attributes or circumstantial attributes that you value that cause you to treat one group of people preferentially over another group of people or one person over another person.
And some of these physical or circumstantial attributes are race, color, nationality, ethnicity, social standing, economic status, educational achievement, types of employment, physical attractiveness as we perceive it.
And the list goes on. And the sad reality is that we as fallen human beings engage in such preferential treatment of people, favoritism, treating one group of people better than we treat another group based on particular attributes that we value.
And an even sadder reality is that this type of preferential treatment even takes place in God's church among God's people.
[4:07] And it should not be as we have already heard from the passage that was read. Now you might be wondering what motivated this sermon.

Before the Lord I can say this morning that this sermon is not motivated by any concern or awareness that I have about partiality among us.
Instead, I'm aware that partiality abounds in the world. Favoritism and preferential treatment of people for various reasons abound in the world.
And my desire is that it will not mark us as a church. By the grace of God, for the past 33 going on 34 years, we have welcomed all kinds of people with many different attributes, many different

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backgrounds, and we've sought to treat them with equal dignity and worth.
And my desire is that we will continue to do that. My desire is that we will grow in doing that. And really, that is the burden behind the sermon. The awareness of what's happening in the world.
[5:27] And my desire that that would not mark us. That that would not be imported among us. And since this is really a...

It starts on a personal level. Though it would end up being a corporate mark for us, it really begins on a personal level. And so I encourage us to... Let's open our hearts this morning.
Let's hear what the Lord would say to us. And let us respond as he would have us to. So let's bow in a word of prayer. Father, would you speak to our hearts based on what you know that we need to hear.
Lord, we will all hear this sermon together. But I pray that you would tailor it to each of us. And raise it only you know that we need.
Lord, our desire is to welcome all those whom you've welcomed. And I pray that you would help us to do that, Lord.
[6:34] Lord, I pray that we be encouraged where we can be and need to be encouraged. And I pray that we be convicted where we need to be convicted. And we pray, Lord, that you would use the preaching of your word this morning to strengthen this local church and to bring glory to your name.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So this scripture before us this morning brings us face-to-face with the command against partiality.
And also the consequence of showing partiality. And so in our remaining time, I want us to consider this command. I want us to consider the consequence.
So two very simple points this morning. First, the command against partiality. And we find the command in verse 1.
James writes, My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. James is highlighting the fact that showing partiality or showing favoritism towards one person over another is a contradiction.
[7:53] And it should never take place among those who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he goes on, starting in verse 2, to illustrate what he means by giving an example, a preferential treatment.

He uses the example of a rich person being treated in a preferential manner above a poor person. But I think it's important to notice that James, starting in verse 1, is addressing this issue as a matter of principle.
And we shouldn't get lost in the example that he gives. It is a predominant and widely applicable example. But what James does is he lays the principle down first in verse 1.
He says, This should not be among you. He says, Show no partiality as you hold faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.
But nonetheless, he uses this illustration of how a rich person versus a poor person might be treated in a church assembly.
[9:10] And James no doubt uses this example because it's a widespread example. It was applicable in his day. People resonated with it. And they resonated, and we resonated with it, we resonate with it in our day because I think you would agree with me that wealth, riches, tends to be one of the attributes that the world and people in general put a lot of emphasis on.

And so much discrimination would take place in that area of esteeming those who are wealthy and not esteeming or putting down those who are not.
And James helps us to see what we are doing when we engage in partiality. In verse 4, he helps us to see it by the question that he asks. Look again at the question that James asks in verse 4.
He says, He asks, Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? The point that James makes is that when we show partiality, we have made distinctions where there should be none, and we have assumed to ourselves a role where we have none.
The role of judge. That's the role we give to ourselves when we engage in showing partiality and making distinctions.
[10:46] We set ourselves up as a judge. And James points out that what motivates that is evil thoughts. He says, Behind showing partiality is evil thoughts.

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And then he goes on to show how out of step this practice of showing partiality is in relation to the rich and the poor.
Look again at what he says in verses 5 to 7. Listen, Listen, my beloved brothers. 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?
But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?
Now, in order to understand what James is saying, I think we first should think about what he is not saying. James is not saying that God has chosen all poor people to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.
[11:59] And that he's rejected all rich people on the other hand. He's not saying that at all. If you look at verse 5, notice he says that the promise of the kingdom is to all who love God.

That would include rich and poor. Not just to the poor, but rich and poor. And in verse 6, James is not saying that all rich people are oppressive and dragging them into court.
Nor were they all blaspheming God's name. There are poor people who blaspheme God's name. There are poor people who take others to court. And so James is certainly not making that case.
I think the point that he makes, and I think we would agree with him, is that the reality is that far too often it is the rich who misuse and abuse power because they have it.
And that power sometimes comes with being rich. And they oftentimes would live their lives in such a way that they demonstrate that they don't need God.
[13:10] Or that's what they try to communicate, that they don't need God. But I think we need to see the broader point that James is making.

Which is that God does not value or esteem the attributes and the circumstances that we tend to be partial towards.
Instead, he has a greater concern for those who are marginalized and affected by such partiality. And sadly, such partiality is worldly. The world makes much of wealth and possessions and achievements. And in the process, many are marginalized.
Many are mistreated. And when we who belong to Christ embrace those values and those distinctions, then we are being worldly.
[14:22] We are being on the opposite side of where the Lord is and where he would have us to be. And notice how James summarizes the effect on the person who is so marginalized.

He says in verse 6, you have dishonored the poor man. And here in the place of the poor man, we can put whatever person we are acting in a partial manner against.
Whoever it is we're showing favoritism against. Whoever it is we are acting in a prejudicial manner against. And not only is it a dishonoring of that person, it really is a dishonoring of the Lord himself in whose image that person is made.
And the reason is that every person derives his or her dignity and worth from the Lord. And when we act partially against them, we dishonor them and the Lord in whose image they're made.
But what is worse is when that person is not only made in the Lord's image, but that person is a fellow believer.
[15:46] As the illustration that James has given. Because when we discriminate against someone who is made in God's image, when we act prejudicially towards them, we are not just discriminating against someone who is made in God's image, but we are actually doing that against someone who is redeemed by Christ's blood.

Someone for whom Christ died. Someone who is our brother or sister in Christ. And who should be received as such. And so it is a compounded sin when we do that with our brothers and sisters. They're made in God's image, but they're also redeemed by Christ's blood. And it goes beyond just that person. We're then an affront to the Lord.
And so I wonder this morning if we would just take some time and just reflect on this. Do you show partiality in one or more ways?
For one or more reasons. And here the spectrum is broad. Certainly there's the major area of showing favoritism towards the rich and against the poor.
[17:11] And certainly about the categories that we have already raised, like race and color and nationality and ethnicity and social standing and educational achievement and the kind of work that

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a person does and physical attractiveness as we see it.

Those are big categories. But what about some of the smaller categories that we can sometimes find ourselves treating people preferentially because of it?
Like hairstyles. Like maybe somebody who wears dreadlocks and we just have a thing about dreadlocks. Or someone who has body art, like tattoos or piercings, and we have a thing about those as well.
And there's nothing wrong with having particular preferences for ourselves, but what we have to guard against is when we allow those preferences to be held so strongly that we begin to use them against people in terms of how we receive them or we don't receive them.
And one of the other areas that we need to think about as well is an area that we can be very blind to. And they are in the area of cultural influences.
[18:30] We need to be mindful that there are ways that our cultural background makes us susceptible to showing partiality in particular ways.

And I think you would agree with me that for us as Bahamians, one of those ways is in showing partiality towards people based on class.
We would rail against racial discrimination and then in the same breath so easily practice class discrimination. We would rail against a person who would advise his or her child along racial lines about relationships, but then we would so easily, certainly has been my own experience, countenance, talking about the class of person that you should marry based on perhaps family connections, based on education or based on some other aspect that communicates class.
I think another cultural influence that we can so easily be unmindful of but is a reality for us as Bahamians is that of being partial against Haitians Haitians and those of Haitian descent.
It is a very real, long-standing reality in our cultural experience. And brothers and sisters, these are realities in the world, but they should not be realities for us personally.
[20:16] They should not be realities for us corporately as a local church. among us. Let those who experience partiality in the world realize they don't experience that here.

They don't experience that among God's people. Let it be a distinctive difference, something that grips them, that grabs their attention, that as God's people, we act differently.
And not just because we have something in and of ourselves, but really because our lives have been transformed by Christ and by his gospel.
Let it not be that they are dishonored out there and then they are dishonored in here. May they be honored in here and may they be aware of that difference.
May they see the difference that Christ and his gospel makes among us. It's so easy to show partiality and think nothing of it.
[21:31] Just think, you know, it's just a thing. I have a thing about that. I have a thing about this. And we can make light of it. Brothers and sisters, James doesn't make light of it.

Scripture does not make light of it. It is a serious thing. And what James helps us to see after pointing it out, pointing out that we are commanded to do this, to not show partiality, partiality, he then lays out for us the consequence of partiality.
He does that in verses 8 to 13 and this is my second and final point. What is the consequence of showing partiality? Or acting in a discriminatory or prejudicial manner against those we don't esteem, those we don't like, for whatever reason.
James tells us in verses 8 to 13, but he doesn't tell us immediately. He works his way up to it. And it's quite startling when we see what he tells us the consequence is.
That the only way that we can engage in partiality is if we're not mindful of this particular consequence because it's a serious consequence.
[22:58] First, look at what he says in verses 8 and 9. He writes, 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.
Now, exactly what is the royal law? Well, James tells us, he says, the royal law is you shall love your neighbor as yourself.
And notice he says according to scripture. And what he's doing here is he's actually quoting scripture. He's quoting Leviticus 19 verse 18. He says, that's the royal law. The word royal means belonging to the king.

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And although all the king's laws belong to the king, by singling this one out and calling it the royal law, James is somehow telling us that this law has special significance to the king.
[24:03] It's near to the king's heart. And the king is the Lord Jesus. So how did James come to this conclusion? Well, it appears that James received this from the Lord himself.

There's an account in Mark's gospel, Mark chapter 12 verses 28 to 34, where a lawyer comes up to Jesus and he says to him, what is the most important commandment?
And strikingly, Jesus, in answering him, does not mention any of the Ten Commandments. He doesn't mention any of them.
Instead, Jesus tells him that the most important commandment is the commandment that the Lord gave to the children of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy as they were preparing to go into the Promised Land.
In Deuteronomy chapter 6, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and you should love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
[25:16] He said, that's the most important one. But Jesus went on to answer a question he was not answering because Jesus felt he needed to know it.

Jesus goes on and he says to him, and the second most important commandment is you should love your neighbor as you love yourself and Jesus quotes Leviticus 19.18.
The same verse that James tells us is the royal law. And Jesus identified loving our neighbor, loving God first is the most important commandment and then the second, loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.
James says that is the royal law. That is the law that's close to the king's heart. And here in verse 9, James says, if we fulfill the royal law, loving our neighbors, we love ourselves.
He said, you're doing well if you do that. But he quickly says, but if you're showing partiality, you're committing sin and you are convicted by the law as transgressors.
[26:32] These are very strong and pointed words that James communicates. Showing partiality is sin. It's not a matter of personal preference.

It isn't excused by cultural influence. James says, it is sin and we are convicted by the law as transgressors.
And why are we transgressors? James explains it and it's important to see how he explains it.
James goes on in verses 10 and 11 and he explains that God's law is a unified whole and God gives his law to us and he calls us to keep it.
And James makes the point, he says, so if you keep the whole law but except one part, he says, you've broken the whole law and you are accountable before God as a lawbreaker.
Because the law is a unified whole and we're called not to just keep parts of it or select what we think we want to keep or can keep, we keep it all or really we keep none of it.
[27:45] We break it all. And so the point is clear. When we show partiality, we break God's commandment that calls us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and because all of God's law is a unified whole that's given to us to keep, we are accountable before God for breaking his whole law when we show partiality.

now in light of this reality, we now consider the consequence that James points us to.
James brings us to the consequence in verses 12 and 13. Notice what he says again. So speak and act, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.
For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. judgment. Now first of all, it's important to note here that, and throughout the letter of James, that when James is referring to the law in verse 12, he is not referring to the Old Testament law as it stood, as it originally stood.
And on this point, theologian Douglas Moo is very helpful in his commentary on James, he writes the following. We do not, sorry, we do need to remember, we do need to remember that the law in question here is not the Old Testament law as such, but the Old Testament as reinterpreted and imposed by Christ on his followers.
[29:37] And the idea that Christians will be judged on the basis of conformity to the will of God expressed in Christ's teaching in the New Testament sorry, expressing Christ's teaching is found in many places in the New Testament.

So he's saying it's not just Old Testament law as existed, but the demands of it that God has revealed as his will for us, as Christ has taught us in many places in the New Testament as he has

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reinterpreted the demands demands of the Old Testament law.
So believers are going to be judged on the basis of their conformity to God's will, which is included, which in his will is included the Old Testament law as reinterpreted by Christ.
And so for example, we see in the Old Testament law, Leviticus 19, 18, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, and Jesus is imposing that on us, on those who follow him, and it is a part of God's expressed will in the New Testament.
But showing partiality, showing favoritism is a violation of this command, and therefore when we sin in that way, we break God's whole law, we fail at doing his will for us.
[31:19] And I think you would agree that there are other ways that we fall short as well. So James tells us that we are to conduct ourselves in an ongoing way as those who are going to be held accountable for God's whole law, his whole will for us, and the reason is that if we judge others without mercy, which is what showing partiality does, which is what favoritism does, it is a merciless judgment of others based on attributes that we have established, and we let our law fall on them.

We judge them. He tells us that if we do that, we ourselves who fall short will be judged without mercy.
And this is an earlier point that James raised over in verse four, earlier in verse four, when he said that when we show favoritism, we're setting ourselves up as a judge. He's expanding on it now, he's elaborating on it, he's helping us to see the consequences of it, the implications of it.
It is a merciless judgment to show partiality against someone. And so the warning and the consequence of showing, of being judgmental towards that person, this merciless judgment, is that we ourselves will be judged without mercy.
James ends by saying that mercy triumphs over judgment. And there's much debate about what those four words mean, what James meant by mercy triumphs over judgment.
[33:21] But it seems to me that in context, James is simply saying to us that in light of the consequence of being judged without mercy because we have executed merciless judgment in showing partiality, it is better to show mercy and not partiality.

It is better to show mercy by not showing partiality. In that sense, he's saying to us, let mercy triumph over judgment. judgment. He's saying to us, mercy beats judgment.
Let mercy beat judgment. Let it win out because if you do not let it win out, you yourself will be subject to a merciless judgment.
Commenting on this verse in his commentary on James, deceased theologian Alec Motia, he points out the highest expression of mercy triumphing over judgment when he writes, in the cross of Christ, justice was fully done, its claims were fully met, and God's mercy to sinners triumphed in the provision of complete forgiveness and a full salvation.
salvation. Brothers and sisters, if we're listening this morning, we should all perceive a dilemma that we face. If we're tracking with the scripture that's been read and this sermon that is being proclaimed to us, we should all be aware of a dilemma that we face.
[35:19] our dilemma is that we all fall short, not just in this area of showing partiality, sinfully and mercilessly judging others based on standards that we have set up, but we fall short in countless, countless ways.

even after we have done our very best to keep the royal law and all that God calls us to do, we still fall short because God's standard is perfection.
And even when we are in our minds as best as we know, not actively showing partiality against our people, we don't do it perfectly.
And then that's added to all the other things that God has called us to do, he's revealed for us to do, that we don't do perfectly. And that is our dilemma. Because James says when we break just one part of God's law, we break the whole thing.
When we don't do what God's will is for us, we have not pleased him in his general will, that is revealed for us. And here again, at this point, Douglas Moore is helpful.
[36:47] Here's what he writes. The believer in himself will always deserve God's judgment. Conformity to the royal law is never perfect, as it must be.

But our merciful attitude and actions will count as evidence of the presence of Christ within us. And it is on the basis of this union with the one who perfectly fulfilled the law for us, that we can have confidence of vindication of the judgment.

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Brothers and sisters, after our best efforts not to show partiality, our best efforts to please God and all that he has called us to do, our only hope is our union with Christ.
Our only hope is that Christ has perfectly fulfilled the law for us. Our only hope is that where we fail, Christ has succeeded.
it. And so may the Lord help us to resist partiality firmly, but when we fail, to whatever degree, may we look to Christ who perfectly succeeded where we fail.
[38:17] And brothers and sisters, by the grace of God, let us let us make grace motivated, good faith efforts to receive all who are made in God's image, to treat them with the dignity and the worth that they have because they're image bearers of God, no matter who they are.

And especially if they name the name of Christ, they are our brothers and they are our sisters. And may we welcome them as Christ has welcomed us.
Let's pray. Father, would you help us to demonstrate your own heart when we resist partiality?
Lord, our desire is that we would not be marked by partiality that is pervasive in the world in which we live.
God, enable us to be able to be in the world and not allow the effect of the world like in the area of showing partiality to influence us.
[39:48] And, God, we pray that we will do all this ultimately for the glory of your great name. In Christ's name we pray, amen. Let's stand together, let's sing.

Thank you, thank you, Thank you.

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