

Favouritism in the Church

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[0 : 00] Well, two recent sermons that we heard here at Kingdom Life, we were told some very strong feelings about certain foods that people liked and did not like.

! Our brother Timothy Trico told us that he loaves crab fat and dough and guava duff and even when he's hungry you wouldn't eat it.

But he told us he loves cheesecake from cheesecake heaven and he could eat two slices of it on a full stomach. And then our brother Clarence told us that he loves any kind of pie. He's never met a pie that he didn't love.

And he said he had the evidence of that. And I imagine that we all have our foods that we like and dislike and if we were to ask we would hear some pretty.

Interesting information about us in terms of what we like and we'll find that some things that some people like we don't like and some things we like other people don't like.

[1 : 10] But I'm not going to ask you that question this morning. I want to ask you another question. I want to ask you what I would think is a far more important question and you don't need to answer it out loud.

Just answer it in your mind. The question is this. What kind of people do you like? What kind of people do you like?

Or to say it another way, what kind of people do you not like and that you treat differently from the people that you do like?

And the truth is we really don't need to answer it out loud. I think if we were observed and we were seen in terms of how we interact with people I think it would be pretty evident how we perhaps like or dislike various ones who we come into contact with.

And it's a far more serious matter than the foods that we like and dislike. We can like certain foods and dislike certain foods without any moral consequence.

[2 : 28] Brothers and sisters when we take that same kind of preference and we interact with people in that way it's far more serious and not only is it serious it is sinful.

And this morning we come face to face with this particular practice not just on a personal level but we actually come face to face with this practice in the church.

And we're continuing our sermon series in the letter of James and we come to James chapter 2 verses 1 through 7 this morning. And if you've not turned there yet please do so at this time.

And I want to read those verses in our hearing James chapter 2 verses 1 through 7.

I'm reading from the English standard version. My brothers show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory.

[3 : 41] For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly and a poor man in shabby clothing comes 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 have you 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 of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?

but you have dishonored the poor man are not the rich ones are not the rich the ones who oppress you are the ones who drag you into court are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

Let's pray together. Father we are grateful this morning that we can gather in this place we're grateful Lord for your saving work that makes it all possible and we pray this moment that as we sit under the preaching of your word that you would superintend every word that is spoken this

morning and you would cause what you would have us to hear to be spoken and that you would give us all ears to hear help us to hear as we should help us to respond as we should and would you use the preaching of your word this morning for the building of this church and for the glory of your great name it's in Christ's name we pray amen well in this passage that we just read

James doesn't use the word that I've used which is favoritism James uses a different word he uses the word partiality in the first verse but in the sermon I'm going to use the word favoritism because we understand favoritism more readily than we may understand partiality and in this passage James warns us in the strongest terms about showing favoritism in the church and James warns us because favoritism among believers contradicts the gospel that we believe and proclaim favoritism contradicts it undermines the gospel that we believe and that we proclaim and so

[7 : 06] James strongly calls it out he calls it out and friends there are some things that are so scandalous it is almost as if they should be corrected privately and this is one of those things but James doesn't correct it privately he corrects it publicly he calls out this wrong treatment of people in a very public manner and the reason is it should never happen in the church among God's people and so how does James call out this sad and sinful practice of favoritism but he does so in three ways and first he does it right up front unconditionally by prohibiting favoritism he gets right to the point in verse one he says my brothers show no partiality as you hold faith in our

Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory now since we've read the whole text we know where James is going we know that James is going to illustrate and he's going to talk about a particular kind of favoritism but James two verse one stands on its own James two verse one stands on its own as an unconditional prohibition against all kinds of favoritism notice again how he says that my brothers show no partiality as you hold faith in our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory it's as if James is saying to us if you want to show favoritism go ahead and show it but don't do it in the church that's almost the import of what James is saying he is not just saying my brothers don't show favoritism he says don't you do that as you hold faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ don't you show distinctions in how you prefer or don't prefer or like or don't like people as you at the same time hold and profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory you know sometimes we talk about how we shouldn't say the same thing in the same breath it is as if James is saying to us you should not do that in the same breath even as you hold yourself out to belong to Christ and to profess faith in him you should not show favoritism it is foreign and remember that James is still addressing this whole issue of what is true religion what is the kind of religion that transforms our lives and demonstrates that we have met the

Savior and he comes to this and he is addressing it in the church not in a vacuum I'm sure that James as he wrote these words those who were hearing it didn't say oh what is he talking about James was hitting the nail on the head as he addressed this now it is interesting the word that is translated partiality in the English Standard Version the NIV uses the word favoritism but this word for partiality in the original it means acceptance of the face it means acceptance of the face that's what partiality means and it's kind of like a situation where you would say to someone man I was in this store today and they treated me in this way they treated me so poorly they say really when I go there they treat me well it must be your face it must be they must be treating you because of your face it's that kind of way just on some cosmetic basis we treat more readily than we accept other faces we judge by accidentals we judge by externals and why is this so wrong well the reason it is so wrong is scripture is filled with examples telling us that the

Lord shows no favoritism the Lord does not play favorites he is no respecter of persons and therefore when we claim to belong to him we should seek to do the very same just imagine walking into the police barracks you know the one up on East Hill Street and you were to see a group of officers sitting around smoking marijuana gambling and doing all manner of wrong things that would be a contradiction because these individuals who have sworn to uphold the law it is unbecoming of them to do things that are contrary to the law that would be a scandal if that were to happen and so among those who profess faith in

[13 : 08] Jesus Christ if we demonstrate favoritism that is as scandalous that is as foreign to us it should be as foreign to us and our conduct as breaking the law should be foreign to those who are sworn to uphold the law brothers and sisters favoritism misrepresents God because he shows no partiality and again what makes this favoritism that James is highlighting so alarming is that James is not addressing favoritism among God's people on a personal level he is addressing it among God's people in the life of the church in the life of the church gathered in the life of the church

worshipping God and that's the overarching concern that James has and why is it in particular so egregious that favoritism is practiced in the church well James explains why beginning in verse 2 and he does so by giving us an illustration which brings me to my second point illustrating favoritism

James does this in verses 2 through 4 let's consider again what he says suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in 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 here or sit on the floor by my feet have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts and so the idea is you have two persons come in and they have different appearances one appears to be rich by his jewelry and by his clothing and the other appears to be poor by his shabby clothing but although James gives us this illustration I think we need to hear what

James is addressing he's not just addressing favoritism between rich and poor because really that may not get to us James may miss us he may miss some of us because we may honestly say you know I don't make distinctions between rich and poor or he may miss us because in our context we don't have the disparity in terms of wealth and poverty that would have been evident in his day in our country though we have very very poor people there's not a large segment of them largely we have this middle ground group this middle class group where it's hard to make the distinctions and so we should not think for a moment that all James is addressing is this issue and saying to us don't treat rich and poor people differently all James is doing is James is using a particular illustration to make the point that he's making

James is addressing favoritism in general we see that in verse one he says don't do it and then now he's illustrating a particular kind of favoritism which no doubt was relevant in his day and it may be relevant in some particular ways for us this morning but not necessarily because that's not the only way that we show favoritism sometimes we show favoritism based on a person's race or a person's complexion we sometimes show favoritism based on nationality we prefer some nationalities over other nationalities we treat them differently I remember being up in immigration a few years ago I had reason to be there and I had to wait for something

I just remember having to be seated and so while I was seated I watched people come and go and I heard different accents and I could recognize them and I watched the difference in treatment both in terms of nationalities and in terms of color of skin I watched some who before they came to the window the woman was pointing to them and telling them don't come back and she told them not to come back and she doesn't know why they're coming back and then others sometimes dress a certain way or certain skin color her tone went down she said yeah just go around the corner go upstairs and you could ask Mrs.

[18 : 34] So and so sometimes we treat people differently based on hairstyle there's some people if they wear dreadlocks we tend to think well a certain way about them or they have a weave in we tend to think a certain way of them why are you laughing are you discriminating against people are you discriminating against people with weaves I touched a nerve I touched a nerve I'm being told I didn't intend to touch a nerve if I knew it was going to touch a nerve I would not have used that I could have used others sometimes it's people who wear tattoos or who have piercings I guess that didn't touch a nerve or based on education or disability and the list goes on we show favoritism in all kinds of cosmetic meaningless ways but we hold them up to mean so to mean so much and we treat people made in

God's image differently based on these preferences that we have established and what's wrong with it what James tells us in verse four he tells us by asking a question he says have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts James is saying when you show favoritism you act beside yourself when you show favoritism you establish a seat for yourself as a judge and you sit one who should be judged you sit as a judge and determine criteria upon which you will prefer people or not prefer people and really he says what you're doing is you're trying to play God to almost know the hearts of people where you are weighing some more preferentially than you are others and again what is alarming about this is not just that it is done what is alarming about this is that it is done in the church it's done among the people of God that should never be done again James is not just saying don't do this with poor people and rich people he's saying to us you should not show favoritism at all and brothers and sisters I encourage all of us to think about this where have we in our personal approaches in the community of believers established particular criteria that we value people more or less favorably than we do

others we need to ask ourselves do I show favoritism and you know some of it could be so some of it can be very intentional and overt and we could be aware that we're doing it and some of it we could just do it almost in a cultural way you know

Jews had this issue and we see Peter the apostle Peter he struggled with this throughout a lot of his life in terms of the way he related to Gentiles and we have this account in Acts 15 where he is having to defend how he went to Cornelius' house and he says he says to that as he begins his speech he says that when he went to Cornelius' house he was able to perceive that God is no respecter of persons as a matter of fact that's the very thing that he told Cornelius when he got to his house he said I now see that God is no respecter of persons and so brothers and sisters let us let us think prayerfully this morning with the help of the Holy Spirit and ask do I show favoritism in the church do I show favoritism among my brothers and sisters do I show favoritism in terms of who walks through the doors and I understand the dynamics between male and female interactions and perhaps if a male walks through the door who you don't know there may be some reluctance as a female maybe to reach out but what about a person of the same sex are we inclined more to reach out to particular people than we are to other people if our answer is yes friends we must confess that to

God and we must say God would you help me would you help me not to practice favoritism at all but in particular that I would not protect it that I would not practice it in the church we need to ask the Lord to help us to see the seriousness of it the seriousness of it is really in a sense what we have done is we've elevated ourselves above God we've done what God does not do and that's the arrogance of it the seat of judge belongs to one belongs to the Lord or nobody else shown favoritism is not a light matter and that's why we see James in verses five through seven condemning favoritism which is my third and final point

[25 : 00] James condemns favoritism and look at how he does it in verses five through seven listen my dear brothers 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 insulted 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 slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong James points out the evil of favoritism using this example between rich and poor but again not limited to that and he's saying don't you see the evil of insulting and mistreating those whom God has chosen to come to faith in Christ and to inherit the kingdom of God now if we're going to be gripped by what

James is saying it's important for us not to miss what he's saying some people come to this passage and they think what James is really doing is James is making the very error that he tells us not to do James is not elevating poor people over rich people he's not doing that at all James is not saying that God has only called poor people and chosen poor people to be rich in faith look at how he says it again listen my dear brothers 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 James is not saying that all poor people have been chosen by God to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom of God he's not saying that at all he is simply saying poor people are among those God has chosen to have faith in Christ and to inherit the kingdom of God that's all he is saying and he clearly is not saying that he isn't called any rich people he's called both and his point is because God has called both because God has called poor people we see the poor person for example maybe walking right in here that person is among the class of people whom God has called he's called all kinds of people all kinds of people without distinction and that's the point that he is making he is not making a distinction between rich and poor and putting up the rich and putting down the poor the truth is that it is a hard issue and you can have a poor person right now and maybe in their circumstances they may be very humble and their mouth may not be sharp but give them money give them money give them power power and we would see them act like how some rich people act and there are some poor people you can give them money you can give them power and they would not act in sinful and ungodly ways as we see some people with wealth and means are not the ones who are mistreating the poor and exploiting them as they are doing james is simply making the point that god chooses those whom we discriminate against every single group that we would discriminate against they are in the class of the kinds of people whom god calls to himself because he is no respecter of persons and so the person we don't gravitate towards that kind of person god has chosen to be rich in faith in christ and to inherit the kingdom of god and they are our brothers and sisters and we need to get used to that because we're going to spend eternity together with

them no doubt James was addressing a common practice that existed in his time where there was no doubt disparities huge differences between the wealthy and the poor and in those days there weren't a whole lot of laws to protect people and we've seen this even in our lifetime in our lifetime in this country for example you would not have want to have been a common laborer back in the 40s and the 50s and the 60s we didn't have particular laws to protect people from working under harsh conditions from being paid for the time that they put in and a lot of protection so those who were wealthy if they were sinful they would take advantage of that even more so in James day and so the things that he is talking about them dragging others before the court because they had the means and the power there's some poor people who didn't do that but it's not that they didn't have the heart to do it they didn't have the means to do it and the same is true today friends every single person every human being whatever their distinctions might be is an individual who's made in the image and likeness of God and put aside the cosmetics put aside the trappings on that that are on them you put it all aside every single one of us is equal we are needy people and needed the grace of God that only he can provide and that is what we are when all the cosmetic things are removed if you want to see it in a very vivid way imagine the illustration that James gives us the wealthy person and the poor person both laid out in front of you what are they going to take is one going to go into the grave richer or poorer no they both go down the verdict is true of all of us we come into this world without anything and we leave this world without anything and at the end of it all we need the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ whoever we are and we who have come to Christ are his ambassadors and we are called to share the good news that Christ receives all kinds of people he receives the vilest of sinner and the gospel comes to all without exception without distinction that's the gospel we are called to bear that's the gospel we are called to proclaim and when we show favoritism what we are in essence almost saying to people is the gospel that we have approves of that but we know that it does not when

[33 : 09] James says in these closing verses he says but you have dishonored the poor 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 are called you know what the point is that James is getting at to the bottom of all of that he is saying your favoritism that you practice leads you nowhere it doesn't gain for you what you hope it will gain it doesn't benefit you because it is by evil thinking that you arrived at that place and it does not produce what you want it to produce why are you treating the rich person in a favorable manner maybe because of the subtle hope that they will benefit you or they will not drag you into court and the point is that our favoritism always leaves us empty handed and that's the point that

James is making and so bottom line James is pointing out that preferential treatment makes no sense and it would not benefit those who are extending it and brothers and sisters that's true for us as well preferential treatment leads us nowhere other than to be condemned in the strongest terms by the word of God and if we persist by God himself and we misrepresent him and the reason that this is so sad is because God has this alternative community that's supposed to be different from the world out there and this stuff goes on in the world out there it'll happen in the morning in work places but it shouldn't in here this is supposed to be the place where people come and they realize I'm being treated differently in heaven out there you know in the early church there were slaves who led in the early church in the church they were treated differently they were treated in society it was God's alternative society it was God's society that communicated the way we should actually live and brothers and sisters whatever the distinction might be whether it is skin color whether it is nationality whether it is hair style whether it's cosmetics whatever it is friends let us ensure by the grace of God that all those who are part of this community now and in the days ahead will be treated differently than they are treated in the world let those distinctions matter in the world let them not matter among us in terms of how we receive and how we relate to one another I want to close by reminding us of some unflattering words that the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that helps us to see the the folly of showing favoritism Paul writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 26 through 31 for consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not many were powerful not many were of noble birth but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong God chose what is low and despised in the world even things that are not to bring to nothing things that are and here's why so that no human being might boast in the presence of

God he is the source of your life in Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and our sanctification and our redemption Therefore as it is written let the one who boasts boast in the Lord when we show favoritism it's a kind of boasting when we show favoritism it's a kind of boasting because we elevate a particular attribute over other attributes and it's an indication that we have forgotten who we are and in particular what we were when Christ called us and Paul reminds us that we're not all that he reminds us that God did not operate that way and thank God he didn't because if he did operate that way we had no hope we would have had no hope we would have been disqualified from the start and so brothers and sisters may the [38 : 51] Lord help us this morning to think long and hard about this issue of showing favoritism in particular showing it in the church and where we need to repent let us repent let us ask God to help us to see it for what it is and to repent remembering that he is no respecter of persons and neither should we be let's pray father we thank you for your word and pray that you would cause us to hear and respond as we should and God we know that we need your help to do both we need your help to cause us to hear as we should we need your help to help us to respond as we should would you work in our hearts we pray in Jesus name amen let's stand for closing song please join me in singing oh lord my rock and my redeemer oh lord my rock and my redeemer greatest treasure of my longing soul my god like you there is no other true delight is found in you alone and your grace so well too deep to fathom and your love exceeds the heavens reach your truth a fount of perfect wisdom my highest good and my unending need oh lord my rock and my redeemer strong defender of my weary heart my sword my rock and my redeemer strong defender of my weary!

my sword to fight the cruel receiver and my shield against his faithful gods and my song when enemies surround me my hope when times of sorrow rise my joy joy where trials are abounding your faithfulness my refuge in the night for three lord my rock and my redeemer oh lord my rock and my redeemer gracious savior of my ruined life and my guilt and cross laid on your shoulders in my place you suffered blood and died and you rose so grave and death I conquered you broke my bonds of sin and shame oh lord my rock and my redeemer may all my days bring glory to your name you rose so grave and death and you rose so grave and death I conquered yes you broke my bonds of sin and shame oh lord my rock and my redeemer may all my days bring glory to your name may all my days bring glory to your name may all my days bring glory to your name may all my of our days will bring glory to your name lord we pray that you would work in our hearts lord we know that we need more than conviction we need the power of your spirit to change god would you change our hearts lord for some of us this morning we are being faced with an issue that has been long standing in our lives where we have shown favoritism in particular ways between particular kinds of people and I ask lord today for the grace to cause that issue to be settled help us to recognize that people when all their cosmetics are removed our sinners in need of a savior no different from the rest of us may we see them as such and may we receive them as such and may we be part of that alternative community where people will recognize that they are being treated in ways that are different and indeed better than the way they're treated in the world so lord would you do that among us we pray and now may the god of peace who brought again from the dead our lord jesus the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant equip you with everything good that you may do his will working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through jesus christ to whom be glory forever and ever amen