

*Introduction:* I want you to imagine you are sitting with me in a coffee shop. We'll call it Mystic Coffee Roasters, the best coffee in Medford. Now as we're sitting there, we notice there is only one table left in the place because it's packed, and we see a group of new customers roll in. I want you to close your eyes and picture them with me:

- 1) The first person rolls in with a snapback turned backwards, pats saggin, all tatted up and more piercings than you can count.
- 2) The second person looks like you....
- 3) The third person comes in with a backpack that probably contains everything they own. They are dirty. Haven't showered in weeks. They are hoping the manager will give them a free cup of coffee or someone will buy them a cup of coffee so they can stay awake and look for work today.

*Who does your heart go out to?*

*Who do you want to offer your table to?*

*Who are you eager to have a conversation with?*

In our text this morning, James sets up a scenario very similar to the one I just described, but the setting for his story is not a coffee shop but the gathered church. He is going to tell set up two realities that are completely incompatible: Faith & Favoritism. These 13 verses teach us about . . .

### **“Partiality, Neighbor Love, & The Glory of Christ”** **James 2:1-13**

We should walk away with one strong encouragement this morning from this passage:

**The Point: Love your neighbor by destroying partiality and display the glory of Christ**

*T:* Read 2:1-4

Story... The setting seems to be a worship gathering in the early church. If the church was not already guilty of this scenario, they would be tempted with it.

- He describes two different types of people who enter into the assembly. The first enters with great pomp and circumstance. He is clearly a rich man who is “colorfully described” as having ‘gold fingers’ and shining clothes. (RINGS?)
- This is someone who not only has wealth but chooses to flaunt their wealth. They want everyone to see their bling bling, and their gleam gleam, shiny Gucci suits.
- How is this person treated? “Hey, Mr. Bling. Come and sit next to me. 50-yard line, near the front. You’ll be nice and comfortable, and most importantly, everyone will see how you are honored with the best seat in the house!”
- And after this . . . a man in tattered clothes stumbles through the door. He is not wealthy. He is poor. Very poor. In fact, the Greek word for “poor” refers to “the most severe forms of poverty, implying [someone who is] ‘destitute,’ without virtually any resources.” Their clothes are shabby or filthy. This may be the only set of clothes they own.
- How are they treated? “Hey, we’re all out of room at the fifty, and even if we had room, we’d probably save it for Mr. Bling’s friends of the shiny sort, so you, Mr. Shabby Clothes., you go and stand over there. Take a spot in the corner, or if you wish to be really humiliated, you can sit down at my feet.”

Partiality

- That is why James levels the key instruction of our passage in verse one: “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- The word partiality “literally means to receive someone according to their face.” Because of external appearances reasons, we show preferential treatment to one person over another.

- But when we are in our right mind, we long for people to be treated with equity, whether it is the rich and poor entering a banquet hall or a kid who didn't get a lollipop because of the color of their skin.
- As George Stulac says: "Our sensitivity to partiality is an evidence of our desire for justice to be real."

T: I want to give you **Four reasons why it is foolish to mix partiality with faith in Jesus . . . #1**

## **I. To show partiality is incompatible with the glory of Christ (2:1).**

*Read 1*

- James addresses Christians who "hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Remember, the aim of this letter is to see faith actively put into practice. He wants his people to display authenticity and integrity in their faith.
- But . . . their faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of Glory.
- James, though, he does not explicitly speak of Jesus frequently in this letter, he has the highest view of Christ. He says, Jesus is the Lord of Glory.
- James equates the worth of Jesus with the "shekinah" glory of God, the revelation of his perfection and resplendent worth. He desires for the glory of Christ (his reputation, his fame, his honor) to be central in the church.
- The fact that James inserts this descriptor here, rather than at the beginning of his letter, suggests he wants his scattered church to understand the instruction to show no partiality in light of the glory of Christ.
- Because God is a God who shows no partiality as it says in Romans 2:4, we glorify him by also showing no partiality.
- \*\*To say, "Hey, rich guy sit over here, poor guy, stand over there." reveals we either do not understand the nature of true glory, or if we understand it, we are radically failing to display it.
- James pairs these realities together as if to say: "How could you make a big deal out of the shining fingers and clothes of the rich, when the glory of Christ outshines everything in the universe?"
- *After all, the glory of God is the goal of all creation. Glory is where this whole thing is going!*
  - ***"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the seas." Habakkuk 2:14***
- The congregation turned from glorifying God in worship to focusing on man, and when that happens, the result is never pretty.

T: To show partiality is incompatible with the glory of Christ. #2

## **II. To show partiality is incompatible with our new spiritual vision (2:2-7).**

After describing the treatment of the rich and poor, James goes on to say in v. 4 when you do this . . . "have you not..." *Read 4-7*

- One of the fundamental flaws for the church is they were judging, making distinctions based on what their physical eyes could see.
- James says to discriminate because of external factors is to become a judge with evil thoughts. They are evil because they fail to account for the glory of God and fail to consider to what God esteems, the heart.
- God calls us to see with spiritual vision and look below the surface, to the heart.
- **"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'" 1 Samuel 16:7**
- Riches are not the only thing we esteem in our culture: *Beauty. Being in Shape: Sun's out. Guns out. ☺ Status. Smart (Ph.d.)*

James corrects this by saying, Listen up! Pay attention! More rhetorical questions.

- “Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world...” “But *you*,” James says, “have dishonored the poor.” This was a strong charge in a culture of honor and shame; we might reword it as “humiliated”
- They were forgetting God delight to choose the poor and weak, because they give special opportunity for his power and riches to be on display.

Do you see the irony?

- The materially poor Christians were extremely rich in faith! They were rich in Christ! These poor believers may not have had two coins to rub together, but their spiritual bank account proved they were more than loaded, more than filthy rich.
- Listen to what Paul says of the Christian in **1 Corinthians 3:21-23**: “**So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.**”
- Everything belongs to the Christian. You weren't ready for that. “all are yours. The world. Life. Death. The present. The Future.” It's all yours because you're in with Jesus and he owns it all.
- What makes us who we are, what determines our identity is not beauty, riches, status, or degrees but it is our standing with Christ.
- So every person is now family (My brothers! Did you catch that?) and every person is an heir of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him.
- Theirs will be the crown of eternal life (we saw in 1:12) and the inheritance of the kingdom! The two go together.
- James calls us to understand that which is truly valuable, not ephemeral earthly riches, unfading spiritual riches. Their thinking was all out of whack. So James argues further:
  - Why do you give preferential treatment to the rich over the poor?
  - The rich oppress you and drag you into court!
  - Worst of all, they are the ones who “blaspheme (insult/denigrate) the honorable name by which you were called.”
- See as God sees! Listen carefully here: we should neither discriminate against the poor *nor* the rich.
  - I love how this text indicates the presence of socioeconomic diversity in the early church. We want the rich, the poor, and people neither poor nor rich to be a part of this church!
  - Why? Because the gospel is for all people!!
  - *The gospel shatters partiality*. Jesus died for his enemies and in his death, he makes one new humanity where social and cultural distinctions hold no water. He makes one man out of the two!

T: James continues his argument in verse 8 and says . . .

### III. To show partiality is incompatible with the kingdom law of love (2:8-11).

Read 8-11

- The royal law refers to the law of the OT as it is fulfilled and interpreted by Jesus. The royal law is one and the same with the “the perfect law of liberty” mentioned in 1:25.
- James quotes Leviticus 19:18, which says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is also the verse Jesus called the second greatest commandment behind the greatest command to love God with everything we have. Jesus said these two commands summarize the whole law.
- It is called the “royal law” because it is given by the King and reveals the ethics of the kingdom regarding *who* we love and *how* we love.

#### The royal law calls us to love *everyone*!

- Whoever your eyes fall on, there you have a person you are called to love with the love of God.
- Is our neighbor restricted to people with whom we have close proximity of some kind, in our neighborhood or workplace? No!

- The parable of the Good Samaritan (you may remember from our Luke series) is not simply about doing good deeds, but it is about a marginalized Samaritan, reaching across ethnic and cultural barriers to *be a neighbor and show mercy* to the person God had placed
  - Jesus was a friend of sinners, a friend of the poor...
  - Story: I can remember 10 years ago . . . New Life Baptist Church. Smell that would literally take your breath away. As I walked away from that apartment, the Spirit reminded me: that's exactly where Jesus would be.
  - The call to love everyone is why we host community service efforts like Soccer Nights. It is why we help plant churches in places like Charlestown. Because Medford and Charlestown, have people who are rich & poor and everything in between. They have people from all different types of ethnicities and nationalities.
- T: The royal law calls us to love everyone and . . .

### **The royal law calls us to love everyone *selflessly*.**

- True love is distributed with no strings attached. Most of the time, the question lying at the root of favoritism and partiality is: "What's in it for me?"
- That is why we often face resistance when we have opportunity to love the poor, because they have nothing to offer in return, from a material standpoint.
- Exp: Let me ask you: when people observe your life, do they naturally conclude you possess a deep love for God and for others? Our love must not be limited in any way, but should flow liberally to all people.
- In verses 9-11 James explains the ramifications of failing to love our neighbor. All who fail to love transgress the law, which means to cross the line of God's intentions. And when we fail to keep one of God's laws we become lawbreakers and accountable for all of it.
- James tells us we cannot pick and choose what commands we want to keep.
- All of God's commands reflect his character. To fail to follow his ways undermines our pursuit of holiness.
- This is where we must not miss the connection with the previous passage. Look back at **1:27. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."**
  - 1) visit orphans and widows in their affliction (highlights God's regard for the weak and overlooked)
  - 2) to keep oneself unstained... (highlights the purity God desires for us. Showing partiality and failing to love our neighbor is one way we get stained, but extending love and being impartial is one way we grow in Christlikeness and bring glory to God.)

T: Finally, reason #4.

### **IV. To show partiality is incompatible with the mercy & judgment of God (2:12-13).**

- In light of being accountable for the law, James says we should live in a way that anticipates our coming judgment before God.
- We will all be judged. I would venture to say the average Christian fails to adequately consider our final judgment. We will be judged for the deeds done in the body whether good or bad. "No condemnation" does not mean "no judgment." Ok?
- We should always live our lives with the end in view!
- That's why James says in *verse 12*: "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty." The issue of favoritism surfaces in very small details of our every day words and actions.
- And don't miss the repeated words "law of liberty." When we stand before God, we will know that all of God's commands, *all of his commands*, were to designed for our freedom and liberation, not our restriction and bondage. He will say to us: "So many times I set before you the path of life and freedom, and you foolishly chose the path of destruction and bondage."
- *Verse 13*: "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy."
- Those who fail to consistently show mercy reveal they never received the mercy of Christ, and they are left with a fearful expectation of judgment.

- But here's the good news! Here's the gospel banner waving over all who come to Christ! "**Mercy triumphs over judgment.**"
- How? Because, *in his mercy*, Christ absorbed the judgment that was coming for you!
- If you are not confident you will receive the mercy of God in the final judgment, flee to Christ. Trust in his finished work on the cross. Receive his mercy and once you have received his mercy, distribute his mercy as liberally as you possibly can.

*Conclusion:*

As I was studying through this text, I had an image of a sign that looks like this.... "**No Partiality.**" If this vision were realized, then what we see in this text would be true: 1) Christ would be reflected as glorious! 2) We would see with God's vision. 3) Love would fill the room. 4) And mercy would triumph over judgment.

But then it hit me.... in order for that vision to be realized this sign must be laid over the heart of every person who belongs to Christ. It starts with you. When each person lives a life of love, free from every form of partiality, this vision of glory, love, and mercy will be accomplished.

Pray.