

James 2:5-11 March 18, 2007

Alright good morning. For those of you who got a Spring Break, I hope you enjoyed it. It's good to have you all back with us. Grab your Bibles and let's pick up where we were last week in James chapter 2.

Remember that in these first 13 verses of chapter 2, James is writing in connection with how he ended chapter 1 – giving us a practical example of how easy it is to let ourselves be polluted by the world. We saw last week that **favoritism is basically making decisions** about people based on external factors alone – **based on the world's standards and not God's. The root of favoritism is selfishness and pride.** Selfishness because we responding to the motivation of “what can this person do for me?” and pride because we are putting ourselves in God's place – we're the judge, we decide who deserves my favor and who doesn't.

To illustrate this, James gives a very specific example of how we treat the rich and the poor. A rich man comes into church and you give him a good seat, a poor man comes in and you tell him to sit at your feet.

Obviously now we'd all agree that's wrong – it's rude, bad manners. But James goes further than that and showed us that it's pure evil. When you show partiality to the rich, you have made distinctions in yourself and have become a judge with evil thoughts.

James just confronted us to our faces with what we might think is no big deal and now in verses 5-11, he sits us down for a second to explain why favoritism is such a serious sin. Let's see what he says.

“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 to 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?” Let's stop there for now.

James first explains that **favoritism doesn't mesh with biblical truth.** Verse 5 says “has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

Did you notice that's a question? He's not teaching them anything they didn't already know. He assumes they know the answer. But even so, it is clear from the way they were living their lives that the truth they knew intellectually wasn't impacting their lives practically. James takes how they are living and holds it up to the light of God's Word and says you are showing favoritism – which doesn't mesh with biblical truth.

Notice he doesn't say God has chosen only the poor of this world – so he's not saying that only poor people are Christians. He's just stating a simple fact.

He says look around you. Aren't there poor people who are believers? In fact as you look through Scripture, it seems that God takes a special delight in choosing to save people who are least likely to be saved. Think about some of the heroes of the Old Testament. Moses was the son of a slave, and yet God made him into one of the greatest leaders of all times. David was just a shepherd boy, remember when Samuel went to look for the next king, God had to tell him straight out this is the one I want or else Samuel never would have believed it. The prophet Amos was just a herdsman. Think about the disciples. God comes to earth and chooses followers, and who does he pick, men who went to graduate school, leaders of Israel, kings and princes? No, he picks people the world would consider nobodies, fishermen, tax-collectors. **God often makes choices that make no sense to the world.** That was true in the Old Testament, and it's true in the New. Fact is, although there are

notable exceptions, those God chooses are typically dominated by those who in the eyes of this world would be rejected.

Flip back to **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**, Paul writes...

Three times in one passage: God chose, God chose, God chose, who? The foolish things, the weak things, the base and the despised, the things that are not.

And God chose the foolish things, the based and despised things for what? To be rich in faith. To be as 1 Peter 2:9 says, "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."

Now get this, because here's where it all connects, this is James 2:5, **if God has chosen those whom the world views as poor to be His special possession that obviously means the world's evaluation of people doesn't mean much to Him.** It doesn't matter. It doesn't come into the equation. Those whom the world dishonors, God often honors. Poverty, riches - not a factor for Him.

So why is it such a factor for you? If you are dishonoring the poor man, you are getting your cue from the world not from God. Your actions don't make biblical sense. If God, the Almighty Ruler of the Universe, honors the poor, so should you. And if God doesn't show favoritism to the rich, neither should you.

Whose standard are you really living by?

And that's not all. What does James say God chose these poor in the eyes of the world for? "To be rich in faith and to inherit his kingdom" right?

That's another reason why favoritism doesn't mesh with biblical truth. **Because believers of all people should know it's much better to be materially poor and spiritually rich than it is to be materially rich and spiritually poor.** Can I say it again? It's better to be materially poor and spiritually rich than it is to be materially rich and spiritually poor.

Don't ever forget that! You can be living on your own island in the Caribbean, lazing about in your billion dollar home, flying here and there on your jet airplane, being waited on hand and foot by your own team of butlers and maids, and if you aren't saved, you are in a much, much worse position than the guy living in a hut made out of a box that he found on the side of the road in Haiti who truly does know Christ. In fact, it's not really even fair to compare the two. There's that big of difference. It's so much better to be the believer living in the hut than the unbeliever lazing about in the Caribbean.

Because the world's riches are nothing, they are trivial, they are trinkets, they are the toy in the happy meal box, in comparison with the riches that are the believer's in Christ.

That guy who is rich, but doesn't know Christ? God says he's spiritually dead. He's an enemy of God. He's spiritually bankrupt. His best deeds are as filthy rags. He's got no hope. But the guy who is poor, but knows Christ? He's a child of God, he's been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, he's got a living hope, he's a new creation.

Point is: That poor believer, the one you insulted, he's spiritually rich, and that's much better than being materially rich. You are thinking too superficially.

Now that illustrates an important principle doesn't it? Just because you know something intellectually doesn't mean you are applying it practically. And **one of the things you constantly need to be doing as believers is holding up your actions to the light of God's Word, to what you know to be true of God, and asking does how I am acting mesh with biblical truth?** And that's one of the

reasons we are here as a body, that's one of the reasons we need accountability, we need men like James who are going to come into our lives, when we have deceived ourselves, and confront us with Scripture, and point out just where our walk is not matching our talk.

That's what is happening here in James 2:5. Favoritism is a serious issue because it doesn't mesh with biblical truth. But real quickly, let's go one step further. Not only does it not mesh with biblical truth, it **doesn't even make common sense**.

Look at verse 6, "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 isn't trying to give them a reason to treat the rich poorly, he's just pointing out how foolish favoritism is. He's saying – you think that by giving the rich man the good seat, he's going to treat you well and really like you? That's going to change everything?

In that day, if a creditor met a debtor on the street, he could grab him by the neck, and literally drag him to court. And they were doing just that. And yet here it seems these people are looking to the rich for favor – a group that is basically opposed to them. And not only opposed to them, but against their God – against their Savior – against the very name of Jesus to which they belong. That doesn't even make common sense.

It's amazing how incredibly deceptive the human heart can be. Do you think when they showed favoritism to the rich man, they were thinking about how ridiculous what they were doing really was? No, it looked great. Here's a chance to get ahead. Here's a chance to make a difference. They didn't think about just how ridiculous what they were doing really was.

Point is: Don't trust your heart. It can make the most foolish decisions look incredibly wise. Think Eve living in Paradise, with a perfect husband, and pure, absolute communion with God, no sickness, no death, able to see God, things don't get better than this, yet gives it all up for a taste of the forbidden fruit. That doesn't make sense.

So if you are in a situation and your heart is giving you all kinds of reasons why you ought to do this or that, but this or that is in opposition to God's Word, don't trust your heart. Trust the Word. Temptation has a way of making even the most idiotic of decisions look great, at the moment. That's what was happening to these believers. So stop, and evaluate your life in the light of God's Word. Do your actions mesh with biblical truth? If not, most likely they don't even make common sense.

Favoritism is a serious issue. One, favoritism doesn't mesh with biblical truth; two, favoritism doesn't even make common sense, and let me be even more blunt, flat out. Take a look at verses 8-11.

"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law breaker."

Favoritism is sin.

James says the royal law – the law that comes from the King – the law that has authority – the law given to us by our King – is to love your neighbor as yourself.

That's not a complicated command. But it's not easy. Because there's no caveats. **We as believers have a responsibility not just to love those who are loveable**, not just to love those who **are easy to love**, not just to love those who **we are comfortable with, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves**

That's what determines whether the way we are acting is right or wrong. The question is not is it convenient? Is it practical? Is it pleasurable? Is it comfortable? Is it profitable? But is it obedient?

That's why James says, "If you are fulfilling the royal law...you are doing right." A rich man comes in and you give him the good seat. If you are doing so because you sincerely desire to fulfill this royal law - you are doing well. He's treated you poorly, he's oppressed you and dragged you into court, but perhaps your concern is evangelistic, or you just want to help, whatever the reason if your action flows out of genuine love for the individual, that's good. That's beautiful. That's right. That's the king's desire.

Here James shows how wise a pastor he really is. He knows that what looks like sin might not actually be sin. It depends on the motive. The same act can be sin or love depending on the motive behind it.

He's not giving them an excuse to sin, but instead he is acknowledging a very real problem, he can't look into that person's heart. An act or word that looks exactly like what he has described as sin might not be. It might look like they are showing favoritism when in reality they are showing love. God's Word is the ultimate judge.

We should learn from James. We need to understand as we go to confront others; **Scripture is the authority, not our personal opinion.** Be careful when you confront others that you allow Scripture to be their judge. What may look like sin to you may not be, depending on the motive. And God's law ultimately is the judge of their motives, not you.

James continues in verse 9, "But if you show favoritism..." On the other hand, if the real reason you are being kind to the rich man is anything other than obedience to the royal law, if you are playing favorites, verse 9, you show partiality you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

The reason we don't think this way normally is because we're basically self-righteous by nature. And so we like to think of God's law as individual commands. I think bad thoughts but I don't murder so therefore I am basically a good person. The problem with that kind of thinking is that God's law is unified. The law of God is not like a heap of stones but rather like a sheet of glass. We could take away one stone from the heap and leave the heap itself intact; but when we throw a stone through a window, it strikes one place but it fragments the whole. The law of God is like the glass; a break at one point cannot be contained; the cracking over the entire area.

This is why I can say that you are convicted as a law-breaker when you show favoritism. This is why I am not over-exaggerating the gravity of this sin.

He says "whoever keeps the whole law..." Imagine a guy who keeps every single part of the law. I'd like to meet that guy, but stretch your imaginations. He is diligent in his pursuit of obedience. This is not some slouch but a person who gives everything he's got to obey.

"and stumbles in one point..." But even though he's worked so hard, at one particular point, a one time act, he falls into sin. The result? James says, "he's become guilty of all." His failure in that one point has brought him into the abiding state of being guilty of all. By his one sin, he is condemned. Most people would say, one sin, not a big deal. James would say, don't you get it? By stumbling in that one point, you are condemned by the whole law!

Why? **The reason the law is unified is because each individual law came from the same law-giver.** Because "he who says, 'Do not commit adultery' also says, 'do not commit murder.'"

The focus is on who you are disobeying. These commands all come from the same person, God, who is king of kings, and it is because you are disobeying Him that any sin is equally serious.

If you'd asked me several weeks ago to write up a list of some of the top problems I struggle with, or one that we as a church struggle with, I don't think this sin of favoritism would have even made the top ten.

Today, if you asked me, however, it'd be a different story. I've come to see the sin of favoritism as a problem of almost epidemic proportions, an attitude ingrained in us by the world from birth. We are trained to show favoritism. We do it almost instinctively.

James doesn't want us to think about favoritism in theory; he wants to think about how it works out in real life. It's not enough to disagree with favoritism in principle. We've got to wage war against it in the nitty-gritty issues of life. That's why he brings up one specific example of favoritism here in chapter 2, how we treat the rich and the poor. He wants you to think specifically about how this sin works out in your life. **Favoritism and authentic Faith do not mix.** It doesn't mesh with biblical truth. It doesn't make common sense. And it is flat out sin.

So back to where we started – do you strive to keep yourself pure? Are you keeping yourself from being polluted by the world? The world is at its most dangerous when it comes in the back door and changes how you think. Are you being polluted?

Does what you know – what you say you believe – match the way you live your life – does it match the way you think about people – the way you treat people – and who your sense of awe belongs to?

“As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.”