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James 2:1-10, 14-18

Rules of Engagement: No Favorites

In just a moment we will jump into our passage for this morning, but first I want to briefly look at where we have been and where we are going. Last week we concluded our summer series in Ephesians: The House That God Built.

And in that series we got a beautiful picture of the house or family that God has built and is building. The community of Spirit filled and Spirit empowers followers of Jesus that God calls and chooses to bring about His redemptive purposes about in this world.

If you missed last week, I encourage you to go online and watch. Janet did an amazing job closing out the series addressing the reality that we have an enemy that is seeking to destroy and tear down the house in anyway possible. But, we don't have to fear. for we can stand firm in Christ, the One who goes before us, the One who conquered sin and conquered death and we have access to God's home security also known as the armor of God.

And so now we are starting a new series for the next few weeks in the book of James, called Rules for Engagement. Practical instruction on being the house and people God is calling us to and how we should deal and interact with each other and the world that we live in.

Now , when it comes to the book of James, I am aware that there can, and has been some mixed feelings and thoughts about James. Some overemphasize his teaching on works and faith. Where works are maximized and faith is minimized.

And when it comes down to it we cannot teach enough here that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone. No amount of deeds or works will make God love us any more or any less. So we need to be clear on that.

Then there are those who avoid or dodge James because he is straightforward and tells it like it is... especially when it comes to the topic of sin.

And if we are being honest we often avoid talking about sin, we don't like to talk about it, confront it, and we are not willing to admit it. But sin is a reality. And sin can entangle us, trip us up, and prevent us from being the House and people that God is calling us to be.

As one Commentator puts it this way:

“When we fail to recognize things we do as sins, we treat them as unimportant, minor, too weak to gain a hold on our lives, as if the Lord’s Prayer read, “Forgive us our miscalculations as we forgive those who miscalculate against us.” Or other times we redefine sin in terms that make it seem less bad or sound more savory”

But James is clear, sin is destructive, and deceptive power and there are consequences of it.

But James is not just all about sin, and faith and works. There are some great and valuable nuggets of encouragement and instruction in his letter.

James writes to encourage followers of Jesus to endure and live bold Christian lives. And a lot of his letter is about practical Christian living that reflects a genuine faith that transforms lives. It is a picture of a living faith. A faith in action.

And it is at the end of James 1 (which we don’t cover in this series) where I see a big picture for what we will be looking at over the next few weeks.

James 1: 27-

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

It is that last part- and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world is what I see as the big picture and from which James give instruction and warning on the way our faith and away of living as followers of Christ as the church should look and act different and not be polluted by the things, values, and patterns of the world.

So as we jump into chapter 2 this morning I want to invite you to listen for the what (what is James addressing), the why (why we shouldn’t do this) and then the way. The way forward, or way to live. The way that demonstrates a living faith.

James 2:

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 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 there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” [a] you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted

by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

Pray

So what is James telling us. Well, The "what" is pretty straightforward and easy to identify: I'll give you a hint, its in verse 1. What does James say?

"Believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism"

Now, what is this favoritism that James is talking about here?

Because the thing is, we all have favorites. Right? Favorite foods, favorite football team, even favorite people that we just enjoy being around. But I don't think this is what James is addressing here.

The type of favoritism that James is addressing has to do with assuming one person is more important than the other. Or treating people differently by treating them greater or less then based on how they look or how you might benefit or not benefit from them

James instruction and warning against favoritism here is that we Do not withhold or give special attention, glory, love, affection, hospitality, friendship, mercy, kindness, or service to people simply based upon external appearance, or what we might "profit" from them.

By favoritism James means a self-serving discrimination that is based upon shallow externals and appearances.

As followers of Jesus, don't do it. That is the what.

Recognize

What we need to realize and come to terms with and just recognize is that we all have a tendency to do this. We have a natural bent, and tendency to show favoritism.

Out of curiosity. Show of hands, How many of you grew up with siblings? Ok... Now, how many of you will admit that you were your parents' favorite child?

All right. Now raise your hand if your brother or sister was your parent's favorite child.

I have three other siblings- an older brother and two younger sisters. I was the favorite until the sisters came along and they became the favorite child.

And those of us who were not our parent's favorite child, we don't mind letting everyone know about it. Am I right?

And if you were the favorite, you might keep it on the DL (down low). Either you feel guilty about it, or you know you have a good thing going, and you don't want to mess it up!

We laugh and joke about it a bit, but I know there are people here and I have met people in family situations where favoritism was shown and there can be a lot of hurt and pain surrounding that because the nature of favoritism is that it ends in tearing down and is destructive.

So we need to recognize that we all have a tendency to do this.

In our everyday lives when we see people either near or at a distance, our brains go into sorting mode and we either have a conscious or subconscious way of categorizing that person based on our own context, assumptions, etc.

I wouldn't say this is wrong, but that we need to be aware and recognize that we all do this. And it is not just about wealth as James gives the specific example on but it can also involve, race, gender, stature, appearance, tall, short, what they are wearing.

The issue arises when we either ignore this tendency, or when it goes left unchecked. It can quickly lead to action and interaction or lack of interaction that is often wrong or motivated by favoritism, and in the end we make assumptions or conclusions about a person that may or may not be true.

And I would have to say our tendency in doing this, based on appearance, is often more wrong than right.

(Jason and Tina story)- First met, based on appearance I thought she was dorky, and she thought I was a punk.

I do have to say though there is wisdom and discernment and that gut feeling we need to pay attention to in regard to a situation and a person that may not be safe.

If I am walking down the street, with my girls and there is someone punching the air and yelling and screaming profanities, I am going to avoid and stay clear of that person.

But the point I am trying to make is we just need to be aware of our tendencies toward favoritism and our own biases.

So the what is “as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, we must not show favoritism.

Now comes the why? The why is often more difficult than the what. We know favoritism is wrong. But why?

Parents or anyone who has worked with kids knows all about difficulty of the why. You tell a kid to do something and they say... why? And then you say... “Because I said so.”

Much easier than actually answering the why. Right? This worked for us with all our other girls until our Penny.

Penny has learned from her sisters and she is a smart, and sassy cookie. She no longer asks why.

For example just the other day Tina was telling me about breakfast time.

Each of the girls usually get a banana and have to eat it. It's fruit, it's good for them. Well, with Penny it can always be a struggle. She now knows not to ask the why. She knows she gets the answer because I said so.

So Tina had told her to eat her banana the other day and Penny stops and says, “well, what if I was da mommy and you were da kid, would you eat the banana?”

The why can be difficult. But I see at least a few reasons that James gives us for the why.

For one, it goes back to James 1:27- “don't be polluted by the world.”

Favoritism, partiality, and discrimination happens everywhere. Our world usually caters to those with wealth, power and money and with that comes special treatment.

Then there are certain people in this world that wherever they go they get noticed, they get special treatment, and they get treated different.

At the same time there are certain people that always get rejected wherever they go, they get cast aside.

And that is a reality of this world but what is not ok is when they come to church, and get treated the same way especially by those who claim to follow Christ.

In this world, when it comes down to it is we want something from other people. We want to know what we can get out of this relationship or that person. That is the way the world works.

The church, followers of Jesus need to be different. We shouldn't be a place that looks at what we can get from people but how we can love them and serve them. Love them as Christ loved us.

Another reason I see James gives us is seen in verse 5

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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?

It is those who are poor by the world's standards and category that God has chosen to be rich in faith. God has a heart for those who are cast aside, those who are marginalized and so we need to also. We can learn about faith from those. (Story of Mexico)

Which leads to another reason James gives is that, "favoritism is not compatible with Gospel living". They don't go together.

If we have truly experienced God's amazing grace and mercy it should show in how we treat others. How we treat the least of these.

Think about your life and our church for a moment. How do you respond or how do we as a church respond when we encounter people who are different from us—different in ways that we aren't comfortable with or don't like or whatever?

How do we respond? If we respond in a way that shows favoritism- that is a shallow, superficial discrimination based upon appearance or external things, or a response of special treatment in order to get something, then that is not the response of someone who truly knows and has experience God's mercy. That is not the response of someone that is putting off the old sinful self and putting on the new self in Christ.

The reality is there are no levels of people in God's eyes. Under the gospel umbrella we are all equalized by sin. If we keep our eyes on God and keep the glory on Jesus Christ, We realize we are all sinners saved by grace. All have sinned and fall short of God's Glory. And God loved the whole world so much He sent Jesus to die for our sins and save us from our sins.

In God's grace ,He chose us in spite of ourselves and in spite of our sins. He didn't look at us and say, "You know, they have a lot to offer Me. I think I'll save them." No! He looked at us, and in spite of ourselves, He had compassion and He loved us and He drew us into His family extending His grace and mercy to us.

And James is saying, in the way that God drew you by mercy into His saving grace and into his family, then that should be how we look at people, and treat others in this world.

As followers of Jesus, if we show favoritism and if we reject the downcast and the overlooked to receive other certain persons because they are considered inherently more worthy of respect and attention. This is a contradiction of grace and gospel living.

So we need to recognize that we have this tendency. And we need to take it a step further and as followers of Jesus, as His church, we need to **reject** this way of treating and seeing people. We need to reject favoritism.

Respond!

What is the better way? What is the way of Jesus?

2:8- If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

The way forward or the way of Christ is action.

Because of all the mercy God has given us we need to be out giving mercy, showing grace , forgiving others.

It is not just talking about loving others but actually doing it. Faith and action go hand in hand. What I believe and what I think then needs to pour out what I do.

Don't talk about it be about it.

I find helpful the way the Message translation puts it (James 2:14-18)

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off

without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?

18 I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, "Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department."

Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.

We need to daily ask God to open our eyes to see people the way He sees people. "God let me see what you value, what is beautiful in your eyes". We need love as He loves. "Help me God to love others as you have shown love to me". And we need to not look at relationships and people as a means of gain or place in categories of greater than or less than.

Pray to be that type of person. So filled by God and His Grace, I can just show mercy and forgiveness. I can give and serve people without the expectation of something in return. That is the picture of God and God's love. May our eyes be open to see people how God sees people. May our faith be not just words but a living faith that tells of the love and grace of God.