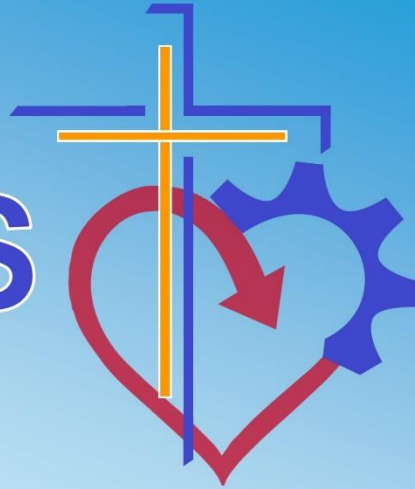


faith WORKS

The Book of James

-DEVOTIONAL PODCAST-



Favoritism Is a Senseless Sin

James 2:1-13 *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby 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: 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 insulted 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 slandering 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," 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. ¹¹ 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 lawbreaker. ¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*

Like Mary Poppins in *The Sound of Music*, we all light up when it comes to our "favorite things"--whether it's a sports team, a vacation destination, or a pair of shoes. And so long as we receive them with grateful hearts and don't get too attached to them, it's fine to have favorite things, but today James warns us that once we start playing favorites with people, we have crossed the line into sin. Note that in this context James is not talking about having best friends, whom you are more naturally drawn to, he's talking about favoritism based solely on outward appearances. In the Greek language "favoritism" literally means, "to receive someone's face."

James proposes a not-so-hypothetical situation: a rich man and a poor man come into worship, but how we react is no joke. It demonstrates our faith in Jesus Christ. Should we fawn over the rich man and make a big do because of their fancy attire, we have judged them as more important and more worthy of our love and respect than the poor man.

But why do we have such varied responses to the outside of a person? James says such behavior is evidence of evil judgements. The sad truth is we show spur of the moment favoritism because we are hoping to gain something by it--either materially or by means of association, immediately or in the future. All such motives are selfish and evil. That's strike one against favoritism.

But it doesn't make sense for believers to show favoritism for additional reasons. First of all, God in his grace very often shows his mercy to the poor and needy by including them in his kingdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26ff). Not many of us were rich, wise, powerful, or of noble birth, but God called us! Most of us are the nobodies and the outcasts of this world, so why would we show extra attention to the rich? And generally speaking, who are the ones who oppose God, his will, and his people by means of persecution and lawsuits? It's most typically the rich and the powerful, who refuse to recognize his rule and humble themselves before the Lord. Strike two against favoring the affluent.

Lastly, James asks us to put ourselves in the poor man's sandals. The law says we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. How would you like it if you entered in God's house and all someone did was judge you based on the clothes you happened to be wearing that day? You might wonder, "How can these people profess to love the God, who loves everybody, if they can't bear to treat me with love and respect?" Favoritism based on appearances breaks the cardinal rule of love, and while the world may have no problems with buttering up the rich, God's Word condemns this practice as lovelessness and sin.

As we learned in our previous devotion, we are those who have been set free from sin by the sacrifice of Jesus, and God is looking for us to live in accordance with the new life of freedom he has won, where we use our freedom to share the same mercy he has shown us. If we can't show mercy to the poor, whom God loves, how can we expect that God would show us mercy? That's three strikes and more against favoritism.

May God give us a spirit of self-awareness that senses when favoritism is rising up in us and then give us the grace to show equal mercy and kindness to all because no matter what one's outward appearance and circumstances may be, we are all equally valuable to Jesus Christ!



For Personal Reflection:

- 1.) Favoritism appeals to our sinful flesh and what we hope to GET for ourselves. How can faith replace that drive to GET with the desire to GIVE? What do we have to give to the people in our lives?
- 2.) Give evidence of Jesus refraining from showing favoritism in his ministry.
- 3.) How has God personally shown you his grace and undeserved favor?



Prayer: Lord God, forgive me for how easily I judge people by appearances and show special favor and attention to those I imagine can help me or boost my status. Thank you for your mercy and grace towards a poor sinner like me! Amen.