

James 2:1-7
July 21, 2024



CONVERSATION STARTERS

What are some highs or lows you experienced this past week?

What Scripture has been shaping you recently?

Where have you seen God moving in your life this week?

What did you hear in today's sermon OR read in today's passage that you would like to discuss?

What did you learn about yourself in today's sermon/passage?

What did you learn about God in today's sermon/passage?

What convicted you as you listened to today's sermon OR read in today's passage?

MAIN POINT

James spoke clearly against the practice of showing partiality to certain people over others.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In 1982, the Reverend Nico J. Smith left his post as a professor of theology at an elite university in South Africa to become pastor of a one-thousand-member church in Mamelodi, a black township outside Pretoria. To relate to his congregation, he changed everything. A lower salary and more modest home near his church were just part of the change.

About six years later, Reverend Smith hosted approximately 170 white people who came to his church to live four days among the black community. These visitors did all the things the local people were doing. They slept in tough conditions. They washed in outdoor faucets and spent time trying to overcome obstacles between the races.



This pastor's boldness and courage showed what it took to overcome the evil results of the practice of partiality and discrimination.

What is the value of putting yourself into someone else's shoes?

When have you been able to step into the perspective of someone of a different race, color, culture, or socioeconomic status?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 2:1-4.

James was clear and precise as he wrote that Christians should not show favoritism or partiality. This was a common practice at the time and involved giving benefits to people who had outward advantages such as money, power, or social prominence. It was nothing for a religious leader to court the favor of important people by showing preference for them over the poor. If Jesus Christ is truly our Lord, then favoritism of any kind has no place in our hearts. This attitude is indirect conflict with the love and grace of Christ.

What are some ways people show favoritism to the powerful and wealthy in today's world?

Though the Mosaic Law also forbade showing partiality, James stressed that the law was not just a list of rules but a guideline for believers to know how to live like Christ. It demonstrated how those who follow Christ should conduct themselves with love at the heart of everything like Jesus. That meant there could be no more treating people better or worse according to their status or possessions. Any kind of discrimination is counter to the way Jesus lived, and James made it clear if they continued to practice favoritism, they could not claim to be followers of the Lord, who rejects partiality.

To be sure he was understood, James gave a clear example of the kind of partiality and discrimination that was prevalent. In his illustration, a man entered the gathering and, judging from his outward appearance, he was wealthy. Seeing his gold rings and fine clothing, the people went out of their way to give him the best treatment. Simultaneously, another man who appeared to be of significantly less means entered the assembly and was treated as the lowest of the low.

¹ "The Rev. Nico Smith dies at 81; white South African pastor who fought apartheid," LA Times, June 21, 2010, <https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-nico-smith-20100621-story.html>.



What “externals” tend to impress people in our culture? In church life?

This kind of behavior does not reflect Christ. James drove this point home because partiality shows a misunderstanding of God’s character and kingdom. The Gospels state repeatedly how Jesus raised the lowly and brought down those who lorded their power and authority over others. Christ made Himself poor so we might become rich and so we could inherit the kingdom we do not deserve. True faith means we treat others like Jesus did without regard to status or position in society. This warning from James applies to our relationships with different races, social classes, or economic groups.

How is partiality a false reflection of the love we have been shown in Christ?

What are some other ways we are tempted to give deference to those in the church who have greater wealth or status?

 ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JAMES 2:5-7.

Our culture tends to favor people who are attractive, talented, wealthy, powerful, successful, or prominent in their fields. We can easily fall into the trap of favoring church members or even those who are not likely to be members, based on external appearance and social status. If we want to treat people impartially, we must ignore outward differences and refuse to be part of injustices around us.

During James’s time, rich people often took advantage of the poor or lower classes. The rich consistently and roughly hauled believers into court. These verses imply that the poor were exploited. This is not acceptable for believers. All people made in the image of God are important to Him, which means we are to honor and love them like Jesus. It is not acceptable to ignore certain people or give preferential treatment to people who abuse them. We are to look for ways to serve other believers. Discrimination of any kind has no place in the church.

James even took it a step further and said that the wealthy, who call themselves Christians yet mistreat the poor, are guilty of blasphemy. Even if they do speak words for Jesus, their actions speak against them as a witness of their lack of faith and love for Him.

How did James say the rich in his time abused and mistreated the poor?

Which of these abuses still exist today? Practically speaking, how can we guard against this in our church family?

How does discriminating or showing partiality show a false witness to the world?



APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

If you were gut-level honest, where do you need to repent for the sin of favoritism?

Are there any areas where favoritism has taken root in our group? How can we ensure that this group is a place where all people can feel comfortable and accepted?

How does showing prejudice and favoritism endanger our witness before a non-believing culture?

PRAYER

Close your time together by sharing prayer requests, praying for each other, and the group.

Ask God to show you any hidden prejudice in your life so you can repent. Ask the Spirit to help you see and love other people as Jesus does.

LOOKING AHEAD

*Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study, **Faith and Works: A Study of James.***

July 28, 2024 --- James 2:8-13



COMMENTARY

James 2:1-7

2:1. This verse commends Jesus as our glorious Lord Jesus Christ and warns that partiality against the poor is inconsistent with faith in Him. “My brothers” shows that James wrote to his readers as believers and urged them to show the reality of their profession of faith. *Who is this Jesus?* First, Jesus is the object of our faith. We have made a trust of commitment to him. We are believers in Jesus. Second, Jesus is the Lord of Glory. The Greek literally reads, “our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Glory.” James gave the title of “Glory” to Jesus, using a term that represents the full presentation of God’s presence and majesty. Jesus is the glorious God. This is a remarkable confession to come from Jesus’s half-brother.

The practice of favoritism involved giving benefits to people who had outward advantages such as money, power, or social prominence. The readers of James were courting the favor of these important people by showing preference for them over the poor. The Mosaic Law had forbidden giving respect to persons of prominence (Deut. 1:17). To these scheming readers James gave a sharp directive, “Stop it!”

2:2–4. These verses illustrate the discrimination. In a Christian assembly a rich man and a poor man appeared. Perhaps both were non-Christians. The meeting could have taken place in the home of a Christian. The rich man wore a gold ring and fine clothes. The poor man appeared in shabby clothes. The word describing the ring of the rich man indicated that he was “gold-fingered.” He may have worn gold rings on several fingers. Wealthy people often wore more than a single ring. Shops rented rings to those wanting to give the appearance of wealth. “Fine”, used to describe the rich man’s clothing, means “sparkling” or “glittering.” Acts 10:30 uses the same word to describe the “shining” garments an angel was wearing. We would say he was a “smart” dresser.

Shabby, used to describe the poor man’s clothing, pictured clothing which was dirty or filthy. The man may have come from work, his clothing stained with the evidence of his labor. The handsome apparel of the rich man earned special treatment for him (v. 3). The greeter gave him a place of special honor. The soiled clothing of the poor man earned indifference to his comfort or feelings. He received the options of standing in some undesirable place or sitting on the floor near the greeter. The greeter showed no concern for his needs.

Verse 4 uses a question to accuse the readers of a pair of evil actions. An affirmative answer is expected. They had indeed discriminated and become evil judges. First, they discriminated among themselves. They were guilty of creating divisions in their midst despite the fact that they had accepted the abolition of class distinctions (see Gal. 3:28). Second, they acted like evil-minded or prejudiced judges, regulating their conduct by blatantly false principles.



They practiced a favoritism toward the rich inconsistent with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for all people. If they continued to practice it, they could not claim to be followers of the Lord who abolished partiality. Deuteronomy 10:17 shows that God practices no partiality.

Surely he could not tolerate such action among his own children. A wide difference separated the faith they professed from their partisan practices. We can apply this warning in our relationships with different races, social classes, or economic groups.

2:5–6a. Partiality is contrary to God’s plan and threatening to the best interests of believers. James contrasted God’s exaltation of the poor with their abuse by his readers. Their practice of discrimination against the poor was contrary to the way God had purposed to treat them. Verse 5 shows how God views the poor. Verse 6a presents the contrasting practices of his readers. It is clear: Christians need to adopt God’s outlook for the poor. God chose the poor. Paul used “chose” to describe the election of believers to salvation (Eph. 1:4). In James 2:5 “chose” describes spiritual blessings God has reserved for the poor. God chose the poor to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him.

The world may look on poverty-stricken people as insignificant and worthless. God sees them as abounding in the riches of faith. Their faith allows them to experience God’s wealth—salvation and its accompanying blessings. This does not suggest all the poor are converted, nor does it mean God practices a bias against those who are not poor. The poor God blesses are those whose poverty is primarily to be “poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3). Often those who are economically poor are better placed than the wealthy to understand God’s purposes. They are more likely than the rich to be prospects for conversion. The kingdom is the full manifestation of Christ’s future kingdom at the end of the age. The poor may appear insignificant in this world, but they have the glorious hope of inheriting the kingdom with Jesus (see Matt. 25:34). God loves the poor more than their treatment by Christians indicates. Verse 6a outlines the church’s treatment of the poor. They had insulted the poor by asking them to stand in some uncomfortable location or to sit on the floor as the Christians gathered for worship. Such shabby treatment could convince the poor that Christianity was not for them.

2:6b–7. The actions of the Christians did not help their own interests. They were pursuing a path of folly. Their treatment of the rich and the poor resembled honoring an executioner while insulting a valued friend. The rich faced three charges. First, they were exploiting the poor by social and economic mistreatment. James 5:4 accuses the wealthy of failing to pay past-due wages. It was a strange twist of circumstances to honor such abusive masters. Second, the rich hauled believers into court and practiced judicial persecution. Notice the actions of the wealthy slave owners who dragged Paul and Silas into court in Acts 16:19–21. Third, they belittled the Lord Jesus by insulting his person and rejecting his claims. The Jews of Antioch showed this behavior in Acts 13:45. These whom the church welcomed were not Christians but wealthy, Christ-rejecting Jews. The readers of James belonged to Jesus, and their biased actions dishonored his honorable name.

