

James 2:1-13
April 26, 2020

American author and humorist, Mark Twain once famously quipped, “It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.”

Twain could have been speaking of the book of James. James is one of those parts of the Bible that bother us NOT because we can't understand but because we DO understand. James doesn't present truth diplomatically or discreetly. He has never heard from Mary Poppins, “A spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down.”

Today—again—is one of those passages all too understandable that is going to bother a lot of us—if we really listen. And I hope we all do. We have an opportunity during this quarantine. James will help us individually to be stronger as a church. Last week, we evaluated our speech, this week James has a different point—

PROP: LOVE to all; do NOT play favorites.

This is good guidance for all of life, but the focus James has here is in your church family. If you are a part of Center Church he is saying:

Center Church: Love all, do not play favorites.

Why?

Faith in Christ and favoritism amongst Christians incompatible. Last week we heard that a genuine followers serve those who cannot serve them back—like widows and orphans. Today, James takes that theme of service and challenges us with a passage that could bother us precisely because we can understand it.

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“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the

whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. "For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." James 2:1-13

PRAY

Center Church: Love all, do not play favorites.

1. Favoritism is Contradictory to Christianity

Did you see that in verse 1?

"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."

James puts favoritism and your faith in Christ side by side. Verse 1 says very simply, you can't BOTH play favorites AND be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Impossible.

Our Lord Jesus Christ—the Lord of glory (James calls him)—cries out even now:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. John 7:37

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

“For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13

The LORD of glory calls any sinner to come and be cleansed. Anyone and everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. Our God welcomes ALL showing no favoritism. Our Savior died welcoming ANY to come to him.

Glory means weight. It means importance. But preeminently God's glory is expressed in God's power. The Heavens declare his glory and one day his glory will fill the earth. The Lord of this Glory, Jesus Christ by his strength have brought sinners to himself.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory shows his glory by dying for worthless, ragged sinners. Do you see what Jesus did? He opened a way for sinners like you and me to come to the God of all glory.

When we play favorites we cancel the crucifixion.

It has been said that we live in a cancel culture. When we play favorites in the church we cancel the power the crucifixion. We are saying with our actions, I'm glad that Jesus can accept you but I won't.

How dare we?

Christians MUST not play favorites.

James gives an illustration of showing partiality.

²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly,

You see, James is not first talking about showing favoritism out there in the world, but in our church.

and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,”

It is easy to see the temptation here. The rich person has money, reputation, stuff to offer and the poor person only has need. The poor person in James story is dressed in what he calls shabby clothing. It is not just that the clothing is old, but it is filthy.

You look at the rich person

You look at the poor person

How tempting it is to move toward the one who you can get something from. It is tempting, but that attitude is profoundly evil. It is judgmental. Do you see what he says in verse 4?

⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

In other words, what right do we have to judge others by what they look like, or what they have or don't have. We must not. Christians must not play favorites.

Not only is favoritism contrary to Christianity—

2. Favoritism violates the Law of Love

After pointing out how very little sense favoritism makes—James gets to most important reason:

⁸If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.
⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” is a direct quotation from Leviticus 19:18. In other words, the reason that Christians must not show favoritism is because it is not loving. This is not just a bare command without any reason.

Remember how we always say that the Bible never tells you what to do without giving a reason why?

Do you see the progression here?

Favoritism is at odds with Christianity.

Why?

Because it contradicts the biblical mandate to love your neighbor as yourself.

Notice this doesn't say love your neighbor because they are like yourself. But love your neighbor has yourself. Our great temptation is to show love to other people who are like us, the rest, not so much.

We Christians must love people regardless of what they can do for us. We do not measure their station in life and ask—is this relationship worth my while? Is this person worth my time?

One of the ways you can tell who loves Jesus and who just says they love Jesus is by how they love other people. This is why we must not show favoritism but love others—always.

Of anyone on the planet we should be able to love others because of the love we have received from God. God loves us NOT because we have anything to offer. He does not love us because we are good, but because he is good. This doesn't mean we have to be best friends with everyone.

But we must—

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Favoritism can masquerade under the guise of phrases like this:

- I just don't fit in.

- I can't relate.
- People aren't that cool.

Those attitudes can be an example of showing partiality to people. It is not okay.

This call to love your neighbor AND to love the person in our church is unprecedented in all the world.

You might say, not really unprecedented. I have heard that other religions have their own versions of the golden rule. And if you say that you would be partly right.

"Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful."
Buddhism

"Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you." Confucianism

"Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss." Taoism

"That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself." Zoroastrianism

Consider the Royal Law as James calls it, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Do you see the difference?

What are they all missing? The essential element is gone from each of those other religious renderings.

What is it?

They speak in the negative. In other words, they say, don't do what you don't like. If you don't like:

- Getting spit on; don't spit on other people.
- Getting lied to; don't lie to others.
- Getting called belittling names; don't call others belittling names.
- Getting beaten about the head and shoulders; don't beat others about the head and shoulders.

Good, but not far enough. They merely forbid negative action. The Bible prescribes positive action.

James is saying something different here—actively love others. Again, remember what he is saying to us as a church:

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Loving others is so much more than just not doing others harm. Not only does this mean we are to NOT show favorites, we are also called to love everyone else.

What does that look like?

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not

irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Where are we?

Favoritism is contrary to Christianity

Favoritism violates the law of love

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3. Mercy triumphs over Favoritism

Vs. 12:

¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

How do we respond Center Church?

Keep speaking and keep acting as people who will be judged under the law of liberty.

You might say—judged? We have been saved by grace we won’t be judged.

True enough. We will never be judged for our sins—we will not receive what we deserve.

Amen. The judgment here is not for sins but how we lived as believers AFTER our many sins were forgiven. You will be rewarded or not for the way in which you treat people at your church.

There are many people who will lose heavenly reward because they do not show consistent love others in their church. I don't want that to be the case for Center Church!

More sobering, vs. 13—

¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

What is mercy?

Not getting what you deserve. Let's be real—do the people in your church deserve your love and acceptance—no! There may be people who have done things against you—but before we ask that question—the question underneath that question is this—

Do you deserve mercy from God? Even more no.

So we can show mercy to anyone and everyone especially the people in our church.

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Here is the stark reality. Those who are unable to love others by showing mercy to others do not understand what they have received in Jesus Christ.

Center Church, this is why we must be FIXED ON JESUS.

When our eyes are on him and we are more aware of the mercy we have received from him; we will be able to love others and show mercy to anyone.

Have you been treated as you deserve by God? No. Praise God the answer is no. Does everyone deserve love and mercy from you? No. But that is not the point. We give love because we have been given love. We show mercy because we have been shown mercy.

As we sit cloistered away in our homes—what is your self-evaluation?

- Are you more aware of the mercy you have received from the Lord or the slights you have endured by others?
 - This doesn't mean we shouldn't ask forgiveness or try and make something right. Maybe you need to do that.

Do you see the opportunity we have here? We can come back stronger from this quarantine, we can look in the mirror of the word and do an honest self-evaluation.

Where are you and what do you need to change?

