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We are rolling along through our sermon series Jim Time. Today James continues his main theme of what healthy faith or Religion B looks like. Assisted by our charming video, Chapter 2 contains a blistering warning about favoritism and how to avoid it.

Did you know that some sins are more obvious than others. For example, public drunkenness, excessive profanity, easily identifiable. Even a casual observer can see if someone is intoxicated or hear if they're talking like a sailor.

Other sins are covert, hidden, secret. People seem to get away with things like adultery because unless there is an actual eyewitness, it's hard to prove. The same goes for jealousy, envy, bitterness or lust. It would be hard to know if someone was engaging in these very internal struggles.

Today in our passage, James talks about another secret sin. The one of *partiality, aka, prejudice aka favoritism*. This is another sin that cannot be seen, cannot be smelled, cannot be touched. Plus for those who engage in it, it's a sin whose existence they'd rather deny. It's hard for anyone to admit that they are prejudiced towards people of different ethnicities or socio-economic groups.

This sin isn't just a secret sin, it's a sinister one. Because entertaining *feelings of superiority toward people who are different from us flies in the face of someone who says that we created in IMAGO DEI the image of God*. It's a sin that says there are people who compared to us are inferior, of less value; to be treated with less respect, to be shown less honor. The way they dress, the way they talk, their lack of sophistication, all invitations to turn up a nose.

Church family, let me be clear on how I feel about this topic. To me *there is nothing more vicious, more destructive, more un-Christ-like than the sin of prejudice and the resultant by product of partiality and discrimination*.

James pulls no punches on this topic. Just listen to the pointed things he says about people who are prejudiced and show partiality. They have “*evil thoughts*”; they “*dishonor*” others; they are “*committing sin*” and are “*transgressors*” of the law.

Why does he say these things? Why is it so heinous and so grievous to hold prejudices in our hearts, to treat others with partiality?

James is backed up by others in the New Testament. Paul, what say you? Romans 2:11

Prejudice and partiality are not part of *the character of God*. “*God shows no partiality.*” This was said in reference to the just and righteous treatment of both Jews and Gentiles. Distinction, in terms of ethnicity, does not register in God’s heart.

Peter, what say you? [Acts 10:34](#) “I truly understand that God shows no partiality,” God does not have double standards that depend on one’s socio-economic status, the color of their skin, their religion, the blood in their veins. *Neither should we!* Passing judgment on the basis of *external considerations*, discriminating on the basis of racial or socio-economic factors is contrary to the character and behavior of God. It must not be a part of the lives of those who profess to be God’s followers. *How we treat others, whether with honor or dishonor, respect or disrespect, should never be based on riches or race.*

The scenario James describes in these opening verses is pretty straightforward. We could see it play out here at St. John’s. Two visitors walk into the sanctuary. Immediately, those gathered notice a difference. One is dressed in fine clothes and wears expensive jewelry. The other is dressed in old and dirty clothes, with poor hygiene, obviously lacking in financial resources. An immediate calculation is made on who would be the best benefit. Who do you think gets led to the best seat in the house?

For a moment consider though, let’s things that James is **not** saying.

First, this isn't a message to ignore people who are rich. ***He is not saying that Christianity is only for the poor.*** If we aren't careful, we might find ourselves discriminating against the rich in favor of the poor. The point he's making? Treat everyone alike, without any consideration for socio-economic factors whatsoever. The way we treat anyone from any socio-economic position is wrong when it's done the exclusion and detriment of the others.

Also, it's just as easy to show ***condescending humility and false pity of the poor.*** We need to avoid both extremes.

Next, James is not saying that ***there is no inherent virtue in poverty or inherent vice in wealth.*** One can be physically poor in this world but spiritually rich. You may inherit nothing in this life, but at the same time are an heir of the kingdom of God! One can be physically rich in this world but spiritually poor in the next. It's also possible to be physically poor in this world and spiritually poor in the next. Do you get the picture?

Fourth, and maybe a shocker, ***James is not denouncing all discrimination.*** We can be morally discerning. There are ***times when discrimination is absolutely essential.*** If you are going to hire someone to watch your home while on vacation, you probably don't want to hire a person with seven prior felony theft convictions.

Fifth, ***we should not interpret James as if he's saying that it is wrong to give honor to whom honor is due.*** It's a matter of not giving preferential treatment to someone based on outward appearance or perceived wealth. But we can and should congratulate someone for their worthy accomplishments.

Sixth, ***James is not saying that it is wrong or sinful for wealthy people to wear jewelry or fashionable clothes to church, any more than he is telling poor people that they should deliberately dress in ragged and dirty clothes.*** James couldn't care less how you dress as long as you do so with propriety, dignity, and modesty.

Finally, *James is not telling the poor to come to church ragged and disheveled even if they have the opportunity to improve their lot in life. Nor is he telling the rich to dress down and hide their wealth as if it's a shameful thing.*

What James is saying is this, your socio-economic status is absolutely irrelevant in the eyes of God and should be equally irrelevant in the eyes of the church. James wants us to treat others the way God treats us, without regard for any external, financial, or physical features.

In 18th century New England, church goers violated James' counsel. In the church of the notorious "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" preacher, Jonathan Edwards seating was not first come first served. It was assigned on the basis of such things as age, gender, social and military rank, and community service. Jonathan Edwards was adamantly opposed to this but was outvoted.

Why are we inclined to behave in this way? Like that 18th century New England church. What is going on beneath the surface that inclines our hearts to prejudice and to giving preferential treatment to people for the wrong reasons?

Might I suggest things like *Greed and pride!* Two of the 7 deadly sins. And why do these sins prevail in our hearts? Perhaps a bit of *Unbelief*. Unbelief in things like, the transitory nature of riches and power; the tenuous nature of reputation and fame; the superiority of spiritual wealth to material wealth; the failure or refusal to believe that when we have Jesus Christ, we have all that is needed for joy, peace and value in life.

Why avoid favoritism? James?

First, it is inconsistent with our faith in Jesus Christ! Jesus our Lord of "Glory" as James says in v. 1. In James' mind, *the heart of prejudice might be our own craving for glory and honor and praise. James wants us to see that if we know, love, and trust in all that God is for us in*

Jesus, we won't need to be controlled by the craving for human praise and acceptance. Jesus is all the glory we need. We won't need to seek security in what others can supply.

Second, showing partiality with preferential treatment based on socioeconomics, or harboring prejudice in your heart toward someone of another ethnicity, sets us as “judges with evil thoughts” (v. 4). Here’s the problem. We are not judges! There’s only one judge and that judge is? God.

So who do we think we are, passing judgment on the worth or value of another human being based on some external factor; wealth, rank, popularity, gender, skin color? Let us never assume the role that belongs to God. REPEAT. I know I personally lack the qualifications to sit behind that bench and pass judgment on who is of greater value and who is of lesser value, who is deserving of my attention and who is not.

Third, prejudice and partiality are inconsistent with the heart of God as seen in the choice of the poor to inherit eternal life. (Psst...from the Beatitudes) Dare I suggest that harboring prejudice in your heart is belittling God and his sovereign work of saving whom he will. To put it bluntly, “if we are ashamed of the poor, we are ashamed of God, because God is not ashamed to choose anyone, especially the poor”

Fourth, prejudice and partiality not only dishonor God by assuming the role of judge but they also dishonor the poor who are created in God’s image. ALL humans, not just the poor, not just the rich, should be treated with honor and dignity because all were created and fashioned in the image of God.

Fifth, prejudice and partiality will cater to the very people who oppress and treat with injustice the people of God.

In the first century context where James is writing, many of the rich oppressed the poor. Not all, but many did. The poor people who became followers of The Way were especially vulnerable to

exploitation and injustice by the wealthy and powerful, because they were so very kind. James is calling out the irony of singling out for special treatment the very people who are most responsible for the violent oppression of Christians. How ridiculous to cater to their needs while overlooking the obvious needs and pain of the poor.

Prejudice and partiality, whether based on racial or socio-economic grounds won't go away easily. Maybe never truly will, given that James was talking about this same issue almost 2000 years ago. And yes, legislative action can and will help. But ***legislation on its own will not do much to transform the passions and dispositions of the human heart.*** Overcoming prejudice and partiality requires more than just laws which can change on a dime. If we are ever to be overcome and defeat prejudice and partiality, we must also be a part of the work ***of God's grace in the human heart.***

So where do we go from here? I have an idea. What if we commit to embracing and acting on this simple truth. ***All men and women are created in the image of God, and for that reason alone all are endowed with dignity and worth not only in the eyes of their Creator but also in ours. So the next time you see a*** a rich man, a poor woman, an African-American teen-ager , an elderly Asian person, a Wall Street executive, a baby in a mother's womb, a Hispanic family sitting down at a restaurant for a meal, remember this. You are looking at people shaped and fashioned in the image of our great God and Creator. Look to your neighbor and tell them, you are a wonderful reflection of God.

As we say this more and more, we will be doing our part to avoid favoritism.