

James 1:26 - 2:7 - Our Impartial King

Introduction.

Bibles.

We'll be back in the book of James today. We'll start at the end of James chapter one and march our way through the next 7 verses in chapter 2. Some of you probably remember that over a year ago we started our trek through James, and so every few months when I have the opportunity to preach we crack this part of the bible back open. Now I realize that it's been a while since we've been in James, so just know that if you want any review from the last sermon or two on James, you can find those on our website at mercyhillchurch.org under the resources tab. But today we will be continuing through the next set of verses, starting at the end of chapter 1. James can be found near the back of your Bibles, just before Revelation and the epistles of John and Peter.

<Watch Party, mention the Bible app on the right side of the screen>

Before I jump into the text, I'd like to pause and just let everyone know that this text and this sermon could make some of you feel uncomfortable. We'll be going through some tough ideas this morning, ideas around social justice with some specifics about relevant current events. So if you're watching with your kids just know that this sermon may be rated more along the lines of PG-13, not because of anything lewd or even any inappropriate language, but rather there's just going to be a lot of intensity and weight with today's message. So I only share this up front because, parents, if you want to watch this first before watching and potentially discussing it as a family, I totally get it. I just didn't want anyone to be caught off guard. But we need to hear the word of God concerning racial harmony and partiality.

And just one more thing: it was back in the beginning of May that I was scheduled to preach on these verses today. And at the time, none of the recent events with protests and police brutality had occurred. And yet here we are entering into a text that centers itself at the heart of the issue of social and racial justice. So as we go through our text today, I hope you are equally amazed at God's timing as I was during my prep for today.

And so I invite you to turn with me to James 1 and let's read together starting in verse 26.

<Text>

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself

unstained from the world. 1 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?

Pray.

<Intro>

So we are getting back into the book James, and I'm just going to jump right in because we have a lot to cover. And I'm going to start today with a narrative that likely most of us are familiar with. It's a narrative about a man named George Floyd. By this point, the name is likely familiar for many of us, and many of us have heard about the news of all the protests across the nation and even in our own city to remember this man and the way that he died. But I wonder how many of us are familiar with the details from that horrible and fateful day on May 25th, 2020.

Now, we're going to get into quite a bit of detail here because, well, the details matter. And my concern is that issues like these can sometimes feel safer and less offensive to some of us when we only take in general information, or only the details that matter to us. Maybe it's watching our one and only one news station that reinforces our inherent bias. Or only catching the headlines so we stay in the know that something happened to someone on some date and that's why some people are unhappy. Or perhaps it even means staying oblivious altogether and not wanting to form an opinion out of fear that it'll offend someone. Well friends, **if** God has counted every hair on our head, **if** God knows our sitting down and our rising up, **if** God truly knows the hearts of all of his people, Believer or not, then it would suffice it to say that the details of this death, George Floyd's death, matter to God. They matter to George's family and George's friends. And so they should matter to us, especially as we try to understand and bring to life this idea of partiality that James talks about in chapter 2. Keeping things ambiguous or just at a numbers level doesn't do justice to the life and soul of George Floyd. Please keep in mind that I'm sharing these details partially because I want us to really come to grips with this idea of partiality that James talks about - what it means, and the effects it has in our society across racial, gender, and socioeconomic lines. You may get the notion that I think that all police officers are bad - this is untrue. I still have a high regard for our police force and I believe they will regain the public's trust in time. So stay with me here this morning.

Here are the facts as we know them. George Floyd, an African American man, visited a convenience store, Cup Foods, in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25th, Memorial Day. It was a store that George frequented often. It's reported that he even knew the store owner by name; this was confirmed by the store owner himself. But on that day on May 25th, it wasn't the store owner that was working the cash register: it was a teenage employee. This teenage employee **suspected** Mr. Floyd of handing over a fake twenty dollar bill to pay for a pack of cigarettes, and after Mr. Floyd refused to hand back the cigarettes to the employee after being asked more than once, the teenage employee called the police to report the incident.

Shortly after the call, two police officers arrived at the Cup Foods. Mr. Floyd was sitting with two other people in a car parked around the corner. After approaching the car, one of the officers, Officer Thomas Lane, pulled out his gun and ordered Mr. Floyd to show his hands. Officer Lane put his hands on Mr. Floyd, pulled him out of the car, to which Mr. Floyd actively resisted being handcuffed. Once handcuffed, however, Mr. Floyd became compliant and Officer Lane explained he was arresting George for passing counterfeit currency.

It was when officers tried to put George Floyd in their squad car that a struggle ensued. According to the report, Mr. Floyd stiffened up, fell to the ground, and told the officers he was claustrophobic. Then, the name that some of us also know pretty well at this point because of all the news that's been around this individual, Officer Derek Chauvin, arrived at the scene. Officer Chauvin and other officers were involved in further attempts to put Mr. Floyd in the police car.

During this attempt, Officer Chauvin pulled George Floyd out of the passenger side of the vehicle, causing him to fall to the ground. George laid there, face down, still in handcuffs. As the other officers restrained Mr. Floyd, Officer Chauvin placed his left knee between George's head and neck while two other officers placed their knees on George's ribs and waist. For eight minutes and 46 seconds, Officer Chauvin kept his knee on George Floyd's neck. I want that to sink in. For eight minutes and 46 seconds, a man placed his knee on another man's neck. Even after several pleas from Mr. Floyd when he told the officers, "I can't breathe," or "please, please, please," with the little air that was left in his lungs, the knee was not removed.

About six minutes into that period, George Floyd became non-responsive. In videos of the incident, this was when Mr. Floyd fell silent, bystanders urged the officers to check his pulse. Officer Kueng, one of the officers part of the squad, did just that. Officer Kueng checked Mr. Floyd's right wrist, but couldn't find a pulse. Yet, Officer Chauvin still did not remove his knee from the neck of George Floyd.

It wasn't until **two minutes** later that Officer Chauvin removed his knee from George Floyd's neck. Motionless, Mr. Floyd was rolled on to a gurney and taken to the Hennepin County Medical Center in an ambulance. He was pronounced dead around an hour later.

Friends, these details still rattle me, and they should rattle you. This incident started as a normal police report about the suspected passing of a counterfeit bill, and ended in the death of a black man by a white police officer. There is no other way to view this incident than one that exhibits total, unequivocal partiality, and crosses the line into racial violence.

Yet, these horrific recent events are, sadly, not isolated events. They represent systemic issues of racism, inequality and injustice that we've all seen in our lifetime and read about in history books. We can look at the countless recent events ranging from Ahmaud Arbery who was going out for an afternoon jog and was shot dead by two white men (one a retired police officer), to Breonna Taylor who was shot at least eight times by police in her apartment for no crime whatsoever, to Sean Reed who was shot dead by police after fleeing from his vehicle, to, much closer to home, Oscar Grant who was shot dead by police in a BART station over one decade ago. In each and every case, police officers went too far with their use of deadly force against one notable skin color: black. And yes, this history of pain in the black community certainly goes even further back, to events dating back to Rodney King and Dr. Martin Luther King, and long, long before that with the Jim Crow laws and the founding of this country.

Friends, the degree of racial violence that has occurred in this country is deeply saddening. There are no words to describe the atrocities that have taken place. The loss of human life is sad in itself, but for that life to be needlessly snatched away at the hands of those that are called to serve and protect adds an extra layer of pain and grief. Again, I want to repeat, not all police officers are bad. I truly believe that today as much as I did in any other time in my adult life, but public trust in our police force has been marred, and it's going to take some pretty intentional efforts, and time and patience from all sides to change that perception.

Now, if you're feeling some uneasiness in the pit of your stomach, then just know that's a good thing. It may be a feeling of disgust, anxiety, or even sadness. And this should be the posture of our hearts as we read James' letter this morning. Because this is what James wanted Jewish Christians to feel as he addressed the sin of partiality in the church and beyond. And this is the message that James wants us to understand today. He wants us to feel what it means to show partiality, the pain that undergirds it, and how we need the Lord's help to not fall prey to the Enemy's lie that it's okay to be...a little biased. Or it's okay to be...a little racist, or...a little sexist. We need to grapple with the issues that are going on in our own hearts when we talk about partiality so we can better understand the lack of partiality that Christ had for all people, especially us sinners who are now saved by grace. This is the only way we can go out and truly love all of our neighbors as Christ loved us, disgusting sinners though we may be. Amen.

<Transition>

We're not done talking about George Floyd and other tragedies in the black community yet, and we'll circle back around to some of these stories later on this morning, but for now let's get to our text to understand James' points that he wants to illuminate in our hearts.

As we read through these verses, you probably noticed that they are extremely instructional. James is seemingly giving us orders of what we should and shouldn't be doing when engaging with people around us, and he is directing his orders to the church community, Jewish Christians, not the world, because of the systemic issues he has seen in the church. Friends, James is writing this letter directly to you and me. And in chapter 2, he's really emphasizing this idea of **partiality**.

So your first question is probably, what does James exactly mean when he mentions partiality? Any quick Google search will show that partiality means an unfair bias in favor of one thing or person compared with another; in another sense, it means favoritism, or biased, or, to even go so far, prejudiced and discrimination. It's the unfair characterization of a person, place or thing and putting it in rank order based on your opinion, and usually based on some pretty sour feelings towards that particular person, place or thing. Said another way, someone or something has more worth, more value, more esteem in your own eyes than someone or something else and so it'll receive different, and many times, obviously better or worse treatment from you.

This is partiality. It means that I am elevating something in my own eyes, and lowering something else in my eyes. On the one hand, this person or this group has higher regard for me and so I'll provide better treatment to **them**, as opposed to the other people or the other group here on the other hand. This is where James wants us to hone in on, is the partiality towards people around us. And in our text James calls out two types of people: one man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, and one man who is poor and wearing shabby clothing. And while the immediate context that James is addressing in his day was literally the sin of showing favoritism to the rich and despising the poor, his words apply to all types of prejudice, whether it is based on economic status, race, gender, disability, or anything else. To favor some people and to disregard others based on outward factors is a terrible sin. Period. And it's not only a sin that's outside the church, but it has also plagued the church going all the way back to James' day, hence the reason why this is in his letter, addressed to us, the church. Friends, partiality has plagued the church in every generation.

Partiality can be seen as another form of pride: I know more than you, or, worse, I **am** more than you. My worth as a human being is greater than your worth. My life matters more than your life. And the bible shows us that this pride, this disease of partiality that we carry in our fallen hearts, is no surprise to God and is fully condemned by Him.

In the book of Genesis, before God floods the earth and restarts his covenant with Noah, we see God grieve. The scriptures say that he was grieved to his heart and he was sorry that he had made man on the earth. And in Genesis 6:5 we read this:

Genesis 6:5

"The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

This human partiality is what caused the first recorded murder with Cain and Abel when Cain thought he deserved God's favor, some would say **over** the favor of his brother Abel. Cain wanted to be the favorite and desired to be noticed when compared to his sheep raising brother. We know that the story doesn't end well for Abel, and this same partiality still fuels the prejudice that we see today all around us. And if you think that God doesn't take partiality seriously, we can look back to the early days of his law in Leviticus 19 to see the weight that God places on partiality. You don't have to turn here, but I'm going to read a few verses in Leviticus 19:

"10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the **poor** and for the **sojourner**: I am the Lord your God."

The lesson: Do not forget the poor and sojourner, also known as the traveler. Pursue holiness by giving graciously to the underserved and the wanderers.

13 “You shall not oppress your **neighbor** or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. 14 You shall not curse the **deaf** or put a stumbling block before the **blind**, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.”

The lesson: Do not insult the disadvantaged and do not delay in paying fair wages to all employees equally.

15 “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be **partial** to the **poor** or defer to the **great**, but in righteousness shall you judge your **neighbor**.”

The lesson: No favoritism is permitted; the poor and the esteemed are to be treated the same.

From early on, God is clear: you shall not show partiality, favoritism, bias, or prejudice. You shall all treat one another equally, and so honor the Lord your God. So let's start thinking about this early on so the thoughts can develop over the next 20 minutes or so. What is it for you? What causes you to show partiality to others? Notice I never said **if** you show partiality. I said, what causes you to show partiality? Favoritism? Prejudice? Racism? Do you gravitate towards people that have a well ordered life and cast aside those “got nothing else to live for except their addiction?” Is that where you draw the line? Or perhaps you find favor in people who are accomplished and well put together while stiff arming the people who “haven't taken a hot bath in months and you can smell them from down the street.” Are those people you keep at arm's length, or even further. Or what about even more simple? When you look at your friend group, your closest friends, are they all pretty homogeneous? Same skin color, same heritage, same highly esteemed Bay Area job, same interests? It's this partiality that we show to people around us that James is referring to. This is the sin of partiality that James is wanting to call out and mortify, yes certainly in the church, but also for us to be a testimony to Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth.

<New Background>

That's a ton of background, I know. But the elders and I wanted to be sure we bring this topic into the foreground to begin having the tough, awkward conversations that many of us shy away from. The church cannot be apathetic about the injustices in our society, and we need to better understand our role as Christians. What to do. How to respond. And to not fall prey to the Enemy's schemes. The main point today that I want us all to walk away with is this:

The sin of partiality shows favoritism based on riches, race, gender, and a multitude of other factors, but we must rise above this in our outward lives as well as in our hearts to live under the law of liberty, which is to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

So let's connect some of these points to our text this morning. I've broken things down into three main headings:

First, the **two classes**.

Second, the **two seats**.

And finally, the **two heart decisions**.

Let's get moving.

Point one: the two classes.

So you'll notice in chapter 2 verse 2, James points out two very distinct people with two very distinct outward appearances. Look there at verse 2. It reads:

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,

I know it's strange to stop mid-sentence like that, but we'll catch up to verses 3 and 4 for our next point. Lightning speed today folks!

We have two men, one wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, and a poor man in shabby clothing. Let's understand a few important facts about the dress of James' day. First off, the rings. He calls out the gold rings because Jews commonly wore rings in those days to showcase their wealth, and few people could actually afford gold rings. As a matter of fact, there are some reports that in James' day the most flamboyant people wore rings on every single finger except the middle finger to show off their economic status. Why not the middle finger? In those times, the middle finger was sometimes reserved for the wedding band during some orthodox Jewish weddings.

To go even further with this attention grabbing ring stuff, there are historical sources that say ring rental businesses existed during that time period. So, some people would actually rent rings to act like they were part of an elite, sought-after class that, in actuality, they never had any rights to. Simply said: they were living a lie. When the sun set or when the clock struck midnight, their life turned back into the nasty pumpkin that it was when the day started, with the rings back to their rightful owner and the person returned back to their normal status. The attention, the stardom, the fame, the recognition, all gone in a matter of an instant. Who would've thought that rings could define one's social standing so much?

But James goes on. He then talks about the clothing of the first man. He describes the clothing as fine clothing there in verse 2. The original greek context of the word here is meant to describe bright, shiny garments. It's actually the exact same word used when referring to the gorgeous garment that Herod's soldiers put on Jesus to mock him before his crucifixion. Let's read that.

Luke 23:11

And Herod with his soldiers treated him (Jesus) with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate.

This splendid clothing, this fine clothing, is the type of clothing reserved for a King. Not only a King. No, no, no. This language of fine clothing also references the way that angels were clothed. In Acts 10:30, we read this:

Acts 10:30

And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing 31 and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’

Friends, an angel visited Cornelius and was wearing bright clothing. Clothing that set the angel apart from anything else in the room. And, safe it to say, to describe angels as bright, vibrant, dazzling, splendid, or anything in our human vocabulary, none of those words would truly give us a sense of the awe and wonder of when an angel appears before a human. How much their light fills a room. How much their vibrance fills in every in-between color that our eyes have never seen. It just can't be compared to any other earthly thing. And this same “bright clothing” from the angel, this same “splendid” royalty from Jesus, both are the same greek word that James uses in verse two to describe the fine clothing of this first man. James is clearly pointing out that this man is walking into the assembly, which, by the way, all an assembly means is a meeting of Christians, so this man is walking into the assembly decked to the nine, which is still probably an understatement, and completely standing out from everyone else that's present. This man's dress **will be** noticed by all who come into his general proximity.

Let's be clear on something before we move on: James is not condemning the first man for his gold ring or his fine clothing. I need to repeat this because I don't want anyone to misunderstand me this morning, especially as we draw parallels back to current events. James is not condemning the first man for his gold ring or his fine clothing. Clothing can be bright, it can be flashy, it can be sparkling. If any of you know the ladies in my household, you know all too well that they all agree that there can't be too much sparkle in any color. And sometimes I'm the victim of that glitter-sparkle-madness by getting it in what little hair I have left or sharing it with the earth around me as the right gust of wind hits my clothes. Honestly, with all the glitter in my household and the amount that gets on me, I sometimes feel like I leave my glory behind me as I round corners, you know, almost the same way that God did with Moses. There is way too much glitter in my household. So the question is, would James condemn my household for liking glitter-sparkle-madness too much? Well, I sure hope not! Otherwise, my family and I are doomed. No, instead James is condemning the church's flattering reaction to it.

But we'll loop back around to the church's response in just a moment.

For now, let's take a look at the second man. The poor man in shabby clothing. Let's start at the man's status: he's poor. We're likely to assume that this man, during that time, not only had little money, but little resources. He probably did not have the means to shower, wash his clothes

with any level of frequency, or even afford other clothes when he was planning to go into the assembly. He certainly couldn't afford one of those ring rentals that we just mentioned a moment ago. James is literally describing the exact opposite of the first man. Do you see that? Instead of some bling on his fingers, the poor man likely only has dust and dirt to show for his fingers. Instead of flashy garments, he is clothed in garments that could likely make your nose sting and your skin curl. James is taking one extreme with the first man, and using a totally opposite extreme with the poor man. It's not some fine detailed nuance of one is wearing a tie and the other isn't. Or one has a handkerchief in his jacket pocket and the other left it at home. No! It is the polar opposite.

Friends, this is how our brains work. **We all create, every single one of us, creates two classes.** No, not me John! Yes, you. And by the way, me too. We all put people into buckets based on their appearance. Rich and poor. Successful and not gonna make it. Man and woman. White and non-white. There's no avoiding it. We're prone to it from very early on in our lives, and we do it both consciously and subconsciously all the time. And I know this because, Mercy Hill, I do it. Me. A Latino. A married man, with two little girls. A college educated, growth mindset kinda dude. A well traveled person, both nationally and internationally, with exposure to many faiths, and many ethnicities. A volunteer. A Christian! Friends, I share this short list of personal attributes not to say "look at me," but rather because partiality crosses all boundaries: race, marital status, education, world-roundedness, volunteerism, faith and non-faith. You could almost liken the sin of partiality to this COVID-19 pandemic: like the virus, the sin of partiality doesn't care who you are, you are susceptible to its stumble. So what's so wrong, so bad, about bucketizing people? The next set of verses begins to answer this question for us.

Point two: the two seats.

So in the text, we see two classes of people, the extreme wealth and the extreme poor. Now let's look at the two seats that they are given. Let's read verses 2 through 4.

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?

Why is this sitting and standing thing such a big deal? Well, the synagogues and assembly halls in those days would generally only have benches around the outside wall and maybe a couple of benches in front. However, most of the congregation either sat cross legged on the floor or stood because the limited number of good seats, these benches, were normally reserved for people of status. And not to mention, they were also the seats that the Pharisees wanted the most. In our text, we see that the wealthy person is told to "sit here" in a good place, a place of honor. Perhaps it was in front, maybe on the outside wall, we're unsure of the exact location, but he is certainly sitting for sure. While the poor person is shown contempt and told either to stand, likely in the back away from the rest of the congregants, or sit down at my feet like a servant. Now keep in mind, the rich man is given privileges only because of his **perceived** wealth. Not anything he said or people recognizing who he is, or any other reason; strictly because of his outward appearance. And, in a polarizing way, the poor man is despised because of his poverty. Again, not because of anything he said, or people recognizing him, or any other reason; strictly because of his outward appearance. One man is given one seat, a good seat, and the other is given a different seat, a less desirable seat. And all based solely on their different outward appearance. Such treatment, James says in verse 4, is evil.

Let's move beyond riches and apply this text to race, because there are parallels. Once upon a time, here in America, we thought it right and justified to have separate but equal facilities for people based purely on the color of their skin. Separate, but equal. This ranged from public schools to public bathrooms to public water fountains to park benches to train seats to bus seats and the list goes on and on.

From the founding of this country in 1776 to 1954 when the Supreme Court overturned the separate but equal doctrine, blacks and whites lived very separate lives. They had two seats ingrained in many fabrics of society, and it was all due to their two classes, that is the color of their skin. And for no other reason. 178 years as a nation we allowed blatant racism to set the foundation of this country, and we did even worse for countless decades before that when early British colonialism began claiming this land in the early 1600s. And you can imagine, it wasn't as if a switch was flipped on that day on May 17, 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that U.S. state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional. No, we

know that the 60s, and the 70s, and the 80s, and the 90s, we now know that even into May 25th, 2020 there are still deep seated passions against people of color. The road to undoing this racial injustice has been a long road. It's been a hard road. And guess what? The road continues. We can't expect for centuries, hundreds of years, of injustice to change in just a matter of a few decades, but **Christians** that's no excuse for us to not elevate this conversation and begin thinking of ways we can eliminate these two seats. The actual physical two seats, and the two seats in our hearts.

And, ladies, don't think that I don't see the same injustices from your viewpoint as well. The publicly condoned sexism and sexual violence, the unfair treatment with wages, the regard to treat women as objects, and just the overall lack of respect in the workplace and in public places towards women. And all due to your class - that is, being a woman. I want you to know that I empathize with your plight - I truly do - and I desire to learn more. You have allies in this church, starting first and foremost with the church leadership, with allyship extending far beyond this into our church body. Racism, sexism, any type of prejudice in any form has no place amongst the saints and it certainly has no place at Mercy Hill.

Mercy Hill, these two seats are real. We can't turn our faces away from it. We can't deny it. We should never justify it. And we dare not excuse it. We must, must accept it. We must confess our part to God, and repent for our part. Because if not, James gives his concern there in verse 4: that you have become judges with evil thoughts. Some translations even go so far as to say you have become judges with vicious intentions. Friends, we can't see the hearts of men as God does. We just can't, because we are not God. But to judge a man based on his outward appearance is to usurp the place of Jesus Christ in His glory as judge of all the earth. James didn't want the church to behave like the sinful world by catering to a preferred class while shunning the other class. But this is what happened in the Christian church in James' day, and still exists today in congregations around the nation and the world.

This takes us into our last point and then we'll wrap up.

Point three: the two heart decisions.

So we see James describe the two classes, then he describes the two seats, and now we get to deal with something more personal: our two heart decisions.

Let's get some alignment here by going back to verse 1 of chapter 2. It reads:

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

To understand this text, we have to see where James is putting his emphasis. Yes, James is saying not to hold our "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" with an attitude of personal favoritism. And, instead, he wants us to place our attention on Jesus Christ and, namely, **His glory**. What do I mean by that? The glory of Christ is not something that can ever really be summed up, and certainly not in the short time that I have left. But I will say the glory of Christy is the glory of his perfect humanity and his full deity in one person. It is his superiority to and fulfillment of the law and the prophets. It is his atoning death, his resurrection, and his ascension. Friends the glory of Christ encapsulates all that is God himself plus the forgiveness of our sins through his death on a cross, a death that he never deserved.

This is where James wants our focus to be, because when our focus is on the **glory** of Christ, it addresses our heart problem of partiality, favoritism, prejudice, in one particular way: it gets us to see how petty our partiality really is, while also recognizing the gravity of its impact on other people. It doesn't matter whether that partiality is between the rich and poor, black and white, or men and women. When we exalt people because of their wealth or race or gender, we actually rob glory from Jesus Christ. Rather than exalting the rich, or a particular race or gender simply based on their outward appearance, we should exalt the supreme glory of Christ alone.

Now, we shouldn't conclude that James is saying that all rich people are bad and that all poor people are good, and the same goes with race and gender. Some rich people are very godly and some poor people are very evil. But James' point is that any judgments based on outward factors alone are wrong judgments, because they do not discern the heart. Only God can judge the heart, and so we are wrong to usurp His place as judge. However, focusing on the **glory** of Christ helps to put our partiality in its proper place.

I think we can all agree that when our heart is **not** pointed to God the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, all that is seen and unseen, we point our heart to his creation. And when we do that, we can't help ourselves but to become partial to what **we deem** is good. And so enter the posture of our hearts. Are they pointed to God, or pointed to the world? There is no in between. Are they pointed to the one that freely gives every good gift to his children, or are they pointed to something in creation that promises good gifts but will ultimately disappoint and turn to dust?

And what's interesting is that partiality will normally flow from one of two heart level sins: **one that is craving human glory, or one that lives in fear.**

So here it all is. The first step of the slippery slope is we have two classes that all of us create as we go about our daily lives. Most if not all of us struggle with not throwing people into one of these two classes. One class that I will grow **towards**, and one that I will remain distant **from**, one that I will **exalt**, and one that I will show **disdain**.

The next step of the slippery slope: We have the two seats. Most, if not all of us, struggle with not putting that lower class in a lower seat, one of a servant. We may only do it with the slight mention of a word, or we may do it by other worse, more sinister means. All the while exhorting and giving the better seat to another person.

Finally, we get to our heart-level decision. Will we give in to craving human glory? Will we give in to fear and show partiality towards that brother or sister because their skin color is different? Or perhaps because they carry less wealth than you? Or perhaps because of their gender? Or will you trust Jesus as the Lord of glory? Will you look to the One that can pull you out of your lowly estate, bring you into a safe place and begin to forgive you for the sins that you confess. Because let us not forget that

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

I can guarantee you, Mercy Hill, that it'll be from that lowly estate and that safe place that the Lord will meet you, help you to showcase the fruits of the spirit towards humanity, that is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; not partiality. Mercy, not racial prejudice. Remember, it is faith in Christ that brings us all into God's family, whatever our backgrounds, and it is faith in Christ that continues to save us each and every day on this side of eternity.

So men, especially dads, I charge you here today to consider what truths of partiality you are teaching your kids. What truths are they, dads? What about to our grandkids, grandparents? And our nieces and nephews, uncles? Are you indoctrinating young, impressionable minds with any biased or prejudiced beliefs that may slip off the tongue all too easily? Because these young, impressionable minds will grow up, Lord willing, and they will point to these moments in time as truths in their life as they mature and grow. And they will act with conviction with some of the lessons we have taught them. And the hope is we have a generation that does not perpetuate two classes, that does not create two seats, and, instead, they make heart decisions led by the fruits of the spirit, not the works of the flesh.

<Closing>

Let's take a look at verses 5 and 6 and we'll start to bring things to a close.

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?

And add to that list, orphans and widows from chapter 1 verse 27.

Church, Jesus has a special care and concern for the poor, the marginalized, the underserved, the orphans, the widows, the blind, the deaf, the castaways, the hated. We see it all throughout his earthly ministry. Now, Jesus certainly offers his love and forgiveness to all people of all walks of life, but Jesus' primary concern is always the heart of his people, not their outward appearance. Those that are poor in spirit and thirst for the kingdom of God. Those that realize how short life is and see their need for eternal life. By choosing these people, God magnifies the riches of His grace towards those that are spiritually bankrupt and have a desire to be filled with the spiritual riches in Christ.

But it had to come at a price. Mercy Hill, Jesus had to be the poor beggar that the world put into the lower seat and condemned for his class, even though he welcomed all classes into his fold: the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the rich, the poor, the children, the women, the sick, the deaf, the lame, even the thief. The most impartial person who ever lived became the victim of our unjust bias and prejudice for being who he was: the King of heaven and earth.

He had to be the homeless servant that was given the lesser seat, journeying from land to land with nowhere to rest his head. He had to be dragged into court, accused of crimes that he never committed, take on the full weight of our sin, and allow his name to be blasphemed.

He had to be the perfect sacrifice that was brutally beaten, hung from a cross and died a horrific death. He had to be the one to do all of this, so that, being rich in mercy, he could take our guilty verdict and issue us, by name, a not-guilty verdict and life everlasting. So that he can encourage us, comfort us, and give us the greatest honor, that is to be called a son and daughter of the most high God.

Without this price being paid, we have no salvation, we have no faith, all we have are our works. And so, yes, let us look to our Savior to see how he fulfilled all that James talks about in these verses. Let us look to Christ as the Lord of glory. Let us trust him as the one who is gloriously strong and gloriously wise and gloriously loving. Let Christ, not partiality, be our glory, all the glory we need.

Application Questions

- Some may think that based on Matthew 7:1, that all judgments are wrong. Is this view wrong? How? Use Matt. 7:6,15 as guidance.
- Consider boundaries between godly discernment (which we all need) and ungodly judgment (which is sin). Where should it be? How can we apply it?
- How should we go about giving to the poor? Should we give indiscriminately, or should we use godly discernment? Where are the lines? For example, Proverbs uniformly mocks the man who is poor because he is lazy or foolish.
 - Ministries of Mercy by Tim Keller is an excellent resource and, in my mind, required reading for everyone in the Christian church. It's also a great group discussion book.