Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Evil of Favoritism in the Church, Part 2
Scripture: James 2:5-7
Code: 59-13

1986

Let's open our Bibles together tonight in James chapter 2 to these first 13 verses. We'll not be able to get through them all tonight and I'm not even going to try to rush. I just really want to open to your heart the things that are here in a full way so that you'll get a grip on what is really a major issue in the church. We've titled this little series on James 2:1 to 13 "The Evil of Favoritism in the Church."

I received a phone call today from a friend back in the midwest and he said to me, "I just had an experience that made me so sad." He said, "I was in a church..." and he went on to describe a certain situation, he didn't know what I was preaching on, and he said, "I never saw such favoritism, such partiality in my life as I saw in this particular church and it grieved my heart to see that."

And I said to him, "Well, you know, that's exactly what I'm preaching these days and I realize that that's a part of our culture and a part of our society." We tend, as I said last week, to stratify everybody, to evaluate everybody on how they look and how they dress and where they went to school and what kind of job they have and home and car and so forth and so on. And we really are a long way from, in many cases, understanding that God evaluates a person purely and simply and only on the basis of their relationship to Him, their soul, their inner man. And the only legitimate favoritism, and there is a legitimate favoritism to be tolerated in the church, the only legitimate favoritism allowed by God is that which allows us to esteem everybody else better than ourselves. That is a legitimate favoritism. Philippians chapter 2 and verse 3, "In lowliness of mind let each regard other better than themselves." But apart from the humility that says I consider you worthy and myself unworthy, I consider your needs more important than my own, I consider serving you more important than serving me, I consider loving you more important than being loved, apart from that kind of legitimate favoritism, any other favoritism is illegitimate and forbidden. And any estimate of a person's worth on the basis of their race, on the basis of their clothing, their money, their education, their position or some other external fact or circumstance is a sin of great proportion.

And very frequently, in fact quite commonly in the church, people who look better and dress better and have more money and better education and better social status who are higher up the ladder of professions seemingly get more status in the church. They tend to receive more favors, more attention, more consideration. Very often less is required of them, and if they do something wrong, no one will approach them with the same eagerness they will approach someone further down the

ladder. People like that usually are able to avoid...what should I say?...elimination from fellowship because everybody sort of wants to make them a part. Whereas there are some folks that are often left out. We tend to tolerate more sin and more evil from people who are higher up the ladder because I suppose we think they're a bit more sophisticated. They may not be quite as ugly in their sinfulness as some less sophisticated people.

But all of those externals show nothing but partiality. And it is unacceptable to God. It is favoritism and it is flatly called by James sin. It has no place in the church, no place whatsoever. In Deuteronomy 10:17 it says, "The Lord your God is a God of Gods and Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty and an awesome God who regards not persons." He has no regard for a person's outward form and outward appearance. And Peter says the same thing, as we noted last time, "Be ye holy for I am holy." And what does that mean? God is no respecter of persons so you be no respecter of persons either, 1 Peter 1:16 and 17.

As we noted last time, God is perfect equity. God is perfect justice. God is perfect impartiality. He treats people with absolute equality based simply and only on the internal condition of the soul, not on the external circumstances. God doesn't care one bit what you look like. He doesn't care how you dress. He doesn't care how much money you have or don't have. He doesn't care about your education and where you went to school. He doesn't care about your social standing. He doesn't care about your prestige. He doesn't care about your race. He doesn't care about any of that, that's all absolutely inconsequential. He is indifferent to all of that. And when the church is anything less than indifferent to that it ceases to be like God.

Now in the text before us James is confronting a problem in the congregation to which he writes. There is partiality in that congregation and he's dealing with it here. And it is another of his tests of living faith. If you want to see whether your faith is real, then test yourself as to your partiality. If you want to see whether the life of God beats in your heart, test yourselves against the principles of partiality. If you want to know whether you are really living out the life of Christ, then test yourselves in regard to the matter of partiality. That's the essence of these verses.

Now he gives us five things to look at: the principle, then the example, then the inconsistency, then the violation and then the final appeal in the last two verses. Obviously, as I said, there was a problem in the church. It wasn't only in the church to which James wrote, it was also in the assembly of believers to which the Apostle John wrote when he wrote 1 John because over and over again in 1 John he says to them you're not a Christian if you don't demonstrate love to your brother. God says it is a mark of true faith that you love your brother, that you love your sister with an equality of love, that is godlike. And if you say you love God but don't love your brother, if you say you love God but hate a certain brother, you say you love God but hate a certain sister, if you are willing to embrace certain people into your friendship and keep other people out of your friendship purely based on the external, that's not a very good record when taking the test of true faith. So it was a problem in the church to

which John wrote, it was a problem in the church to which James wrote as we shall see looking at the text.

Now first of all remember the principle I gave you last week comes in verse 1, "My brothers," he says, "with favoritism...the Greek order is this...with favoritism, do not have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ the glory, or the glorious one." What he is saying is, do not practice partiality. Why? Because practicing partiality and claiming to hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious one, that is God revealed in human flesh, the very God of glory, is absolutely incompatible. You cannot practice partiality and be consistent with calling yourself a Christian. You cannot hold the Christian faith which is centered with the Lord Jesus Christ who is the very essence of the divine presence of God who shows no partiality.

When Jesus came into the world He revealed that God was an impartial God. You read, for example, the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, read the genealogy again recorded in Luke and you will find a list of people in those genealogies that run all the way from the commonest to the king, from very righteous people to prostitutes, harlots, people who committed incest. All kinds of people are in that genealogy. The genealogy of Christ, in a sense, is the great leveler. In that genealogy you have Tamar who committed incest. You have Rahab who was a professional prostitute. You have Ruth who was an idolatress. You have Bathsheba who was an adulteress and the paramour of David. You have those kinds of people all the way to the good and the godly kind of people as well in all stratas of society. Jesus comes even in His genealogy to be the leveler of all men.

And where was Jesus born? He was born in Bethlehem and then after having been born in Bethlehem, the city of David, He then had a choice of where to live and God had set it up so that He would live in Nazareth. Nazareth was the common man's town. In fact, people said, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" And when the Apostles began to preach in the book of Acts, the comment of the leaders of Israel was, "How do these uneducated illiterate Galileans know anything?" They were the despised. They were the up-the-road, out-of-town hicks...uneducated, untrained, unsophisticated, uncultured. And so even the fact that Jesus spent His life up to the age of 30 in that obscure out of the way dusty town in Galilee called Nazareth, which was not even a blue-collar town as we would design to call it, indicates how God is in Jesus Christ giving us a message about impartiality.

And then when you look at the ministry of Jesus Christ, His primary ministry was among what segment of people? The poor. Without question the great bulk of His ministry was to poor people, people who had little or no resources, humanly speaking. And all the way through the ministry of Jesus as well, He taught principles of impartiality. They were part and parcel of everything He taught. For example, in Matthew chapter 20 He told a story about a man who owned some land and wanted to hire some people to harvest the grapes. Went into the city, to the marketplace and early in the morning, six A.M. and hired some men, took them out. Those men worked 12 hours that day. And

then he hired some others. You remember? Later he hired another group. And finally there was a group that only worked one hour and at the end of the day all these people working all different times, they all received the very same pay. Right? Every man received a denarius, says Matthew 20, each man received a denarius. And the principle Jesus wanted to illustrate was that the last shall be first and the first shall be last. What does that mean? That means everybody ends in a dead heat. If the last are first and the first are last, then everybody finishes at the same time because if you're first you become last and if you're last you become first. And as soon as you're first, you're last, as soon as you're last you're first. You understand that?

So what He is saying is you're all going to end up at the same point. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter how you served, if you loved God you're going to receive the same eternal life. That's a wonderful promise...wonderful promise.

In Matthew chapter 22, also, later on as Jesus spoke, He gave another very fascinating parable about a wedding. It's the marriage of the king's son...referring to Christ. And in Matthew 22 we come to it in verse 9, he says to the servants, verse 8, the wedding is ready. Then he says in verse 9, "The guests who were supposed to come didn't show," that's the nation Israel, so he says, "Go out into the highways and as many as you find, bid them to the marriage." There's no discrimination there. There's no partiality. So they went to the highways and they gathered together all as many as they found...bad and good. In other words, people who were moral and people who were immoral, people who were religious and people who were irreligious, good, nice, faithful family types and evil street people...everything. And then the wedding was furnished with guests. When it comes to calling people to Himself, Jesus was absolutely impartial. In fact there was only one requirement for salvation and that was to acknowledge yourself to be...what?...a sinner...a sinner.

So, whether you're talking about the genealogy of Jesus, you're talking about the place in which He was raised in Nazareth, you're talking about the focus of His ministry among poor people, we note that He demonstrates this great impartiality. In fact, in Mark 12 when He was teaching in the synagogue it says in verse 37, "And the common people heard Him gladly..." rather He was teaching in the temple. And teaching in the temple speaking of the truth, the scribes, of course, and the Pharisees were antagonistic, but the common people heard Him gladly. So He said to the common people, "Beware of the scribes, they love to go in long clothes, they love salutations in the marketplaces, they love the chief seats in the synagogues and the upper most places at feasts, they devour widows' houses and for a pretense they make long prayers, these shall receive greater condemnation."

And to illustrate His impartiality, immediately He says, He sat opposite the treasury, does Mark, and people started putting in their money and a certain poor widow came. And the rich people put in much and the poor widow threw two mites and He said, "Now there is a lady who gave more than everybody else because she gave everything she had." What people had, how people dressed, all

that religious falderal meant absolutely nothing to Christ. He was absolutely utterly and totally impartial and evaluated people simply and only upon the openness of their heart and their willingness to respond in faith to the message which He proclaimed. In fact, it all sums up, I think, in Luke chapter 5 verse...I believe it's verse 32, He says, "I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

So the principle then is illustrated. Let's go back to James. The principle is illustrated in the life of Christ. So you cannot hold partiality in one hand and hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ, the very God of glory, in the other hand. Those are absolutely incompatible. If you are committed to the faith of Jesus Christ you must be committed to impartiality, that's the principle. The example, do you remember it in verses 2 to 4, if there comes into your assembly a man gold fingered, more than one ring, gold fingered, he's wearing fine clothes, there comes also a poor man in shabby clothing and you show favoritism to the one that wears the fine clothes and say sit over here in a good place, and you say to the poor man, stand there or get down under my footstool, which is to say get somewhere will you, out of the way preferably. Are you not then partial in yourselves and have become judges with evil intent?

He postulates a somewhat hypothetical illustration to show the kind of behavior that is sinful. There were some special seats in a synagogue, there probably were a few special seats in the place the assembly of the church met as well. But there was to be no partiality shown to somebody giving him the special seat because of the way he dressed and because of his money. The gospel is to be an equalizer.

Back in chapter 1 that was made clear in verses 9 to 11. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted into rich in that he is made low." The gospel is the equalizer. It takes the poor man and exalts him to heavenly riches. It takes the rich man and strips him of all the uselessness of earthly riches. And so it's the equalizer. And James says if you do that, if you show partiality to someone like this usher at this particular church service, you have become a judge. Or literally are you not making distinctions in yourselves? You're judging. You're separating. You're dividing people.

Now some judgment is necessary in the sense of evaluating truth and error, evaluating right and wrong, in the sense of righteous judgment, in the sense of disciplining sin. But an arbitrary favoritism for someone who is simply shows up more on the outside than someone else is sinful. Someone whose outward appearance or status is superior to another one should not be treated any differently at all. And it's precisely that which God forbids us to do who bear His name. If we're going to bear the name of God, we have no business acting in an ungodly way. And when a believer does this, he contradicts the Christian faith at its very core. Think about Christ, it says in 2 Corinthians 8:9 He was rich but for our sake He became...what?...poor that we through His poverty might be made rich. Jesus also said in Matthew 11:29 in that wonderful beautiful invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, I am meek and lowly

in heart and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Come everybody, come everybody. The gospel's a great leveler...anyone who needs rest, anyone who needs forgiveness. That's the essence of the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. And anyone who does other than that is guilty of judgment, guilty of being a judge with an evil discriminating motive. You have become judges, he says, with evil thoughts.

Now thirdly, he talks not only about an appeal...about a principle and an illustration or example, but thirdly, about the inconsistency. And I want you to notice this in verses 5 to 7, this is very very practical and very interesting. Verses 5 to 7, "Hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him? But you have despised the poor. Do not rich man oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats, do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called?" Stop at that point.

And James is here pointing out the absolute inconsistency of being disrespectful to poor people or people who are lower on some...some human level of evaluation. And this is a call to listen. He starts in verse 5, "Listen, hearken, tune in on this, my beloved brethren." It's a warm call to listen. It's aimed at the heart. "My beloved brethren," is a respectful way to talk. It shows that he's giving them his word not only because he's concerned from the standpoint of truth but he's concerned from the standpoint of love...my beloved brethren. He's not just a hard-hearted expositor of truth, he also has a passion for the people who are the objects of that teaching. I understand that kind of pastor's heart. You love the truth but you also love the people. And so he doesn't hammer them in the head, he says, "My beloved brethren, listen to me." Like every good preacher, every good exhorter, he calls for their attention. And he's saying let me show you the inconsistency of this partiality. To be partial to the rich and the status people and to turn your back on others who are below that level is inconsistent in light of two facts...here they come, they're in the text. Number one, the divine choice of the poor, "Has not God chosen the poor?" Number two, the blasphemy of the rich, verse 7, "Don't they blaspheme that worthy name by which you're called?"

When you side with the rich, you side with the blasphemers. When you go against the poor and the downcast, you go against the ones God has chosen. You are utterly inconsistent. You have reversed the whole picture. Partiality then is inconsistent in the light of those two facts.

Let's look at fact number one. This is most interesting. The divine choice of the poor, verse 5 again, "Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him but you have despised the poor." That really should go into verse 5. God has chosen the poor but you, if you act like this, have despised the very ones God has chosen. Now what poor is he talking about? Not the poor in spirit, this has no relationship to Matthew chapter 5, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This isn't talking about poor in spirit, this is talking about poor in status, economics.

Generally speaking, and we don't really have time to exhaust the subject, but generally speaking throughout God's redemptive history God has chosen the poor. What poor? Those that are poor in this world, or literally those who are poor in the eyes of the world...the ones the world thinks are the poor, the ones who are the down and outers, if you will, the ones who are without. It is a general principle. The elect of God are dominated by the poor, the people who do not have everything that the rich possess.

Now that's not to say that no rich folks are chosen by God because some rich folks definitely are chosen by God. In Genesis Abraham was a very very wealthy man...extremely wealthy, probably wealthy beyond, vastly beyond other men of his own time. In Genesis 13:2 it says, "Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold." He was very rich. God had prospered him and God chose him, not only chose him but chose him to the father of a nation. Job, that very unique and special man, also a godly man. Godly in the sense that few other men would be godly. In fact, he was so godly that God literally turned Satan loose on him to test him. He was so wealthy his substance, Job 1:3 says, was seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she asses, a very great household so that this man was the greatest or the wealthiest of all the men of the east. The wealthiest guy in the world. He would have been top of the list in the latest issue of Forbes Magazine.

And then there was Joseph of Arimathea who was a rich man. A prosperous rich man, rich enough to provide a garden tomb for the burial of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we bless God that that rich man was redeemed. And then there was Levi who later became known as Matthew. And he was the tax collector and all tax collectors were loaded because the whole profession was filled with graft. Matthew was wealthy. He was not a poor man.

There were rich in the early church. In 1 Timothy 6:17 to 19 Paul says to Timothy, "Charge them that are rich, charge them that are rich to share." That is, to stoop down and help those that are not rich, those that are poor. Zacchaeus, according to Luke 19, was the chief of all tax collectors which probably meant that not only was he collecting money for himself but he was getting a piece of everybody else's action also. Again, a very wealthy man. He had parlayed what he took in taxes into an absolute fortune, so much so that he could repay everybody multiple times what he took from them. So there are in God's economy certain elect people who are rich.

But in spite of that the general mass of redeemed people has come from the poor. And God has a special affection and love for the poor. In Psalm, let's look at the Psalms for a moment, and let me just see if I can't give you an understanding of this. God has chosen the poor in the eyes of the world, James says. They are the elect. They are the ones who are desperate. They are the ones who cry out for resources. They are the ones who need help. And listen to the heart of God in Psalm 41, "Blessed is he that considers the poor." Psalm 41:1, "Blessed is he that considers the poor, the Lord

will deliver him in time of trouble and the Lord will preserve him and the Lord will keep him alive and he shall be blessed upon the earth and thou will not deliver him unto the will of his enemies, the Lord will strengthen him on the bed of languishing, thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."

In other words, you take care of the poor and God will take care of you because you have the heart of God. Psalm 68, and I can't even start to give you all the scriptures on this subject, but just a few, Psalm 68 verse 10 says, "O God, thou hast prepared of Thy goodness for the poor." Beautiful statement. Thou hast prepared of Thy goodness for the poor.

Psalm 72 verse 4, "He shall judge the poor of the people. He shall save the children of the needy and break in pieces the oppressor." God is the defender of the poor. He meets their need and He goes after their enemies. Verse 12, "He shall deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also and him that has no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy and save the souls of the needy." Mark that, "He will save the souls of the needy."

See, rich people tend so much to be able to solve all their own problems with their own resources whereas the poor in their desperation so often cry out to a source of supply greater and beyond themselves. In Psalm 113 verse 7, "He raiseth up the poor of the dust, He lifteth the needy out of the dump, the dung hill, the manure pile, the trash bin." God picks up those kinds of people.

Go to Proverbs for a moment and a few other passages that give us the heart of God in this matter. Proverbs 17:5, very important scripture, "Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his maker." When you mock a poor man, when you say to a poor man, "Get down here on the floor out of the way, get over to the side," when you treat a poor man with disdain, when you are unfaithful to meet a poor man's need, you mock the poor man's maker. You reproach the poor man's maker. And the poor man's maker is God.

In Proverbs 21:13, "Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he shall also cry himself but shall not be heard." If your prayers aren't being answered, you might do a little inventory and see if you've stopped your ears to the need of someone around you. I want to be sensitive to that.

I received a little note on my desk today. It said, "Here's a dollar," a gift of a dollar. "This is all we can send because our family doesn't have any money left for food this month." I believe God put that across my desk as a test because He knew what I was teaching. It happens that way, week after week after week. How you respond to the poor is how you respond to those that are the special concern and the special care of God.

In Proverbs 28:27, "He that gives to the poor shall not lack but he that hides his eyes and says, I didn't see that, I don't want to get involved, shall have many a curse. But if you give to the poor you won't lack anything." You can give away to the poor and God will replenish, God will give it right back,

put it right back. Proverbs 29:7, "The righteous considers the cause of the poor but the wicked doesn't regard it." He doesn't want to know about it.

Proverbs 31:9 says, "Plead the cause of the poor and needy, plead the cause of the poor and needy." And what is the Proverbs 31 woman? Verse 20, "She stretches out her hands to the poor, she reaches forth her hands to the needy." She has the heart of God.

In Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah, chapter 3 verse 14, the Lord's going to enter into judgment with the ancients of His people, the leaders of Israel. And He's going to enter judgment because they have eaten the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. You have robbed the poor. Then in the next verse he says, "What mean you that you beat My people to pieces and grind the faces of the poor? says the Lord God of hosts." Careful how you treat God's people who are poor. "Woe unto them who decree unrighteous decrees," chapter 10 of Isaiah, "who write grievances which they have prescribed to turn aside the needy from justice, to take away the right from the poor of My people that widows may be their prey and that they may rob the fatherless. And what will you do in the day of visitation and in the desolation which shall come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory?" What are you going to do when I come after you for the way you've treated the poor?

In chapter 25 of Isaiah, another one, and as I say these are only representative. Chapter 25 starts, "O Lord, thou art my God. I will exalt Thee, I'll praise Thy name for Thou hast done wonderful things, Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and true, Thou hast made of a city an heap of a fortified city a ruin, a place of foreigners to be no city, it shall never be built, therefore shall the strong people glorify Thee, the city of the terrible nation shall fear Thee for Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat when the blast of the terrible ones is like a storm against the wall."

In other words, God, You help people in distress. You reach out to the poor. You reach out to those who are in great need. That's part of Your character. That's the essence of who You really are. And how can we say we're the people of God if...if we don't do that?

Amos condemns Israel in chapter 2 because they have sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes. They sinned against the poor people, the very special people who are cared for by God. Chapter 4 says, "You oppress the poor, you crush the needy." This was continually one of the sins for which the nation Israel needed to repent. Chapter 5 he says it again in verse 12, "You turn aside the poor in the gate." So you get a little idea from those and we could look at a lot of other scriptures that God has a heart for the poor.

Partiality, discrimination against people because they're lower on the economic level, lower educationally, lower in terms of what they own and possess and whatever really is so contrary to the

nature of God as to be worthy of judgment. You look at the Old Testament and see how God provided for the poor. In the sacrificial system, poor people sometimes couldn't afford a lamb so God said if you can't afford a lamb bring a turtledove or a pigeon. Every seventh year was the sabbath year of the land and the poor people had all their debts cancelled at the seventh year so that a poor person would never go deeper and deeper and deeper in the debt just to survive. In the Jubilee Year everybody was set free, all the slaves who worked for someone else were given an opportunity to reorient their whole life. When they harvested every year, the corners of the field were not to be harvested, they were to be left for the poor to come in and collect what remained in the corners of the field so the poor could share in the benefit of the crop.

According to Leviticus chapter 25 verses 35 to 37, no one was ever to charge interest to a poor person. You either gave them the money, or you gave them an interest free loan. Anything else was usury and was severely to be punished by God. Any time a poor person got into debt, Leviticus 25:25 says a brother could come along and free him from that. He could redeem that indebted poor person. And Leviticus 25:39 also indicates that when a poor person was out of a job, the neighbor nearest was to employ that poor person. So God set up in that nation ways to help the poor people, a built in way for them to share in the benefit of the harvest, for them to be released from all their debts, for them to offer sacrifices that were very inexpensive, for them to be loaned money and given money without any interest, for them to be redeemed from debt by a brother and for them to be given employment by a neighbor. And if you say you walk with God, says James, then who...He who chose the poor, the poor of this world to be rich in faith will reveal Himself through your attitude toward those people. You'll share His concern. One who walks with God will share the concern of God for poor people, for needy people. As James said it in chapter 1, "Pure religion and defiled is to visit the widows and the orphans," right? Because that's the heart of God. That's the attitude of God.

Jesus came to the rich young ruler, He said, "Let Me test whether you're willing to follow Me." Here's something you're going to have to face, "Take everything you have, sell it and get the money and give it to...whom?...the poor," Matthew 19:21. And he went away, he didn't want to do that. Poor people of are special concern to the heart of God...so many, many illustrations of that. They keep buzzing around in my mind.

In Luke 19 verse 8, Zacchaeus when he was converted, that man who was the chief of all tax collectors and he was rich, it says in verse 2. When he was converted to Christ it says, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the...what?...poor." Why? Because all of a sudden the heart of God was controlling Zacchaeus. "And if I've taken anything from anybody by false accusation, I give him back four fold. And Jesus said, This day is salvation come to this house." How do you know that's true salvation? Because you see the heart of God, the attitude of God. The attitude of God is to help the people who are poor, downcast. That's just so evident through the ministry of Jesus. His particular concern was for people who had little.

You remember the little purse that they carried? The disciples? And when they were in Bethany and Jesus was anointed with this beautiful smelling ointment, Judas got all upset. You remember what he said. "We could have sold that for 300 days' wages and given it to the poor." That leads me to believe that they probably did a lot of that, that it was probably fairly customary for the disciples to collect in their little bag money. And then instead of using it for themselves, wind up giving it to the poor. And of course the next verse says, "Judas cared not for the poor, he was a thief and he had the bag and he possessed what was in it." Zacchaeus, truly converted, wanted to give half of his goods to the poor. Judas, there with all of the apostles, gives evidence of never being converted because he could have cared less about the poor, he wanted it in his own pocket. So that kind of love, that kind of giving which reaches out to people who are poor marks true salvation. That's why James is using this as a test.

Do you remember the words of Paul in Galatians 2:10? He says, "We need to go to the Gentiles and we need to say...and they unto the circumcision, only they would that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was diligent to do." In other words, Paul says when I was commissioned by the Jews, sent out to preach the gospel, they said go to the Gentiles as well as the circumcision and don't forget the poor. And he says I was diligent to do that. Always taking a collection for the poor. In Macedonia and Achaia he says in Romans 15:26, we got a collection for the poor. You get the picture. I don't want to belabor it any more than that.

God identifies with the poor. And when God chose the nation Israel, He chose them because they were the least of all people. In a very real sense, they were the most desperate group of all. Deuteronomy 7:7 and 8, you ought to know that passage, it's really at the very heart of God's choosing Israel. It says, "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any people, you were the least of all people but because the Lord loved you and because He would keep the yoke which He swore unto your fathers has the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you out of the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt." God saw you in your distress, God saw you in your poverty, God loved you and God chose you.

What about the church? Look at 1 Corinthians 1:26 and here is the characterization of the church. "You see your calling, he says, brothers, you see your calling how that not many of you are wise men after the flesh, not many erudite, highly educated, not many are mighty, powerful prominent, not many are high brow noble, not in the church, but God choose...chose to call the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, the base or common things of the world, the things which are despised like poor people God has chosen, things which are nothing to bring to nothing things that are in order that no flesh should glory in his presence, or in himself."

So, the church is common folks and if you want to know who the Corinthian church was, let me introduce you to them. They're described for us as former fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunks, revilers, extortioners, etc. Nice group. But that was the church, such were some of you. So when God chose the church they were the poor, the common, just as when He chose Israel, Israel was poor and in bondage but He chose them.

Now go back to James and let's see what He chose them to. It says, "Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him." First He chose them, two promises, to be rich in faith. They may never have the riches of the world but to be rich in faith. Their faith in Christ, it means, has brought them eternal riches...eternal riches...the true riches, the true riches. All that any man and a woman could ever hope for, could ever ask for, He gives us richly all things in Christ. His riches super abound to us, not in an earthly sense but in an eternal sense, in a spiritual sense. Romans, I think it's 10:12, yes, there's no difference between the Jew and the Gentile, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. And whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So He is rich toward the ones who come in faith. And in chapter 11 verse 33, cries out Paul with this great benediction, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how rich we are, how gloriously rich we are in Christ."

In 2 Corinthians 6:10 similarly he says, "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich," and he's describing the nature of his apostleship and he says, I've had the privilege of making many rich...not in a monetary sense, in a spiritual sense.

We, of course, as Paul says, can do all things through Christ who strengthens us because His riches have abounded to us. My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ. And the verses go on and on and on. The point is obvious. Those who were poor in the physical realm become rich in the spiritual dimension. Secondly, he says not only do they become rich in spiritual dimension through faith but they become heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to them that love Him.

What is the Kingdom? The sphere of salvation. We say it over and over again. The Kingdom is the sphere of salvation with all that that includes, and all that that implies. Really these two phrases, "rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He's promised to them that love Him," are saying the same thing. We become rich and how rich? We own the Kingdom, we possess the Kingdom. All that God has promised to those that love Him become ours.

Let me just give you this little theological note. The Kingdom is inseparably linked to salvation, right? The Kingdom is inseparably linked to salvation. Calling someone to the Kingdom is calling someone to salvation. That's just very very basic. And perhaps that can be illustrated to you in case you might

be confused. Matthew 19, for just a brief moment, and I want to make this point, it sort of sticks in here a little bit but not right in the flow but so many people ask this question: what is the Kingdom and how do we understand the Kingdom? It's really...it's really to be understood as inseparably linked to the matter of salvation.

For example, in Matthew 19:16, watch the terminology here. Here comes a young ruler and he says to Jesus, "Good Master, what do I do that I may have eternal life?" So now we're going to talk about eternal life. Verse 23, "Jesus said to the disciples after talking with that young man, I say to you that a rich man shall with great difficulty enter into...what?...the Kingdom of heaven." The Kingdom of heaven then can be equated with what? Eternal life. Then you go to verse 24 and He said, "In fact it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into...what?...the Kingdom of God." So now you have eternal life, Kingdom of heaven, Kingdom of God all inseparably linked.

And then verse 28, "Jesus said to them, Verily I say to you that you who have followed Me in the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, He'll also sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel and everyone that has forsaken houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for My namesake shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life."

So here you have all these terms being thrown around in one passage...everlasting life, eternal life, Kingdom of God, Kingdom of heaven, and what they all are doing is calling a person to salvation and the fullness of all that salvation means. So when he says you'll be heirs of the Kingdom, he means you will inherit everything that salvation can possibly bring to you, all the eternal reward, all the blessing in time as well will belong to you. The fullness of salvation, the richness of God's eternal blessing is promised to the poor who become rich in faith.

Notice what he says there also, "To them that love Him." So two things are said to be exercised here. One is faith and the other is love. Where a person puts faith in Christ and loves Him, he gives evidence of having received by inheritance the riches of the eternal Kingdom of God.

I want to tell you something, folks. There aren't going to be any poor folk in heaven. There aren't going to be any outcasts in heaven. And I hear people preach all the time, "Well, you know, you're going to get rewards and if you goof your life up you're going to have...you're going to have just a small place in heaven." I heard a sermon about a guy who said, "Now whatever you're doing in this life is sending up building materials. And some of you are sending up fine brick and marble and some of you are sending up the most beautiful pillars and you're going to be living in this mansion in this fabulous place. And some of you are sending up there cardboard and two-by-fours and you're going to be living in heavenly shanty town," and on and on and on he went. I want you to know that there's no respecter of persons in heaven and that includes God. There won't be any poor people and there

won't be...heaven hasn't got any slums, to put it mildly. Everybody's going to be living in the Father's house. We're all going to receive the same eternal life. We're all going to inherit totally the promised Kingdom in all its glorious fullness. It will all be ours no matter how long we worked, how short we worked, we get the full same wages, we'll all be like Jesus Christ, those are all wonderful truths.

So what is James saying? He's saying, "How in the world can you look down on the poor when God has chosen the poor to be the eternally rich?" But then comes the point that really stabs them, "You," verse 6, "have despised the poor." You have despised them. You are unbelievably unlike God.

The second issue here is the blasphemy of the rich. He says, "Why would you be partial to the rich? Do not rich men," verse 6, "oppress you and drag you before the judgment seat." That's civil court. And history will tell you that the rich have oppressed the poor. "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you are called?" Not only do they drag you before civil courts, but they drag you into religious courts. Not only do they depreciate your human value, but they depreciate your religion. Civil hostility and religious hostility.

When it says oppressed, that is the word tyrannize, and it probably refers to the Sadducees who were the most tyrannical of all. They were the ones who most offended the early church in its beginnings. But in general the rich have oppressed the poor. We read about some of that in our reading of the Old Testament. So the rich man coming into the church in the illustration of verses 2 to 4 is a symbol of the rich who oppressed. And the poor man is a symbol of the poor who were generally oppressed. The word "draw," it says draw you before judgment seat, literally is the word "drag." And it means force, it's the idea of dragging you into court to exploit you by some injustice, some inequity. And worse than that, they blasphemed the worthy name by which you're called. What is that worthy name? The worthy name of Jesus. They slandered Jesus. They slander the Lord Jesus Christ. Wealthy Christ-rejecting Jews, no doubt, in that community rejecting Jesus as their Messiah were blaspheming the name of Jesus, dragging these poor people in to courts, harassing them. This is the worthy name by which you're called.

That little phrase "by which you are called" speaks of personal relationship. This was, by the way, first done at their baptism. When those early believers were baptized they were first called by the name of Jesus. They took on, as it were, the name Christian, Christ's own, Christ's one, belonging to Christ. So James reminds them that at their baptism they took on the worthy name of Jesus Christ. And it's the rich people who oppress them, not the poor people. Always...even with Christ it was never the poor people who oppressed Him it was always the religious leadership, the petty kings.

And so, James reminds them that they belong to Jesus Christ and they are not to practice partiality. For one thing, they ought not to look down on the poor, God chose the poor to be rich in eternal riches. They ought not to side with the rich, it's the rich who usually oppress the poor. And if you have an attitude of partiality, you line up with the enemy rather than the worthy name of the Lord Jesus.

In summation, listen carefully. Looking back all the way to the beginning of the chapter, these first seven verses, we can say because we are one with the Lord Jesus Christ who is the glory of God revealed, we cannot show partiality. Two, because God has chosen the poor, we cannot show partiality. Three, because God has called us by His name, we cannot show partiality.

In other words, everything is bound up with the purpose and the person of God in Christ. And if we're going to be like Christ and reveal His glory and feel as He feels and honor the name we bear, then we cannot be partial. The likeness of God must show in us in caring for the poor in our fellowship, the poor in our congregation and not being partial to the rich.

One writer says, "Money still does the talking far too loudly in Christian circles and where and when it does the glory of Christ departs."

In verse 8 James moves to the seriousness of this sin and we'll save that for next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

Listen carefully. My dad told the story of a poor but well- known Japanese Christian who is now with the Lord. His name was Toyohiko Kagawa. He was burdened deeply for the poor Japanese people in the slums of Kobe. And he spent the years of his life in those slums demonstrating his love to those who were downcast and down trodden. He was a small man with a frail body. And one of his lungs was diseased with tuberculosis.

On a visit to America the doctors told him that he couldn't live long, so he returned to the slums of Kobe saying, "If my life is short, it will be full." He moved into a room in the slums so the needy could get to him and there in the stench of those back streets Toyohiko Kagawa lived. Every day he preached in the streets to the poor people.

On one particular day as he was preaching, his text was John 3:16 and his theme was the love of God for unworthy sinners. It wasn't an easy place to preach the love of God, a dismal rain, a dank street, dispersed the crowd and rough men laughed and mocked at him. What does this little man with his funny talk about God know? And what does anyone know about whether God loves us or not?" one man mocked. It seemed they had the right side of the argument for even as Toyohiko tried to answer them he coughed the hacking cough and spit up a significant amount of blood.

They laughed and said, "If God loves you why doesn't He do something for you?" The persistent little man lifted his arm, wiped the blood from his mouth with his sleeve and went on with the story of God's love. And the biographer says, "Gradually in the cold street there ruckus voices were stilled, for stealing in on their pagan minds was the realization that right before their eyes in that little sick man was the very proof of what he was saying. Toyo Hikokagawa was actually a demonstration of God's

love."

Our love for people is not often expressed in such dramatic terms, I admit. But in the everyday ways we show impartiality by caring for those in our fellowship who have need, and maybe those outside who have need with no thought of anything for ourselves but the value of their soul we show the character of God.

I read this week a story about a barber. In one week his business increased greatly...in fact it almost doubled. He couldn't understand why until he discovered that his competitor down the street was sick, so all of his customers were coming to him. When the week ended, he took what he had made over his average week and gave it to the ill man and said it was a gift of Christian love. He demonstrated the attitude of God in such a gift. Reaching out to others, impartiality demonstrates true salvation, the life of God at work in the soul of a man and woman.

Father, we thank You for this time again tonight, for the power and the pointedness of Your Word to us, so much to say, so many things. Lord, somehow in this failing approach to these things which leaves out so much, help us to understand this great principle that we are not to be partial as You are not partial but to love all with the same love and to be generous and gracious to all and kind to all and evaluate all as You do on the basis of the worth of an eternal soul. Save us from the sin of favoritism and make our church a church where all are equally welcome and beloved for who they are in Jesus Christ. May we have His love toward all those around us.

Father, we pray that we'll have opportunity this week to apply these things. Give us that opportunity some way some how to live out this truth so that it's reinforced and becomes a part of our most natural responses. We'll thank You for that in Christ's name. Amen.

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