

James Chapter 2A

Working our way through the Bible Verse by Verse we encounter every topic, we study every issue, we evaluate every doctrine that God in his infinite wisdom has given to us. In this way God sets the course, He determines the priorities and He provides us with a perfectly balanced diet whereby we might grow in His image and likeness.

- There are churches whose sole focus is social justice and they teach only those portions of Scripture that motivate their people to make a difference in the world.
- There are churches whose single focus is the Holy Spirit and they teach on the baptism, the gifts and Fruit of the Spirit continually.
- BUT when you read every book, when you study every chapter all of the doctrines of God are uncovered within the context and with the emphasis and clarity that God Himself has ordained.

When we study the Bible verse by verse, we encounter the progressive revelation of God and we discover all of His glorious attributes in the way that He chose to reveal them to man throughout Human History. (example)

- He is the creator, the one who delivers man from bondage; He is the Holy Law giver and the Sacrificial Lamb, the one who dwells with his people in glory and faithfully leads them out of bondage into His promised rest.
- I find it astounding that God, using simple language has magnificently revealed his majestic glory and His manifold perfections to common ordinary people.

Reading through Exodus 34, in a way that any 6th grader can understand, God declares His glorious perfections as He passes by His servant Moses.

Exodus 34: "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,

Throughout the Bible God reveals the fact that He is NOT LIKE us, He is Holy, He is unchanging, He is perfect in righteousness and faithfulness. He forgives sin and His steadfast love endures forever. We also learn that He is uncompromisingly just.

- There is no one like him! Every attribute that is revealed elicits greater adoration and adulation from those who believe.
- Among the manifold perfections of our glorious God there is one attribute that is often overlooked, that is the attribute that we will focus on this morning,
- God is impartial in all of his dealings with people. As I said He is not like us.

Human beings, even Christians are naturally inclined to show partiality.

It is very common for us to judge the people that we meet, to place them into predetermined categories ranking them by their looks, by their clothes, by their race, by their social stature, their intelligence or their wealth.

We judge people almost immediately by their speech, the kind of car that they drive, the house in which they live. We judge them by the behavior of their children.

- I believe that Favoritism, Partiality and Prejudice are part of our sinful fallen nature.

All you need do is spend one week riding on a Middle School bus with my wife and you will see the natural and sinful partiality and prejudice of which I speak.

- Children refuse to sit with other children because they dress funny, because they smell bad or because they have a speech problem.
- They relentlessly badger kids who wear the wrong kind of shoes. They verbally abuse children who are over-weight. They mock kids who can't afford a cell phone.
- But before we point a finger at everyone else, WE have to admit that we too show partiality, WE play favorites, BUT God does not!

Deuteronomy 10: 17 **For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. 18 He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.**

In the Book of Romans Paul states it plainly: (2:11) **For God shows no partiality.**

- Since Jesus is God, we would expect to see this attribute in Him. (*He doesn't disappoint us*)
- The spies who were sent to trip Jesus up in his words came to him saying:

Luke 20:21 **So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.**

- Their motives were wrong but their facts were right. The Second person of the Trinity does not show partiality.

It stands to reason then, that those of us who have been born of God, those who have become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2 Peter 1:4)

- WE too should NOT show partiality, WE too should not show favoritism.

John 7: 24 **Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."**

1 Peter 1: 15 **but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile**

ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

- We are called (Better) we are commanded to reflect His holiness.

James Chapter 2 the Half-Brother of our Lord addresses our fleshly partiality clearly expressing the sinful folly that is expressed through our prejudice.

1. The Imperative – James gives an imperative statement regarding Favoritism
2. The Illustration – Illustrations help us personalize the command that is given.
3. The Inconsistency – Favoritism toward the wealthy is inconsistent with logic.
4. The Infraction – We break God’s holy law through favoritism. (Not today)

Chapter 2 of James opens with an imperative that demands our attention.

James 2: 1 **My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.**

- James bluntly, clearly forbids believers from showing partiality, or favoritism based on appearance or financial status.
- IF we were to read that sentence literally, it would read this way, “**DO not hold faith in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ with favoritism.**”
- Saving faith and fleshly favoritism are incongruous. They simply don’t fit together in the life of the Church corporately or personally you cannot hold faith and favoritism together.

The picture that immediately entered my mind as I read this verse arose from my many attempts to carry all of the groceries, every bag and bottle in from the car in one single trip. (It’s a man thing)

Arriving at the door only to find that the door is locked. NOW I have to try to get the key out of my pocket and into the door, propping the screen door open with my hip, all the while holding 8 bags of groceries and 4 gallons of water in my now shaking hands.

- No matter how hard I try, I cannot hold the keys and the groceries at the same time. It just doesn’t work.
- I have one of two options; Kick the door with my foot while yelling Sharon!
- OR put down the groceries and put the key in the lock and go into the house.

James is commanding us to do the later. We must put down every semblance of partiality and every fleshly form of favoritism and hold firmly to Christ our glorious Redeemed.

- This was one of the first issues addressed by the Holy Spirit when the Gospel moved outside of the borders of Israel.

In Acts Chapter 10, we learn an important lesson on prejudice and impartiality from the Apostle Peter.

- It was around noon when Peter went up to the roof of the house to pray. While he was praying his stomach began to growl.

- As the meal was being prepared Peter became completely consumed with a thought, in a vision He saw a sheet descending from the sky and on it were all kinds of animals, reptiles and birds of the air. (You could say this was a Non-Kosher Picnic blanket)

Acts 10: 13 And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." 16 This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

- God was preparing Peter for what was about to happen.
- While he was still confused about these strange images, he had seen a knock came at the door.
- Three men from the house of a Roman Centurion had been sent to bring Peter to the town of Caesarea to share the Gospel with Cornelius.
- The Spirit confirmed Peter's mission and he headed off to Caesarea.

In the house of Cornelius, 28 he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

- Cornelius went on to tell Peter how the Lord had led him to find Peter and that He sent the men to retrieve Him.

And Cornelius said: "Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."

Acts 10:34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. 36 As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all),

- Peter said, "I get it!" God is not a respecter of persons! This Gospel is for all people, it must be proclaimed in every nation throughout the world.

Moving on in James to Vs. 2 After giving a firm command like a good preacher James employs a hypothetical illustration in order to make sure that we get the point. And that moves us from the Imperative to the Illustration.

2 The Illustration

James 2: 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,

- Get the picture, The worship service is about to begin but before it does, two individuals arrive seemingly at the same time.

- The imagery that James uses is both picturesque and clear. One of men appears to be of significant means. He is the quintessential image of status and wealth. He is described literally as having gold fingers and shiny clothes. (*You walked into the party like you were walking on to a yacht. You're so vain!*)
- The second worshipper is the polar opposite of the first. This individual is a poor man, dressed in shabby clothes. James describes him as one of abject poverty, destitute, wearing filthy clothes.
- Their descriptions could not possibly be more dis-similar.
- And now James brings a clear warning, possibly even an indictment to the church.

James 2:3 **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,"**

- Favoritism; that which we were told cannot be held along with Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is blatantly displayed through the behavior of the members of "First Church."
- The rich man received preferential treatment, expressed through a special greeting and special seating.
 - YOU is in a position of emphasis, eluding to that special greeting.
 - The word "**Here**" suggests a special seating near the front of the room where everyone in the room can see his shining clothes.
 - "**Sit here in a Good Place,**" some suggest refers to a chair rather than the customary bench where worshippers were seated.
- The poor man is treated quite differently. The usher commands him to stand in the corner or sit on the ground by his feet, which implies a dominance on the part of the usher.
- The illustration may lose a little of its power in today's culture but the point remains valid.

TODAY: a gold ring indicates marital more than economic status and costly clothing may only prove that particular person is buried under a mound of credit card debt.

- In our day when shabby chic is in vogue it is hard to differentiate the rich from the poor. People spend a day's wages on a pair of jeans with holes in them.
- And today it is acceptable for everyone to dress down to church so it's harder to identify social rankings. BUT that doesn't mean that favoritism is dead.

In the ancient world the poor were despised or ignored. Religious Jews viewed poverty as evidence of God's judgment visited upon those who break his holy Law.

- We take a little different approach here in America.

Here in the good old USA we believe that every generation has the opportunity to lift themselves out of the despair of poverty and pursue the American Dream through hard work and education.

- IF the poor black son of a single mother can rise to the highest office in the land, surely anyone can flourish and prosper.
- SO we don't look down on the poor because they are poor instead we look down on the poor because we think they are lazy.
- After all in a perfect system like ours there is no excuse for poverty.

So we still judge the poor. We favor the hardworking and despise the sluggard (isn't that Biblical?)

We show partiality to the educated and despise the drop out.

In our flesh, we gravitate toward the person with the Type A personality and steer clear of the guy who stands in the corner and never talks to anyone.

However you slice it, we still struggle with partiality, we show favoritism toward people we think will be able to help advance our own position.

James moves on to show that favoring the rich and despising the poor not only goes against the expressed will of God but it is extremely irrational. It is inconsistent with both the character of God and human logic.

3 The Inconsistency

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?

The words of James are presented as a wake up call, "Listen Up!" there are multiple spiritual and logical inconsistencies in showing favoritism to the wealthy.

- Spiritually the scripture tells us that GOD has chosen the Poor through which to display His gracious gift of faith.
- Logically, James asks: Aren't the rich the very people who give you a hard time? They oppress you and take advantage of you in court because you can't afford a lawyer? Why in the world would you possibly favor them?
- Let's begin with the Spiritual.

God, by his own sovereign grace has chosen for himself, as a display of His glory, those people who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith.

- That doesn't mean that God doesn't ever give the gift of faith to wealthy people: Consider, Abraham, Job, Zacchaeus, Joseph of Aramathea. (Rich & Faithful)

- BUT in general, God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. We see this in God's choice of the People of Israel described for us in Deuteronomy 7.
 - The poor widow who threw 2 copper coins into the treasury.
 - Two blind men sitting by the wayside crying: "Son of David have mercy on us."
- Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was herself poor, spoke of God lifting up the poor.

Luke 1: 46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

For His own glory, as a display of his power and his abundant mercy; NOT because he is prejudice against the wealthy; but so that He may be seen as our benevolent deliverer, God brings down the mighty and exalts the humble.

- Paul refers to the common / poor status of those in the church at Corinth.

1 Corinthians 1: 26 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

- God himself has chosen the foolish in this world, those who are despised and rejected to be rich in faith.
- We see this same principle at work in American History

In the early nineteenth century, African Americans were uniquely affected by the "Second Great Awakening". They met in camp meetings and sang without any hymnbooks. Spontaneous songs were composed on the spot. They were called "spiritual songs and the term "sperichil" appeared for the first time in the book "Slave Songs of The United States"

I've a crown in the Kingdom
Ain't that good news (2X)

I'm going to lay down this world
Going to shoulder up my cross
Goin' to take it home to Jesus
Ain't that good news

Sum it all up:

How should we respond to the Word of God this morning?

- Has our study this morning caused you to evaluate your motives? Has the Holy Spirit used the Word of God to challenge patterns of your behavior?
 - Are you guilty of Favoritism? (I must admit, I am)
- Are there people that you knowingly attempt to steer clear of?
- Do you find yourself crossing the street to avoid contact with a homeless person?

The proper response to sin of any kind involves repentance and faith in Christ.

- When we confess the sin of favoritism to the Lord, He is faithful and He is just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- WHAT does that repentance look like moving forward?

As a church we recognize that poverty, at its very core, is a moral problem, and because it is a moral problem it cannot be fixed by simply throwing money at it.

Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkery (Helping without Hurting)

“At its core poverty alleviation is the process of broken people in a broken world being restored to the hope and dignity God intends for human beings as His image-bearers.”

“The restoration of broken people involves the journey of salvation and sanctification that all people, rich and poor need to experience over the course of their lives.”

“Poverty alleviation is not simply applying a recipe. Rather, walking alongside a low income person requires humbly surrendering yourself in prayer, asking God to give you wisdom, a caring heart and open eyes as you listen to the person's story. It requires pressing deeper into the Good News of the Gospel, pleading for Christ's power to fix all that is broken in the person, in you and in the world.”

The Gospel is the great equalizer of all humanity.

- All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- All who believe are justified freely by the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

As we hold forth the Gospel and invest ourselves in the lives of our neighbors the power of God which is in the Gospel will do the work of transformation.