

Whose Side are You on?

Faith & Love Part 02
James 2:5-7 2-22-2015

Summary: You can tell how good a person you are by how closely your values match God's. God values the poor/humble, and the rich tend to blaspheme Him and opposed His people. So if we favor the rich over the poor/humble, we have values opposite God's. If we had God's, the "hot prospect" would be the humble man, not the rich man. Salvation is through faith and results in loving God, and inheriting His kingdom (all things). Show honor to visitors in the church.

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James 2:1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

Introduction

Values

Imagine someone asked your best friend to describe you and they said, "Tell me what he/she is all about. What defines him/her?" What kind of a description would it take to really capture who you are? If they gave your height and weight and eye color and hair style, that wouldn't really do it, would it? If you were a different height or weight or you changed your hair, but everything else stayed the same, you

would still be you. Those kinds of things are out on the fringes of who you are. What is at the core? If someone really wants to get to the core of who you are and what you are all about, where should they look? What about your values? I think if they looked at what you value, that would be about as close to the center as you can get. If a person could describe exactly which things are most important to you, and how important they are compared to other things in your heart, I would say that person's got you pretty well pegged. If you changed your hairstyle, probably nobody would say, "He's a new man! He's a whole different person!" But they probably would say that if you had a wholesale change in which things you consider to be treasure and which things you consider to be trash. If you had a complete reversal in which things you desire enough to run after and which things you don't mind being without, if those things radically changed, people would say that you are not the same person you used to be.

If you ever find yourself asking the question, "Who am I?" - this is the place to look. *What do you value?* That is what determines what sort of person you are. That is why when Paul gives the qualifications for an overseer in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he talks about what the man loves. He must not be a lover of money (1 Tim.3:3). He must be a lover of the good (Tit.1:8). If a person loves the right things and desires the right things and hates the right things, you won't have to worry about his behavior.

So what are the right things? That's easy - whatever God loves and desires. The closer your feelings get to being like the feelings of God, the better you are as a person. The definition of an evil person is someone who values different things than what God values.

So how can you tell how close your values are to God's values? One of the most accurate indicators is how you treat people. Which kinds of people are on your "A" list, and which ones you don't care much for. And so in today's passage, James is going to talk about that - which types of people you tend to favor. And the example James gives is set in terms of the way you treat different kinds of visitors in church on Sunday morning.

Visitors in the Church

Some people might be surprised to discover that the Bible even talks about the issue of visitors in church. There is a lot of talk these days about getting back to the early church. People want to get back to doing things the way they did them in the book of Acts, when they didn't have all the structures and systems, and there were no paid pastors, and there were no church buildings... - no formal worship services; they just got together in each other's homes and had fellowship. There is a popular book by Frank Viola and George Barna titled, *Pagan Christianity* that is promoting these ideas. They say things like church buildings and organized structure like we have today - it all came from pagan roots, and we need to get back to the New Testament church.¹

But this idea that the early church was an unorganized, informal situation where people just got together in homes for some fellowship is not historically accurate. The very first meeting place for the church was the temple courts (Acts 2:46). There were over 3000 of them from the very first day, and in Acts 2:44 it says they were all together. Archaeologists have discovered a church building from the early 200's.² They did have paid pastors,³ they did have organization and structure, they had sermons, and they did use buildings. And all of that stands to reason, given how fast the church was growing at the beginning. The Lord was adding to their number every single day. So we would expect that not every church would fit in a house.

And it is also worth noting that when the church first began, Christians did not think of themselves as a different religion from Judaism. They considered themselves the true Judaism. And so you would expect that their corporate gatherings would reflect common Jewish practice. And the common Jewish

¹ Whenever I hear that kind of thing, my first question is, "Which New Testament church do you want to be like?" The church in Corinth, with all their idolatry and immorality? The churches in Galatia, that abandoned the true gospel? Maybe the church in Laodicea, that Jesus said that church made Him nauseous? If anybody is under the illusion that the New Testament church had no problems, they need to reread the New Testament.

² Prior to Constantine's edict.

³ Paying pastors is actually commanded in 1 Timothy 5 and 1 Corinthians 9.

practice for the corporate weekly gathering was to come together in a synagogue – which was a special building that was built specifically for that purpose.

The reason I'm telling you all that is because it gives us some background for what we are studying in James. We have been studying verse by verse through the book of James, and last week we came to chapter 2 where James says this:

James 2:2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes...

That word translated **meeting** (your Bible might say **assembly**) is actually the word *synagogue*.

Suppose a man comes into your synagogue wearing a gold ring and fine clothes...

It is obvious in the context that he is talking about a gathering of the church. In the previous verse he talks about their faith in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. And in chapter 5 James uses the word *church* when he says that the sick should call upon the elders of the church. So he is talking about the church gathering, but he calls it the **synagogue**. This isn't absolute proof,⁴ but I do think it is good evidence that even as early as James (which was written in the early 40s), churches were meeting in buildings just like the Jewish synagogues.

And they dealt with a lot of the same issues that we deal with today – including how to make a good impression on visitors. There are at least two passages in the New Testament that specifically address the issue of how to deal with visitors in the church gathering. One of them is in 1 Corinthians 14:23, where we are instructed not to be so kooky and weird in the way that we worship that unbelievers who come and visit might think that we've lost our minds. Then in the next verse he says that our goal for visitors who come on a Sunday morning and who are unsaved should be that they would be convicted of sin. The other passage that talks about how to deal with visitors is this one here in James 2.

And in this passage the issue has to do with – believe it or not - seating. They evidently had people functioning as ushers telling visitors to sit in certain chairs. I think that's interesting, because that book I mentioned claims that even having a formal arrangement of chairs facing a platform is a bad thing. And yet in this passage it's obvious that there were certain seats that were better than other seats.

“Why is any of this important? Of all the weighty, eternal things that God could tell us about in His Word, why would He devote precious real estate on the pages of the Bible to something as mundane as the seating of visitors on Sunday morning? Is that really a spiritual issue?”

If you question whether it's a spiritual issue, let me ask you this: What would you do if you were visiting a church and just before you sat down an usher came up to you and said, “Would you like me to show you to the free seating area?” Or if you walked in and the usher said, “Oh, here, let me show you the chairs we have set up for people like you.” “People like you”? What would you do? If you are smart you would hand him the bulletin back and say, “Do you know of any good churches in the area?” If they are making judgments about how well or how poorly you are going to be treated based on your physical appearance, you immediately know something is drastically wrong in this church *spiritually*.

So yes, seating can most definitely be a spiritual issue. In fact, James is going to show us that it is directly connected to the most fundamental command in the entire Bible – the love command.

Glory

Just to refresh your memory - last week we looked at verses 1-4, and we found out that discrimination and favoritism are fundamentally an issue of glory. Which glory are you after – the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the glory of this world? All of us are running after whatever it is we see as real glory. And people who give special treatment to the rich and the beautiful are showing that the glory

⁴ Another possibility is that the term “synagogue” is used in a literal sense here, meaning “gathering.” But given how commonly the word was used among Jews of that time to refer to the building where their weekly gathering took place, I think that is the most natural way to take it here.

they are after is this world's glory. You are always going to pay the most attention to whoever has that which you most treasure.

Why do we get excited about rich people? Why do we admire celebrities who spend their lives exploiting us and our children, taking our money, and in return, mock us and our beliefs and our Savior? Why do we look up to them? Why would we be all excited if we met one of them or had lunch with one of them? It is because a materialistic focus brings an intrinsic spiritual derangement. And in this passage, James is laboring to expose that derangement.

God's Valuation vs. Ours

So in verses 2-4 James describes the situation. A rich, good-looking visitor came in on a Sunday morning, and a poor visitor with filthy clothes also came in. And they gave a really good seat to the first guy, and the poor guy had to stand in the back or sit on the floor. So clearly they were valuing wealth and attractiveness. And what James wants to do is to compare those values with God's values. Remember I said the most fundamental core of what kind of person you really are is seen in how closely your values match up with God's values? If you want to get the force of the Greek, you can underline the word **God** in verse 5 and the word **you** in verse 6.

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor.

God favored the poor; God chose the poor, but you have insulted the poor by favoring the rich. Anytime you find that your attitudes are the opposite of God's, you've got a real problem.

Now, to elaborate on this, James is going to give a description of the poor and then a description of the rich. First, the poor.

The Poor

God has chosen them to be **rich in faith**. That could mean that they have a whole lot of faith, or it could mean that they are rich in the realm of faith. But either way, the meaning is the same – they are spiritually rich because of faith.

Does that mean every poor person is a believer? No, as we saw back in chapter 1, when James refers to the poor, he is talking about those who are not only poor, but who have been humbled by their poverty and hardship. Whenever James uses the word *poor*, you can pencil in parentheses the word *humble*. And it is those people who have been humbled by lowliness and poverty and the hardships of life who, generally speaking, tend to be rich in faith.

God's Choice

And James underscores the fact that this was God's choice (**5 ...God has chosen those who are poor...**) God could have designed this world any way He wanted. But His choice was to design things in such a way that it is the poor who are most likely to be humbled enough to actually put their faith in God. And the fact that God chose to set things up that way is a wonderful thing. It is something to praise God for. In Matthew 11, Jesus had a sudden outburst of joy, and it was because of His delight in the Father's wisdom in choosing the lowly.

Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

It is such a marvelous thing God has done. It is so much better than the world's system, where the greatest honor goes to those at the top of the ladder. God gives the greatest reward to those at the bottom.

That's wonderful, because not everyone is capable of making it to the top. But anyone can choose to descend to the bottom. So whenever someone isn't saved, it's not because they can't; it's because they won't. It is not because God's hand is closed; it is because their hands aren't open, ready to receive a gift. Thomas Manton said faith "is the open hand of the soul, to receive all the bounteous supplies of God." To be saved you have to come to God as a beggar, with hands open to receive. But the rich usually have their hands clinched tightly around the treasures of this world. And salvation is a gift that cannot be received by hands that are clinched around some other treasure.

Rich people tend to trust in their riches and in themselves, so most of the time they just don't think they need God.

Ezekiel 28:5 ... because of your wealth your heart has grown proud.

Everybody needs God, but for poor people it is easier for them to see their need for God. Rich people think they have other options.

There was a time in my life when I used to go door-to-door sharing the gospel. I would knock on the door, ask them if they would participate in a quick, religious survey, and from their answers to the questions I would try to share the gospel. And one thing that quickly became very obvious was that there was a night-and-day difference between the poor neighborhoods and the rich neighborhoods. In the poor neighborhoods, it was very common for people to invite me in and be very engaged in the conversation and show interest in the gospel. In the rich neighborhoods, there was almost zero interest.

I don't know how many of you are wealthy. Probably not many. And of the few who are, probably most, if not all, became a Christian before you became wealthy. Does that mean it's impossible for a rich person to be saved? No, not impossible, but very difficult.

Matthew 19:23 Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Why is that? Two reasons. One is that faith in God requires humility and dependence on God, and rich people are usually self-reliant. Secondly, coming to Christ requires holding Him as your greatest treasure. Rich people have a hard time with that, because they are so prone to hold money as their greatest treasure. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus in Matthew 19, he told Jesus that he wanted to become a follower. But at the end of the passage the man went away sad. Why? Because Jesus exposed two things:

1. He had pride in his heart, so he wouldn't admit he was a sinner.
2. He was in love with his money, so as soon as obeying Christ required giving up his money, he couldn't bring himself to do it.

Coming to God requires abandoning yourself as your savior, and looking to Christ alone as your Savior. And it involves abandoning money as your great treasure, and embracing Christ alone as your great treasure. And it is very rare to find a rich person who will do that.

Liberation Theology

Some theologians look at passages like this and conclude that salvation is strictly an issue of economics and politics. All rich, powerful people are evil and all poor, oppressed people are favored by God. And salvation isn't about personal faith in Christ; it is only about freeing poor people from the tyranny of the rich. That is a doctrine known as Liberation Theology, taught by people like Jeremiah Wright (Barak Obama's pastor). They say the Bible is not concerned with spiritual salvation, but rather with political and economic liberation.

A similar error is committed by people like Mother Teresa. She devoted her life to helping the poor in physical ways, but she refused to help them in spiritual ways. She said, "We never try to convert those who we receive to Christianity ... if ... Buddhists, or agnostics become for this better men -- simply

better -- we will be satisfied."⁵ She didn't care about leading anyone to faith in Christ. She only cared about relieving their physical suffering.

Is that the kind of thing James is teaching here? That God favors the poor just because they are poor and faith in Christ doesn't matter? If so, then I'm not sure why we would want to help the poor out financially. If the way to God's favor is through poverty, why would we ever want to help someone escape poverty? That whole view violates common sense.

But more importantly, it violates the very passage of Scripture they use to support it. James is very clear that faith does matter. Look again at verse 5. Does he say that God chose them regardless of whether or not they believe?

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom God has promised to all those who love him?

They don't inherit the kingdom because they are poor. They inherit the Kingdom because of their faith in and love for God. It is just that their poverty puts them in a better position to trust and love God.

No one goes to heaven unless he or she has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If a poor person rejects the gospel, he is just as lost as an unbelieving rich person. And if a rich person accepts the gospel, he is just as saved as a believing poor person. The advantage of being poor is not that you automatically go to heaven regardless of faith. The advantage of being poor is that you are much more likely to believe the gospel when it is presented to you.

The Rich

So that is James' description of the poor. Then in verse 6 he describes the rich.

6 ... Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

What is James saying here? Don't be nice to rich people because they are being mean to you? No, that is not his point at all. The issue here is not how we are being mistreated as individuals. The issue is the attitude of the rich toward God and His people. If they were just mistreating us, that, in itself, wouldn't be any big deal, because in ourselves we are not anything special. But they are mistreating a group of people who are called by the name of Christ.

7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Literally, **the name called (or invoked) over you**. On the day you became a Christian, Christ gave you His name. Like a wife receiving her husband's name when they get married, or a child receiving his dad's name when he is adopted, the Lord Jesus Christ gave us His name on the day we came into His family. We bear His name. If someone declares war on one of my kids, they have declared war on me. When people mistreat Christians because they are Christians, they declare war on Christ Himself. And James wants to know - why favor those people over the people who are rich in faith and who love God?

Why would we be so enamored with celebrities? Aren't they the ones who routinely play roles in movies or write songs that mock the law of God and dishonor His name? Aren't they the ones who promote sleeping together before you are married, and who make homosexuality seem like it is perfectly ok? Aren't they the ones who promote selfishness and materialism and evolutionism and immodesty and the reversal of male and female roles? Aren't they the primary mouthpieces for the doctrines of demons in our culture - drilling those ideas deep into people's hearts with their song lyrics and TV shows and movies and lifestyles? How do you think it makes God feel when those who are blaspheming Him are the object of our envy and we stumble all over ourselves to win their favor while neglecting the people God has chosen?

⁵ *Life in the Spirit: Reflections, Meditations, and Prayers*, 81-82.

James just wants to know, whose side are you on? God has clearly favored this group of people over that group. So if we come along and favor that group over this group, what does that say about our hearts? They are out of sync with God's.

Who is the Hot Prospect?

So – how do your values compare to God's (as measured by your attitudes toward different kinds of people)? When you do your networking, what is the purpose? Is it for the kingdom of God? If you met some guy who works as a garbage collector, but he knew the Scriptures and he could teach you how to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and overcome sin in your life, and you met another man who could show you how to triple your income within one year, which one would you be more inclined to spend your time with?

If a really rich guy comes into our church and a poor, humble nobody walked in, we should get all excited because one of those two guys is a hot prospect. We will go ahead and share the gospel with both, and show love to both, but the one guy – he's a hot prospect. And if he became a Christian, just think what could be accomplished for the kingdom of God! If he joined our church, just think what we would be able to do!

That is what we should be saying to ourselves, but we should be saying it, not about the rich guy. He's not the hot prospect. There is an outside chance the rich man might receive the gospel, so we will still present it to him, but it's a long shot. But that humble guy – there is a great chance of reaching him.

And if the rich guy got saved, sure, the Lord could use him – the Lord can use anybody. So we don't have anything against the rich guy – it's just that he doesn't have the resources that humble guy has. If you really want to do some great things in the kingdom of God, you need resources like humility and dependence on God. The rich person might have some of that, but probably not near as much as the poor person has. You see, if we understand how the kingdom of God works, and we understand godly priorities, we will welcome anyone into this church – but we will get especially excited if we can get a real humble person. That's like getting a #1 draft pick. A humble person is such a tremendous commodity in the kingdom of God.

If a pastor sees a really rich guy visit the church and start salivating, thinking about how great it would be to get a guy like that to join – that pastor does not understand how the kingdom of God works. He needs to take another look at the church's purpose statement. What is it that we are trying to accomplish as a church? Everything we are trying to accomplish is accomplished not by money, not by fame, not by political power, not by good looks. The things we are trying to accomplish are accomplished only through the power of the Holy Spirit. And guess who that power flows through? The humble. If you see a guy who is humble and broken over his sin, and needy, and desperate for God's help – that is what should make you start salivating and thinking, "Boy, if we could just get a guy like that in our church..."

Jesus' Example

In Mark 5 an important, wealthy ruler of a synagogue comes to ask Jesus to heal his daughter. So Jesus starts walking with him toward his home, but on the way comes across an unclean, despised, rejected, outcast woman who also needs healing. And suddenly, even though Jairus asked first, he goes to the back of the line and this woman is in the front of the line. Jesus makes the synagogue big shot stand there and wait while He ministers to this lowly, outcast woman.

Jesus was just like the rest of us – He needed money to live. It took a lot of money to support Jesus and His 12 disciples and their families full time. I'm sure that wasn't easy raising that much support. If you could make a wealthy man like Jairus happy, that would really help matters. But that kind of thing never affected Jesus' decision-making in the slightest. Why? Because of what He valued. I don't think it required any special self-discipline on Jesus' part to favor humble, believing people over rich, proud, unbelieving people. It was His natural response, because of what He valued. When He saw humility and faith, it was beautiful to Him. It was attractive to Him. When He saw pride and self-reliance, it was ugly

and repulsive to Him. And when He saw money and power, it had no effect on Him because those things were so small in His affections.

There are some people who are such sports fanatics that if they saw a person wearing a ball cap with a rival team's logo, they would actually have hostility in their hearts towards that person. But there are others who are not into sports, so someone could have a hat with any team logo on it and you wouldn't even notice it, because sports teams just are not something that matter to you. That is the way Jesus was with wealth – it just wasn't something that mattered to Him. What mattered to Him was faith.

Faith

So, if it is all about faith - let's make sure we understand what faith is. Faith has two parts to it – believing, and trusting. You believe information; you trust a person, and both are required. In order to be saved and have your sins forgiven and go to heaven when you die, you have to believe the information in the gospel, and you have to trust Jesus Christ. Trusting Jesus means when everything in you thinks that this way is the best path towards joy, but God's word says *that* path is the best path toward joy, you will trust what God says more than you trust your own feelings, and you will follow God's way. When you come to a settled decision - "That's how I want to live my life. I'm going to follow Christ's way instead of my way. And in those times where I relapse and follow my own way instead of God's way, I will repent and turn around and start following God's way again." That is what faith is.

And on the day that you first trust the Lord Jesus Christ like that, that is when you are truly saved. That is when your sins are all forgiven, and you are adopted into God's family as a son or daughter.

Inheritance of the Kingdom

And as a child of God, you inherit His kingdom.

5 Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

Once again James is plagiarizing from Jesus. Jesus said this in the very first line of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Kingdom

What are the boundaries of God's kingdom? There are none. His reign extends to every corner of creation. As Abraham Kiper said, "There's not a square inch on planet earth where Jesus Christ doesn't say, 'mine'." And whatever belongs to Him belongs to us.

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ

1 Corinthians 3:21 All things are yours

2 Corinthians 6:10 [we are] ... poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

When I look at the things in this world – it's all mine. Whether it's a car or a mansion or a mountain or an ocean – it's all mine. I may not have the keys just yet, but the title is in my name. So why be impressed with those who temporarily have the keys, but don't have the title? Imagine an orphan who has been adopted into the family of a billionaire, and he is one week away from all the papers being signed and moving into the big mansion. One week away – but when the day comes, he is nowhere to be found. He was so envious of his friends who had skateboards and video games and all kinds of things that he never had, he decided to run away from his foster home and try to pursue some of those things. That is what we are like when we lose sight of our inheritance and we become impatient and go running after the

world's trinkets. When you see someone who is rich in this world, don't envy them. Feel sorry for them because their riches are so small. When you hear about somebody winning the lottery, you can think, "I won the lottery, too. The only difference is, the jackpot I got is so much bigger than the one he got – poor guy. He only gets his temporarily and then it will all be taken away. But I get mine forever."

Those Who Love Him

That is the inheritance for everyone who has true faith. But look how James describes those people at the end of the verse.

5 Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

The only people who ever receive the kingdom of God are people who love God. No one ever goes to heaven who does not love God. And James tells us something interesting in the way he structures that sentence. First he describes the people who inherit the kingdom as those who are **rich in faith**. And then he describes the people who inherit the kingdom as those who love God. And so James is showing us that the group of people who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the exact same group of people who love God. There is no such thing as a person who has true faith, but does not have love for God. And there is no such thing as a person who loves God, who does not have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know you have true, saving faith when you love the Lord Jesus Christ more than you love this world. Loving Him means you desire His favor more than you desire anything in this world. You enjoy the experience of His presence more than you enjoy anything in this world. You delight in pleasing Him more than you delight in anything in this world. And so you run harder after Him than you run after anything in this world.

Conclusion: Acceptance

What is the bottom line in this passage? I find it fascinating that this passage is all about seating in church. He doesn't say anything about feeding the poor man, or helping him out financially, or protecting him from injustice. Other passages of Scripture talk about doing those things, and we should most certainly do them, but that is not what James is talking about here. He says nothing about financial assistance. What is it that we are to give the poor in this passage? A seat. We will get around to helping them financially as well, but when they first walk-in, give them a seat. And in the context, what is that talking about? It is talking about honor and respect and welcoming love. Look at verse six.

6 you have insulted the poor.

That word translated **insult** means to dishonor. To treat them as unworthy of you – "I'm up here; you're down there." And to have that kind of attitude toward a fellow human being is sin.

Proverbs 14:21 He who insults⁶ his neighbor sins.

We are not permitted to do that to anyone who visits the church. Instead, we are to do the opposite: accept them. Treat them as valuable. Show them honor. Give them a seat. We saw last week that giving them a seat means more than just giving them a place to sit down. It means giving them a place in the church; giving them a place in this family.

I would love it if visitors who came to Agape would leave saying, "Those people sure are friendly." But I would love it a lot more if they would leave saying, "I really felt honored by those people."

How could you, as an individual, do that? Well, do you know where the bathrooms are? And do you know where the sanctuary is? If so, maybe for you it would be as simple as just getting on the rotation to be a greeter. Or just, in an informal way, standing out in the foyer and watching for people who look like they are new and asking if you can show them around.

⁶ This is the same Greek word in the LXX.

“Can I help you find something? The nursery is right over there. The worship services through those doors – will be getting started here in about 10 minutes or so. In the meantime, there’s coffee down at the end of the hall. I can show you if you like.”

That would be a great start. But what else could we do? Maybe we need to get creative. I think we should definitely strive to become more friendly than we are, but maybe we need to think beyond just being friendly. Maybe some of you who are really good at that sort of thing could put a few hours into brainstorming some ways that we could show honor to people who come here in a way that makes them feel honored.

I can think of a couple things. I think most people feel honored when you listen to them. If you are truly interested in what they are saying - that makes people feel honored.

I think people feel honored when they come in as someone new and they are included in what is going on.

I think most people feel honored when you pray for them - out loud. That is why inviting a visitor to your prayer group is such a great idea. You are including them, the group is eager to listen to their prayer request, and someone prays for them. I don’t know any better ways to honor someone than that.

Those are a few ideas, but some of you are pretty creative and you are gifted in the area of hospitality, and maybe you could think of some things we could do and lead the rest of us into greater hospitality. Let me close with this question: Imagine Jesus sent a letter to us that said, “I will be watching you next Sunday. I want Agape to be twice as welcoming and honoring next Sunday as you normally are.” If we got a letter from Jesus that said that, what would you, personally, do differently next Sunday?

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

1. If Jesus sent a letter to us that said, “I will be watching you next Sunday. I want Agape to be twice as welcoming and honoring next Sunday as you normally are,” what would you do differently?
2. If one of the purposes of hardships (such as poverty) is to bring about humility and trust in God (so you can be rich in faith), what is the most severe suffering in your life right now? Talk to the group about how that suffering could potentially increase your humility and faith.
3. Can you identify any worldly things that are too valuable in your affections, or any spiritual things that are not valuable enough in your affections?

Devotionals

Day 1

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

S is for Seek

Psalm 119:176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.

All our seeking after God will be worthless if He does not seek us. Begin by asking God to come near to you.

I is for Incline

Psalm 119:36 Incline my heart toward your statutes.

Inclination has to do with what you like and dislike. We do not observe life with a detached, robotic analysis. We have a sense of liking and being attracted to some things and disliking and being inclined away from others.

Before you open your Bible take a moment to remind yourself that you could begin reading, come across some wonderful truth about God, and be bored by it. Horror! What could be worse than being unable to be delighted by the glory of God? Before reading, ask the Lord to incline your heart toward whatever it is He is about to show you so that when you see it you will love it.

O is for Open

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

When you read something in Scripture about God and it does not thrill your soul and cause great joy, peace, comfort, or awe, there is only one explanation: your eyes are blind to what is wonderful about that truth. Every truth about God in Scripture would absolutely thrill you if your eyes were opened to see what is so wonderful about it. And only God can do that. So before reading, pray—"God, open my eyes."

U is for Unite

Psalm 86:11 Unite my heart, that I may fear your name.

When we come to the Word of God, we usually come with a scattered, distracted heart. We must pray, "Dear God, please unite my heart so for this brief little time I can focus my entire being on You."

S is for Satisfy

Psalm 90:14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

The presence of God is like food—it always satisfies the soul. If you go away from your time in the Word unsatisfied, then, it is because you did not experience the presence of God. It is good, before we open the Bible, to remind ourselves of the purpose of coming to God’s banquet table. The goal is not just to gather information, but to leave the table with our souls satisfied!

Read:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Isaiah 58.

Meditate:

Imagine someone asked your best friend to describe you, and they said, “Tell me what he/she is all about. What defines him/her?” What kind of a description would it take to really capture who you are? If they gave your height and weight and eye color and hair style, that wouldn’t really do it, would it? If you were a different height or weight or you changed your hair, but everything else stayed the same, you would still be you. Those kinds of things are out on the fringes of who you are. What is at the core? If someone really wants to get to the core of who you are and what you are all about, where should they look? What about your values? I think if they looked at what you value, that would be about as close to the center as you can get. If a person could describe exactly which things are most important to you, and how important they are compared to other things in your heart, I would say that person’s got you pretty well pegged. If you changed your hairstyle, probably nobody would say, “He’s a new man! He’s a whole different person!” But they probably would say that if you had a wholesale change in which things you consider to be treasure and which things you consider to be trash. If you had a complete reversal in which things you desire enough to run after and which things you don’t mind being without, if those things radically changed, people would say that you’re not the same person you used to be.

If you ever find yourself asking the question, “Who am I?” - this is the place to look. *What do you value?* That is what determines what sort of person you are. That is why when Paul gives the qualifications for an overseer in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he talks about what the man loves. He must not be a lover of money (1 Tim.3:3). He must be a lover of the good (Tit.1:8). If a person loves the right things and desires the right things and hates the right things, you won’t have to worry about his behavior.

So what are the right things? That’s easy – whatever God loves and desires. The closer your feelings get to being like the feelings of God, the better you are as a person. The definition of an evil person is someone who values different things than what God values.

So how can you tell how close your values are to God’s values? One of the most accurate indicators is how you treat people. Which kinds of people are on your “A” list, and which ones you don’t care much for. And so in today’s passage, James is going to talk about that – which types of people you tend to favor. And the example James gives is set in terms of the way you treat different kinds of visitors in church on Sunday morning.

Last week we looked at verses 1-4, and we found out that discrimination and favoritism are fundamentally an issue of glory. Which glory are you after – the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the glory of this world? All of us are running after whatever it is we see as real glory. And people who give special treatment to the rich and the beautiful are showing that the glory they are after is this world’s glory. You are always going to pay the most attention to whoever has that which you most treasure.

Why do we get excited about rich people? Why do we admire celebrities who spend their lives exploiting us and our children, taking our money, and in return, mock us and our beliefs and our Savior? Why do we look up to them? Why would we be all excited if we met one of them or had lunch with one

of them? It is because a materialistic focus brings an intrinsic spiritual derangement. And in this passage, James is laboring to expose that derangement.

So in verses 2-4 James describes the situation. A rich, good-looking visitor came in on a Sunday morning, and a poor visitor with filthy clothes also came in. And they gave a really good seat to the first guy, and the poor guy had to stand in the back or sit on the floor. So clearly they were valuing wealth and attractiveness. And what James wants to do is to compare those values with God's values. Remember I said the most fundamental core of what kind of person you really are is seen in how closely your values match up with God's values? If you want to get the force of the Greek, you can underline the word **God** in verse 5 and the word **you** in verse 6.

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor.

God favored the poor; God chose the poor, but you have insulted the poor by favoring the rich. Anytime you find that your attitudes are the opposite of God's, you've got a real problem.

Now, to elaborate on this, James is going to give a description of the poor and then a description of the rich.

First, the poor. God has chosen them to be **rich in faith**. That could mean that they have a whole lot of faith, or it could mean that they are rich in the realm of faith. But either way, the meaning is the same – they are spiritually rich because of faith.

Does that mean every poor person is a believer? No, as we saw back in chapter 1, when James refers to the poor, he is talking about those who are not only poor, but who have been humbled by their poverty and hardship. Whenever James uses the word *poor*, you can pencil in parentheses the word *humble*. And it is those people who have been humbled by lowliness and poverty and the hardships of life who, generally speaking, tend to be rich in faith.

Memorize:

Review James 1:19-2:4.

Memorize James 2:5. Say it 10 times word for word from memory, and then at least two more times later in the day.

Pray:

Talk to God about what He said in Isaiah 58 and in James 2. Ask Him to show you what changes you may need to make in your life based on these passages.

Share:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Do!

- Think about the most difficult people in your life. Write a list of differences you see in the way you look at them compared to the way God looks at them.
- Pray through that list and ask God to help you adjust your perspective. Make an intentional effort to adjust the way you feel toward those people to be like the way God feels.

Further Study:

For more on some specific things you can do to care for the poor, read the book *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* by Tim Keller.

Day 2

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Read:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Matthew 19:16-30.

Meditate:

James 2:5 ...God has chosen those who are poor...

God could have designed this world any way He wanted. But His choice was to design things in such a way that it is the poor who are most likely to be humbled enough to actually put their faith in God. And the fact that God chose to set things up that way is a wonderful thing. It is something to praise God for. In Matthew 11, Jesus had a sudden outburst of joy, and it was because of His delight in the Father's wisdom in choosing the lowly.

Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

It is such a marvelous thing God has done. It is so much better than the world's system, where the greatest honor goes to those at the top of the ladder. God gives the greatest reward to those at the bottom. That's wonderful, because not everyone is capable of making it to the top. But anyone can choose to descend to the bottom. So whenever someone isn't saved, it's not because they can't; it's because they won't. It is not because God's hand is closed; it is because their hands aren't open, ready to receive a gift. Thomas Manton said faith "is the open hand of the soul, to receive all the bounteous supplies of God." To be saved you have to come to God as a beggar, with hands open to receive. But the rich usually have their hands clinched tightly around the treasures of this world. And salvation is a gift that cannot be received by hands that are clinched around some other treasure.

Rich people tend to trust in their riches and in themselves, so most of the time they just don't think they need God.

Ezekiel 28:5 ... because of your wealth your heart has grown proud.

Everybody needs God, but for poor people it is easier for them to see their need for God. Rich people think they have other options.

There was a time in my life when I used to go door-to-door sharing the gospel. I would knock on the door, ask them if they would participate in a quick, religious survey, and from their answers to the questions I would try to share the gospel. And one thing that quickly became very obvious was that there was a night-and-day difference between the poor neighborhoods and the rich neighborhoods. In the poor neighborhoods, it was very common for people to invite me in and be very engaged in the conversation and show interest in the gospel. In the rich neighborhoods, there was almost zero interest.

I don't know how many of you are wealthy. Probably not many. And of the few who are, probably most, if not all, became a Christian before you became wealthy. Does that mean it's impossible for a rich person to be saved? No, not impossible, but very difficult.

Matthew 19:23 Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Why is that? Two reasons. One is that faith in God requires humility and dependence on God, and rich people are usually self-reliant. Secondly, coming to Christ requires holding Him as your greatest treasure. Rich people have a hard time with that, because they are so prone to hold money as their greatest treasure. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus in Matthew 19, he told Jesus that he wanted to become a follower. But at the end of the passage the man went away sad. Why? Because Jesus exposed to things:

1. He had pride in his heart, so he wouldn't admit he was a sinner.
2. He was in love with his money, so as soon as obeying Christ required giving up his money, he couldn't bring himself to do it.

Coming to God requires abandoning yourself as your savior, and looking to Christ alone as your Savior. And it involves abandoning money as your great treasure, and embracing Christ alone as your great treasure. And it is very rare to find a rich person who will do that.

Memorize:

Review James 1:19-2:4.

Memorize James 2:6. Say verses 5&6 10 times word for word from memory, and then at least two more times later in the day.

Pray:

Talk to God about what He said in Mt.19 and in James 2. Ask Him to show you what changes you may need to make in your life based on these passages.

Share:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Do!

- Repeat the exercise from yesterday.

Day 3

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Read:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Luke 1:46-55.

Meditate:

James 2:6 ... Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

What is James saying here? Don't be nice to rich people because they are being mean to you? No, that is not his point at all. The issue here is not how we are being mistreated as individuals. The issue is the attitude of the rich toward God and His people. If they were just mistreating us, that, in itself, wouldn't be any big deal, because in ourselves we aren't anything special. But they are mistreating a group of people who are called by the name of Christ.

7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Literally, **the name called (or invoked) over you**. On the day you became a Christian, Christ gave you His name. Like a wife receiving her husband's name when they get married, or a child receiving his dad's name when he is adopted, the Lord Jesus Christ gave us His name on the day we came into His family. We bear His name. If someone declares war on one my kids, they have declared war on me. When people mistreat Christians because they are Christians, they declare war on Christ Himself. And James wants to know - why favor those people over the people who are rich in faith and who love God?

Why would we be so enamored with celebrities? Aren't they the ones who routinely play roles in movies or write songs that mock the law of God and dishonor His name? Aren't they the ones who promote sleeping together before you are married, and who make homosexuality seem like it's perfectly ok? Aren't they the ones who promote selfishness and materialism and evolutionism and immodesty and the reversal of male and female roles? Aren't they the primary mouthpieces for the doctrines of demons in our culture – drilling those ideas deep into people's hearts with their song lyrics and TV shows and movies and lifestyles? How do you think it makes God feel when those who are blaspheming Him are the object of our envy and we stumble all over ourselves to win their favor while neglecting the people God has chosen?

James just wants to know, whose side are you on? God has clearly favored this group of people over that group. So if we come along and favor that group over this group, what does that say about our hearts? They are out of sync with God's.

So – how do your values compare to God's (as measured by your attitudes toward different kinds of people)? When you do your networking, what is the purpose? Is it for the kingdom of God? If you met some guy who works as a garbage collector, but he knew the Scriptures and he could teach you how to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and overcome sin in your life, and you met another man who could show you how to triple your income within one year, which one would you be more inclined to spend your time with?

If a really rich guy comes into our church and a poor, humble nobody walked in, we should get all excited because one of those two guys is a hot prospect. We will go ahead and share the gospel with both, and show love to both, but the one guy – he's a hot prospect. And if he became a Christian, just think what could be accomplished for the kingdom of God! If he joined our church, just think what we would be able to do!

That is what we should be saying to ourselves, but we should be saying it, not about the rich guy. He's not the hot prospect. There is an outside chance the rich man might receive the gospel, so we will still present it to him, but it's a long shot. But that humble guy – there is a great chance of reaching him.

And if the rich guy got saved, sure, the Lord could use him – the Lord can use anybody. So we don't have anything against the rich guy – it's just that he doesn't have the resources that humble guy has. If you really want to do some great things in the kingdom of God, you need resources like humility and dependence on God. The rich guy might have some of that, but probably not near as much as the poor guy has. You see, if we understand how the kingdom of God works, and we understand godly priorities, we will welcome anyone into this church – but we will get especially excited if we can get a real humble

person. That's like getting a #1 draft pick. A humble person is such a tremendous commodity in the kingdom of God.

If a pastor sees a really rich guy visit the church and start salivating, thinking about how great it would be to get a guy like that to join – that pastor does not understand how the kingdom of God works. He needs to take another look at the church's purpose statement. What is it that we are trying to accomplish as a church? Everything we are trying to accomplish is accomplished not by money, not by fame, not by political power, not by good looks. The things we are trying to accomplish are accomplished only through the power of the Holy Spirit. And guess who that power flows through? The humble. If you see a guy who is humble and broken over his sin, and needy, and desperately for God's help – that is what should make a start salivating and thinking, "Boy, if we could just get a guy like that in our church..."

In Mark 5 an important, wealthy ruler of a synagogue comes to ask Jesus to heal his daughter. So Jesus starts walking with him toward his home, but on the way comes across an unclean, despised, rejected, outcast woman who also needs healing. And suddenly, even though Jairus asked first, he goes to the back of the line and this woman is in the front of the line. Jesus makes the synagogue big shot stand there and wait while He ministers to this lowly, outcast woman.

Jesus was just like the rest of us – He needed money to live. It took a lot of money to support Jesus and His 12 disciples and their families full time. I'm sure that wasn't easy raising that much support. If you could make a wealthy man like Jairus happy, that would really help matters. But that kind of thing never affected Jesus' decision-making in the slightest. Why? Because of what He valued. I don't think it required any special self-discipline on Jesus' part to favor humble, believing people over rich, proud, unbelieving people. It was His natural response, because of what He valued. When He saw humility and faith, it was beautiful to Him. It was attractive to Him. When He saw pride and self-reliance, it was ugly and repulsive to Him. And when He saw money and power, it had no effect on Him because those things were so small in His affections.

There are some people who are such sports fanatics that if they saw a person wearing a ball cap with a rival team's logo, they would actually have hostility in their hearts towards that person. But there are others who aren't into sports, so someone could have a hat with any team logo on it and you wouldn't even notice it, because sports teams just aren't something that matter to you. That is the way Jesus was with wealth – it just wasn't something that mattered to Him. What mattered to Him was faith.

Memorize:

Review James 1:19-2:4.

Memorize James 2:7. Say verses 5-7 10 times word for word from memory, and then at least two more times later in the day.

Pray:

Talk to God about what He said in Luke 1 and in James 2. Ask Him to show you what changes you may need to make in your life based on these passages.

Share:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Do!

- Repeat the exercise from day 1.

Day 4

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Read:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Hebrews 11. Ask the Lord to give you insight into the nature of true faith.

Meditate:

So, if it is all about faith - let's make sure we understand what faith is. Faith has two parts to it – believing, and trusting. You believe information; you trust a person, and both are required. In order to be saved and have your sins forgiven and go to heaven when you die, you have to believe the information in the gospel, and you have to trust Jesus Christ. Trusting Jesus means when everything in you thinks that this way is the best path towards joy, but God's word says that path is the best path toward joy, you will trust what God says more than you trust your own feelings, and you will follow God's way. When you come to a settled decision - "That's how I want to live my life. I'm going to follow Christ's way instead of my way. And in those times where I relapse and follow my own way instead of God's way, I will repent and turn around and start following God's way again." That is what faith is.

And on the day that you first trust the Lord Jesus Christ like that, that is when you are truly saved. That is when your sins are all forgiven, and you are adopted into God's family as a son or daughter.

And as a child of God, you inherit His kingdom.

James 2:5 Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

Once again James is plagiarizing from Jesus. Jesus said this in the very first line of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What are the boundaries of God's kingdom? There are none. His reign extends to every corner of creation. As Abraham Kiper said, "There's not a square inch on planet earth where Jesus Christ doesn't say, 'mine'." And whatever belongs to Him belongs to us.

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ

1 Corinthians 3:21 All things are yours

2 Corinthians 6:10 [we are] ... poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

When I look at the things in this world – it's all mine. Whether it's a car or a mansion or a mountain or an ocean – it's all mine. I may not have the keys just yet, but the title is in my name. So why be impressed with those who temporarily have the keys, but don't have the title? Imagine an orphan who has been adopted into the family of a billionaire, and he is one week away from all the papers being signed and moving into the big mansion. One week away – but when the day comes, he is nowhere to be found. He was so envious of his friends who had skateboards and video games and all kinds of things that he never had, he decided to run away from his foster home and try to pursue some of those things. That is what we are like when we lose sight of our inheritance and we become impatient and go running after the

world's trinkets. When you see someone who is rich in this world, don't envy them. Feel sorry for them because their riches are so small. When you hear about somebody winning the lottery, you can think, "I won the lottery, too. The only difference is, the jackpot I got is so much bigger than the one he got – poor guy. He only gets his temporarily and then it will all be taken away. But I get mine forever."

That is the inheritance for everyone who has true faith. But look how James describes those people at the end of the verse.

5 Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

The only people who ever receive the kingdom of God are people who love God. No one ever goes to heaven who does not love God. And James tells us something interesting in the way he structures that sentence. First he describes the people who inherit the kingdom as those who are **rich in faith**. And then he describes the people who inherit the kingdom as those who love God. And so James is showing us that the group of people who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the exact same group of people who love God. There is no such thing as a person who has true faith, but does not have love for God. And there is no such thing as a person who loves God, who does not have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know you have true, saving faith when you love the Lord Jesus Christ more than you love this world. Loving Him means you desire His favor more than you desire anything in this world. You enjoy the experience of His presence more than you enjoy anything in this world. You delight in pleasing Him more than you delight in anything in this world. And so you run harder after Him than you run after anything in this world.

Memorize:

Review James 1:19-2:7.

Pray:

Talk to God about what He said in Hebrews 11 and in James 2. Ask Him to show you what changes you may need to make in your life based on these passages.

Share:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Do!

Carry out at least 5 actions today that only make sense if God's promises are reliable.

- First action
- Second action
- Third action
- Fourth action
- Fifth action

Day 5

Preparation:

Pray S.I.O.U.S.

Read:

Read carefully and prayerfully through Hebrews 13:1-3. Ask the Lord to give you insight.

Meditate:

What is the bottom line in this passage? I find it fascinating that this passage is all about seating in church. He doesn't say anything about feeding the poor man, or helping him out financially, or protecting him from injustice. Other passages of Scripture talk about doing those things, and we should most certainly do them, but that is not what James is talking about here. He says nothing about financial assistance. What is it that we are to give the poor in this passage? A seat. We will get around to helping them financially as well, but when they first walk-in, give them a seat. And in the context, what is that talking about? It is talking about honor and respect and welcoming love. Look at verse six.

James 2:6 you have insulted the poor.

That word translated **insult** means to dishonor. To treat them as unworthy of you – “I'm up here; you're down there.” And to have that kind of attitude toward a fellow human being is sin.

Proverbs 14:21 He who insults his neighbor sins.

We are not permitted to do that to anyone who visits the church. Instead, we are to do the opposite: accept them. Treat them as valuable. Show them honor. Give them a seat. We saw last week that giving them a seat means more than just giving them a place to sit down. It means giving them a place in the church. Giving them a place in this family.

I would love it if visitors who came to Agape would leave saying, “Those people sure are friendly.” But I would love it a lot more if they would leave saying, “I really felt honored by those people.”

How could you, as an individual, do that? Well, do you know where the bathrooms are? And do you know where the sanctuary is? If so, maybe for you it would be as simple as just getting on the rotation to be a greeter. Or just, in an informal way, standing out in the foyer and watching for people who look like they are new and asking if you can show them around.

“Can I help you find something? The nursery is right over there. The worship services through those doors – will be getting started here in about 10 minutes or so. In the meantime, there's coffee down at the end of the hall. I can show you if you like.”

That would be a great start. But what else could we do? Maybe we need to get creative. I think we should definitely strive to become more friendly than we are, but maybe we need to think beyond just being friendly. Maybe some of you who are really good at that sort of thing could put a few hours into brainstorming some ways that we could show honor to people who come here in a way that makes them feel honored.

I can think of a couple things. I think most people feel honored when you listen to them. If you are truly interested in what they are saying - that makes people feel honored.

I think people feel honored when they come in as someone new and they are included in what is going on.

I think most people feel honored when you pray for them - out loud. That is why inviting a visitor to your prayer group is such a great idea. You are including them, the group is eager to listen to their prayer request, and someone prays for them. I don't know any better ways to honor someone than that.

Those are a few ideas, but some of you are pretty creative and you are gifted in the area of hospitality, and maybe you could think of some things we could do and lead the rest of us into greater hospitality. Let me close with this question: Imagine Jesus sent a letter to us that said, "I will be watching you next Sunday. I want Agape to be twice as welcoming and honoring next Sunday as you normally are." If we got a letter from Jesus that said that, what would you, personally, do differently next Sunday?

Memorize:

Review James 1:19-2:7.

Pray:

Talk to God about what He said in Hebrews 13 and in James 2. Ask Him to show you what changes you may need to make in your life based on these passages.

Share:

Try to have a conversation with someone today about the most helpful thoughts that came out of your time with the Lord today.

Do!

- This Sunday at church, greet at least two different people with Hebrews 13:2 in mind (showing hospitality with the possibility in mind that it could be an angel).