

# FORSAKING FAVORS FOR FAITH - JAMES 2:1-13

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ September 6, 2015

<sup>1</sup> My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. <sup>2</sup> Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup> 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," <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: 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? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? <sup>8</sup> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. <sup>12</sup> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, <sup>13</sup> because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

I bet Jesus was a people watcher. When he wasn't teaching or being asked questions, I can just picture Jesus off to the side observing what was going on around him. That's where we found him in our gospel for this morning. Imagine what Jesus must have been thinking. He had been invited to a banquet at an important individual's house. Invitations were hard to come by, but he had been making a name for himself as quite a teacher, and so an invitation found him. He was not the guest of honor, so he had the opportunity to stand to the side and watch as the guests picked their places.

It must have been an interesting spectacle, not unlike a wedding that has no preassigned spots, everybody jostling for an important seat, a seat with an unobstructed view of the bride and groom. It was then that Jesus speaks one of his famous parables. **"When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited."** This was exactly what he observed the guests doing, searching for the best seats. But what would happen, Jesus said, if someone more important than you came along and the master of the banquet had prepared your seat for him? You would be humiliated in front of all the guests as you leave your place of honor and go to the lowest seat at the banquet.

"Instead," Jesus said, "humbly pick the lowest seat, that way, the master will come and raise you up to a better seat." Now the point of Jesus' parable was not to enable our egos to get a boost by taking a low spot just to be observed getting a better one. The parable was about humility - genuine humility. He went on to tell the master of the banquet, "Do not invite those

who can pay you back, but rather invite those who are unable to pay you back.” Now, why would Jesus say something like this? And what are we able to take from it?

The second lesson we heard from the book of James explains the point Jesus was making at the end of the gospel. A point about humility, humility from the standpoint of faith. James was very clear that doing favors for people can and does damage faith. He encourages his readers, us included to FORSAKE FAVORS FOR FAITH.

1. Remember who you were
2. Remember who you're called to be

(1)

The book of James has a different focal point than many of the other books of the Bible. While many other books of the Bible focus on what we call justification - What Jesus has done for you, the book of James has a lot of focus on what we call sanctification - what is our response to God's love. James addressed a people who were almost arrogant in their Christianity. They felt they didn't need to do anything if they believed in Jesus. James reminds them that they didn't need to do anything to be saved when they believe in Jesus, but that doesn't mean they didn't have to do anything. And so James goes on to show in any number of examples what it means to live a Christian life.

This particular chapter he addresses how showing favoritism is not the way that we are to conduct ourselves as Christians. He goes on to describe an example of this favoritism that could take place in their worship service. **“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 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,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”** Favoritism is shown to the rich man over the poor man, merely because of the clothes he is wearing and the honor he brings.

Now, don't get me wrong, James isn't against doing good to rich people. In fact, James would probably say, “continue to act kindly toward the rich person.” But he is also saying apply that same favor and kindness toward the person who is poor. We would be foolish to think that this kind of favoritism doesn't play out in our lives today. It may not be specifically between rich and poor, but perhaps between race, perhaps between Christian and non-Christian. I think we all have a tendency to be nicer to people who are nice to us.

It's so easy to be nice to those who are nice to us, because it's easy, it fulfills a basic human need - looking out for yourself. I often wonder how much of the charity work done in the world is ultimately done to make the person doing the charity work feel better about themselves. So even some good work can be twisted with impure motives.

But James gives Christians a better reason for being generous, a better reason for helping those who cannot help us back. He says, **“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

idea James is bringing up is not that the poor are automatically believers because they are poor, but rather, those who are poor in the eyes of the world have a tendency to be rich in faith, because they find more examples to trust in God than do those who are rich in the eyes of the world.

But just think about how you personally would react to another poor person you didn't know. What would your response be if a man walked through those doors, he smelt like he hadn't showered in over a week and his language was a little coarse? As much as I'd hope we would all line up to greet him, I think many of us would be turned off, maybe even wonder, "what is he doing here?" It doesn't have to be someone like that for us to be judgmental - maybe it's simply someone who holds a position we disagree with - be it politically, socially, or anything else. Maybe it's not the poor we discriminate against, but the wealthy - thinking how greedy and selfish they are to have that much money.

Now we may not think we're doing anything terrible by a little discrimination, but look at what James has to say, **"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."** Think for a moment what that means. Think for a moment how you have conducted your life, let's say in just the last 24 hours. Have you murdered someone? Have you slept with someone who is not your spouse? Have you stolen anything? Have you coveted something that someone else had? Have you slandered someone's good name or reputation? Have you taken God's name in vain? Have you created an idol in your heart by your love for it? Have you gotten angry? Have you had an impure thought? I could go on and on until I find something you have not done perfectly, but I think you get the point. If you were guilty of just one of those things, maybe it was just getting slightly angry, in God's eyes, you're guilty of breaking all of them.

And let's face it, who among us is only guilty of breaking just one of God's commands? And sometimes that's our problem, we minimize our problem. We think the sins we need to repent of are just small little things that we say a simple prayer about and we're good. But no, the guilt of God's whole law hangs over our heads. We don't just need to repent for a small little sin, but for how we have broken God's law in its entirety. This is who we were. And a God who judges justly is unable to overlook sin, but he must punish it.

(2)

But while God is a completely just God, we also know him to be a completely merciful God. And the only place where God's mercy and God's justice could meet was in Jesus. Jesus is the law that gives freedom. Jesus' obeying of God's law earned our freedom from the law that accuses us as lawbreakers.

When we are under the law that gives freedom, we see the way we perform favors in a different light. We do not show our favoritism based on what we can get out of it, but we base our favoritism in who we are called to be. As Christians, we have been called out of this world to be different. It's a difference we have been talking about in our Sunday morning Bible Class. Jesus described it as being the light in the world and the salt of the earth. We **"love our neighbor as ourselves"** not because of what we might get out of it or because of what others think about us, but because we are **"Speaking and acting according to the law that gives freedom."**

It is this law that gives freedom that James spends so much time in his letter talking about. Normally we call this the gospel - good news. But James doesn't just want Christians to be happy they are saved, he tells them how we are to act after hearing this news. As Christians we are not to show favoritism between people, but strive to see all people as our Savior saw them - lost souls loved by their God. Sometimes it's our job to remind people that they are loved by their God. Other times it's our job to tell people that despite what they think, they are loved by God.

It is this law that gives freedom that we spend the rest of our lives as Christians speaking and acting to fulfill. It's a "law" that is not obedience driven, but grace driven. It's a "law" that can only be acted out after humbly bowing down at the foot of the cross in repentance. It's a "law" that has no rules, only mercy.

This might sound vague and generic, but in our lives it is specific and real. We only need to consider the people we come into contact with. Maybe it's a regular contact like a friend or a family member. Maybe it's an acquaintance, or maybe it's a complete stranger. Our job is not to judge them based on their difference from us, it is rather to show mercy based on what we have in common - a desperate need for a Savior. But mercy is not just about ignoring people's sins, but warning about them.

We show mercy because he showed mercy to us. We love because he first loved us. This is what it's all about. It's not about exchanging favors with one another, it's not about showing favoritism to someone you may like. It's about FORSAKING FAVORS FOR FAITH. A faith that will do favors regardless of how they are received. In fact, do a favor for someone who can't pay you back. Because that's what God did for us. May God's mercy which lives in us now, triumph over judgment! Amen.