

## Impartial Love

### James 2:1-13

We live in a world that has selective loss of vision, a temporary blindness of sorts that allows us to see the people we want and ignore the people we do not want to see.

In a recent interview, a homeless man was asked what the worst part of being homeless is. I was expecting the outdoor conditions to be high on the list. I also thought about the living arrangements and the food insecurity to be key, but his answer startled me and made me think about the text of scripture we are investigating today. The man said that the worst part of being homeless is how invisible he feels. He went on to say, *"It is as if no one sees me; people go out of their way to avoid making eye contact. It is as if I am not there if our eyes do not connect and most people do not want our eyes to connect."*

We have a tendency to judge people based on what we see or do not see. Our quick survey and appraisal of people is our way of pre-judging and therefore using our time in a most efficient way so as not to waste time on people who we do not deem worthy of time and energy.

In today's lesson, James described himself as a "servant of... the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1). This author could have made a bolder claim, however, for he was the half-brother of Jesus. James is listed as number two of five brothers (Mark 6:3) and therefore in charge of his family's inheritance after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Although James did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah during Jesus' ministry (John 7:5), a dramatic change took place after the resurrection of Jesus (1Cor.15:7). Acts tells us that the brothers of Jesus were part of the earliest fellowship in Jerusalem that became the church (Acts 1:14). All this to say that James has firsthand knowledge of who Jesus was and he could testify to the veracity of what Jesus stood for. Three things stand out as important to our investigation of the text this morning:

#### I. Favoring the Wealthy (James 2:1-4)

##### A. Attitude of Jesus (v.1)

1. Following the assertion that religion God desires from his people requires caring for the afflicted and pursuing holiness (James 1:27), he transitions to the subject of favoritism (v.1a)
2. He exhorted his audience to be faithful to the example of Christ (v.1b)

##### B. Case Study (vv.2-4)

1. James offered a hypothetical situation to illustrate why showing special attention to one person over another is inappropriate for Christians (v.2)

2. James suggested the man with the appearance of wealth would be escorted to a comfortable seat where he could see and hear everything in the service (v.3)
3. Anyone who participated in that partiality is a judge whose evil thoughts run counter to what God desires (v.4)

## II. Favoring the Poor (James 2:5-7)

### A. In Faith (v.5)

1. God expressed that he has chosen those who are poor (example: Leviticus 23:22; Zechariah 7:10).
2. Because the poor do not possess wealth, James suggested that it is easier for them to be rich in faith and trust in God, not worldly riches (v.5)

### B. Against Oppression (vv.6-7)

1. The charge of dishonoring the poor implies that the church really was honoring the rich. The wealthy in James's society notoriously oppressed the poor and used the corrupt courts to their advantage. (v.6)
2. The dishonoring tactics of the rich are an insult to the noble name, Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:9-11)

## III. Favoring the Neighbor (James 2:8-13)

### A. Royal Law (James 2:8-11)

1. The royal law works on two levels. (v.8)
  - a. This is the "*king of laws*," the one that controls and orders all things we should do.
  - b. This is the "*law of the King*." No law that contradicts this one will come from Jesus, and no law will replace it.
2. Showing favoritism violates the intent of the royal law and is therefore sinful. (v.9)
3. The law was a package, not a pick-and-choose buffet of options. To be in compliance meant 100 percent blamelessness. (v.10)
4. James was not interested in every obscure commandment in the Law of Moses or trying to bind such things upon Jewish Christian believers. (v.11)

### B. Law of Liberty (vv.12-13)

1. Love frees us to keep God's commands rather than constraining us with the commands. (v.12)
2. Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer that if we withhold forgiveness, we should not expect God's forgiveness. (v.13)

Note: Discrimination, prejudice, and partiality are all types of judging others. When we favor the rich person because of her wealth and disfavor a poor person because of his poverty we make moral judgements without mercy. James wants mercy to win this battle. He wants

mercy to win out in our lives and to be shown in the way we treat others. In this way, mercy will overrule judgment.

### Conclusion

Over 1,900 years ago, James gave definitive answers for how the church should live and behave. James offered these two ethical foundations—the royal law and the law of liberty—to guide the church. Both of these were learned from his half brother, Jesus.

These two laws go together. If we see others as our neighbors in need—whether they are beloved friends or reviled enemies—we must show mercy, not discrimination. If we set aside our natural impulse to favor certain visitors, we will find unexpected opportunities to share the love that wells up in our hearts.

Jesus did not treat people according to divisions of wealth or poverty, or perceived blessings or curses. James, his brother, did not either. Instead, James and Jesus show that God loves the poor, and we should too. This issue has not gone away in the nearly 2,000 years since James wrote, and we do well to listen to him today.