

A SERMON SERIES IN JAMES

UNDIVIDED

Living Out the Shema

Mercy Wins

James 2:1–13

LET'S START HERE

Think about the last time you walked into a room where you didn't know anybody.

Who did you want to sit by?

And who did you hope you wouldn't have to?

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 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?

James is writing to a church that loves Jesus and still sorts people.

WHERE WE ARE GOING THIS MORNING

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

James 2:13

A WORD WORTH KNOWING

prosōpolēmpsía

Literally: “to receive the face.”

The word James uses for favoritism describes a judgment made off the surface of a person — the face, the clothing, the first impression — before a single word has been exchanged.

Scripture says God does the opposite. He looks past the face every time.

LOOK CLOSELY AT THE SCENE

They let him in.

They just showed him where he ranked.

Favoritism rarely says “you are not welcome here.”

It says “welcome,” and then it points to the back.

JAMES 2:4

“Have you not... become judges with evil thoughts?”

There is only one Judge in this house, and the seat is taken.

Ranking a room is doing a job that was never handed to us — with evidence we were never given.

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

God chose. That verb carries the whole argument.

THE PATTERN RUNS ALL THE WAY THROUGH SCRIPTURE

A shepherd boy

still out in the field when the prophet
arrived

1 Samuel 16

A girl from Nazareth

a town with no standing and no
reputation

Luke 1

Fishermen and a tax collector

the ones no rabbi had chosen

Matthew 4 · 9

A woman at a well

drawing water at noon, when nobody
else would be there

John 4

Heaven never recruits from the top of the list.

SO WHY DOES JAMES HAVE TO SAY ANY OF THIS?

**Because mercy is easy to receive
and easy to forget.**

Nobody in this room made the cut. Nobody was chosen off a résumé. Every one of us was welcomed in on grace we did not earn and could not repay.

Remember that, and the door stops being something you guard. It becomes something you hold open.

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

The royal law — the law of the King, the one Jesus said the rest hangs on.

JAMES 2:10

**The law is not a scorecard.
It is a window.**

Throw one rock and you do not have a chipped window. You have a broken one.

Which is why the law was never meant to make us confident. It was meant to bring us to mercy.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

**Mercy triumphs
over judgment.**

WHERE THAT WAS SETTLED

Not in a courtroom. On a hill outside Jerusalem.

Every broken window. Every verdict any of us had coming. It all landed on Jesus, and he carried it all the way down.

**Judgment brought everything it had.
And mercy still won.**

That isn't just your theology.

That's your biography.

You are a person for whom mercy beat judgment.

And people who know that about themselves tend to hand it out the same way they got it.

THIS WEEK

Three ways to let mercy win.

1 Notice it

The next time you size somebody up, just catch it happening. Awareness comes before change.

2 Take the seat

Sit with the person you would normally walk past, and stay long enough to learn something true about them.

3 Release one

Think of somebody you have been holding an account against, and let this be the week you close it.

Every one of us came in the same way.

God looked at you and said,
“Here’s a good seat for you.”

**You are not here because you ranked.
You are here because mercy won.**