

The World According to Jim
“The World According to Jim...Not Jim Crow”
James 2:1-13

Introduction

- I want to begin this morning by looking at the family dynamics of the most prominent and important family in the Old Testament. Israel’s family. If you’ll remember God chose to fulfill his promises to Abraham during the life of the Jacob, Isaac’s son, Abraham’s grandson. Jacob, also known as Israel, is the central figure in the book of Genesis. He is the **Vito Corleone** of the Old Testament, the Godfather of the family, and rules the family with the will of an Italian Don in terms of the leadership and control. That’s maybe a bit of an overstatement but you get the picture.
- Turn to Genesis 37:1-4. Listen. *Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan. 2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them. 3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.*
- We all know what happens don’t we? It’s because of favoritism that Joseph’s jealous brothers throw him into a pit and leave him for dead. It’s because of favoritism they then decide to sell him the caravan of Ishmaelite traders heading for Egypt. It’ because of favoritism Joseph ends up as a servant in Potiphar’s house. In some sense, the favoritism shown to Joseph by Israel sets off a chain of events that leads to 400 years of slavery in Egypt.
- The sad thing is Jacob, Israel, was just doing what was modeled to him by his dad. Jacob himself was the favored one. Isaac his dad favored Jacob over his brother Esau. And Jacob’s grandfather Abraham was no better. He favored Isaac over Ishmael. That family trait was passed on down the line. It didn’t end with Jacob. Moses is favored over Aaron. This family dynamic of favoritism, this failure of parenting, marks the family of God right on down the line through the time of Christ.
- What makes us think it’s any different now? Seriously. What makes us think we’re any better than Abraham or Israel? It certainly wasn’t any better in the family dynamic of church life in James’s day.

Transition

In fact, the big idea of James 2:1-13 is right there in **verse 1**. *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.* [Slide #2] James’s point is that...

Proposition

- **The body of Christ is no place to play favorites**
- It’s the World According to Jim. We’re talking about the church. It’s not the world according to Jim Crow. Favoritism is inconsistent with true faith in Christ. It was a problem then and chances are good it’s a problem now. And we say “Amen brother. Preach it brother. But that’s not my problem.” “Good thing the guy next to me is hearing this.” “Boy

it's about time she heard that." And God says to you, "if you are anything like your family that's gone before you, you're no different." Don't show favoritism. There's no place for it in the body of Christ. It's inconsistent with true faith in Christ.

- It happens in the church all the time, doesn't it? A person receives a position on the church board because of how much they earn instead of their character. Church discipline is ignored because the person is question gives a lot to the church. So nothing is said or done for fear of giving going down. Favoritism. We carefully calculate who's in our small group. "Oh, I hope they are there," we think. "I hope they don't come." Churches have "in crowds" just as much as the halls of the high school—it's just nobody talks about it. Pastors only entrust the ministry to a select few and ignore the gifts of others because of personality differences. That's favoritism. We go out of our way to greet those we know and like and avoid those on the fringes. Take for instance Elaine Brook's sister Mary. God bless her. When was the last time you went out of your way to greet Mary—someone who can do absolutely nothing for you? We are so quick to judge by outward appearances. Think about it for a second. Would a smelly, dirty, homeless person be welcomed here in the same way as a new doctor at the hospital?
- There's an even darker side to favoritism. If we're favoring someone that means we're discriminating against someone else. [Donald Miller](#) in his book [Blue Like Jazz](#) tells a story about something that happened to him while in line at the grocery store. He writes. "At the checkout counter, the lady in front of me pulled out food stamps to pay for her groceries. I had never seen food stamps before. They were more colorful than I imagined and looked more like money than stamps. It was obvious as she unfolded the currency that she, I, and the checkout girl were quite uncomfortable with the interaction. I wished there was something I could do. I wished I could pay for her groceries myself, but to do so would have been to cause a greater scene. The checkout girl quickly performed her job, signing and verifying a few documents, then filed the lady through the line. The woman never lifted her head as she organized her bags of groceries and set them into her cart. She walked away from the checkout stand in the sort of stiff movements a person uses when they know they are being watched. On the drive over the mountain that afternoon, I realized that it was not the woman who should be pitied; it was me. Somehow I had come to believe that because a person is in need, they are candidates for sympathy, not just charity. It was not that I wanted to buy her groceries; the government was already doing that. I wanted to buy her dignity. And yet, by judging her, I was the one taking her dignity away."¹
- We discriminate against those that aren't like us, that don't talk like us, that don't look like us, that don't act like us, that don't have the same educational background as we do. And we rob them of their dignity. We're suspicious of others that come from different cultures. And we make racist, discriminatory, partial, comments like, "they can't help themselves." "That's just the way they are." We are too quick to judge by outward appearances.

Transition

I would bet that most of us, myself included, would consider ourselves beyond favoritism, beyond, partiality. James 2 warns us not to be too confident of ourselves. [[Slide #3](#)] There are

Organizational Sentence

- **Two reasons why favoritism is evil**

¹ Donald Miller, [Blue Like Jazz](#) (Thomas Nelson, 2003) p.84.

Transition

[Slide #4] First of all, in verses 1-7, James says **favoritism violates the character of God**. *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?* Thank goodness God doesn't show favoritism.

Main Points

- In verses 2-3 James tells of a situation which had most likely happened in the churches James was writing to. This is not just a hypothetical, what if scenario. Something like this probably happened. If you've ever read James before this is one of those passages that just jumps out at you. It's been called the case of the nearsighted usher.
- Two people show up to the worship service. The first man is dressed wearing a gold ring. In James' day rings were markers of social status. It'd be like a guy driving up to church in a brand new BMW. This man James says is also wearing fine clothes. Meaning, he's either dressed in luxurious clothes or fresh and clean clothes.² It really doesn't matter the point is still the same. This guy, for simple outward appearances alone, gets the best seat in the house.
- The second guy is poor. He looks it. He acts it. He probably smells it. I like Doug Moo's description. "The image James conjures up is of the typical homeless person in our day, dressed in mismatched, stained, and smelly rags."³ In our day and age this is the guy who drives to church in the 15 year old beater that's rusted out with the tailpipe so noisy you hear him coming a mile away. And he gets seated in the nosebleed section. *Sit on the floor by my feet.*
- The word translated in the NIV as favoritism literally means 'receiving the face.' It was a word invented by the New Testament writers as a literal rendering of a Hebrew word for partiality. "To 'receive the face' means to make judgments about people based on external appearance."⁴ James says if you'd judged by outward appearances alone, *if you show special attention have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?* There's no place for favoritism in the church.
- Why? Because God is not a God of favoritism. Romans 2:11 kind of beats around the bush when it says this about God. *For God does not show favoritism.* End of story. Remember what God told Samuel when Samuel was sent to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king? The bunch is paraded in front of Samuel from the eldest and tallest to the youngest and Samuel sees the eldest and says, *"Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."* But God says in 1 Samuel 16:7 *"Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have*

² Reinecker, p. 727.

³ Moo, p. 103.

⁴ Moo, p. 102.

rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." God is not this way. Favoritism violates the character of God. He doesn't show favoritism. He doesn't make judgments based on external characteristics. He doesn't make decisions based on dress, or color of skin, size of the pocket book or physical appearance.⁵

- Nor should Christians. There are strong words in the Old Testament about the seriousness of showing favoritism. Leviticus 19:15 "*Do not pervert justice.*" God says. "*Do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.*" Favoritism is evil because it is a perversion of justice. *As believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.* A Christian should be the last person on earth to get caught up in the sham of social status. Who are we to make distinctions like that? And yet we make external judgments about people all the time.
- The story is told of the preacher who dressed like a homeless man one Sunday morning just to see how the congregation would respond—to see if he would be accepted and welcomed. And I thought about doing that this morning. Only I figured my height would blow my cover. What would happen if Ty Pennington, Paige Hemmis and Eduardo from Extreme Home Makeover showed up here this morning? They'd get the best seat in the house. We'd all stand as they entered.
- In our family there's a guy who drives by our house somewhat regularly. He visits one of our neighbors. I'm ashamed to admit this, but to Miriam and me and the kids, he's simply known as "scary guy." Isn't that horrible? Would "scary guy" receive the same welcome as Ty? What would happen if "scary guy" showed up at LifeGroup one night? Listen to me. This church needs more "scary guys."

Transition

[Slide #5] James goes on to say in verses 8-13 that favoritism is evil because it violates the sum total of God's law—love your neighbor. It's the royal law of Scripture James says in verse 8. *Love your neighbor as yourself.* It's the sum total of all of God's laws put together. Do this, live this command out and you fulfill and keep all the rest of God's commands. James says favoritism violates that law. And we say to the pastor under our breath...[Slide #6]...“fine, good. I'd like to see you love my neighbor.” Or as Carl Sandburg put it, “Love your neighbor as yourself; but don't take down the fence.”⁶

- Listen again. *If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!*
- [Slide #7] In as few words as possible and as one commentator put it, “Favoritism violates the demand of love for one's neighbor.”⁷ You can't love others when you're partial to a few.

⁵ Moo, p. 102.

⁶ Carl Sandburg, American poet, novelist, and historian (1878–1967)

⁷ Moo, p. 113 and 110.

When you discriminate against some. James says favoritism makes us lawbreakers. It is a violation of the law. A lawbreaker is a term for a person who directly disobeys a positive command in scripture.⁸ Most of us don't see ourselves as lawbreakers. We drive the speed limit. We pay our taxes. We're law abiding citizens.

- But the Bible says all of us, every single one of us, have broken God's moral law. If we've broken the positive command *love your neighbor as yourself* by showing favoritism we are lawbreakers. In God's eyes it makes no difference whether we've sinned by showing partiality or murder or adultery, the two Old Testament commands he quotes here. They're all the same in God's eyes. The Great Lawgiver stands behind all of his commands. To break one is to break them all because God's moral law is a unified whole. Sin is sin is sin is sin. Or as [verse 10](#) puts it. *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.*
- Think about it like this. You throw a tiny little pebble through the corner of a very large picture window. In doing so, you don't just break the corner of the window pane. You've broken the whole pane of glass.⁹ James's point here is that by showing discrimination, by showing favoritism, by showing partiality, it may seem like breaking a small corner of a very large window. It may seem like no big deal in the grand scheme of things. But in reality, partiality breaks the whole window. In fact, it's a huge deal. As a sin it's no different than the biggies. In fact, it's a direct violation of *the royal law found in scripture*, the law that sums up the totality of all that God expects of us as his followers of Christ. We break that law, the law to love your neighbor as yourself, and we put ourselves in grave danger.¹⁰
- See, James says that one day we will all be judged; everything we've ever said or done will come to light. And if we continue to judge others, here, now, if we continue to make decisions and form opinions based on outward appearances alone—then at the judgment we can expect God to treat us the same way. [Verse 12](#), *because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.* That is a scary thing to think about.

Conclusion

- So how do you beat prejudice, favoritism, partiality, discrimination? If you find you have the same disease as the nearsighted usher what should you do? Follow God's example. Allow mercy to triumph over judgment. [Verse 13](#). *Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Remember god's character. Romans 2:11. *For God does not show favoritism.* He hasn't called you to Christ Jesus because you were the most spit polished best shined up one of the lot. He's called you to Christ as a lawbreaker, as a transgressor no less. It's as a rusty old beater that he's brought you to Jesus. He has shown you great mercy. His mercy has triumphed over his judgment against you. In other words, his mercy has triumphed over all thought of showing discrimination against you because of who you are and what you've done.
- And it's by the blood of our *glorious Lord Jesus Christ* that he asks you to do the same for others. **The body of Christ is no place to play favorites.** *My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Love your neighbor as yourself.* If you do this, James says, *you are doing right.*

⁸ Moo, p. 113. See Romans 2:25, 27, Galatians 2:18, Hebrews 2:2, 9:15

⁹ Hiebert, *James*, p. 148.

¹⁰ Moo, p. 98.