

*James 2:1-13. My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. <sup>2</sup> Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby 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: 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 insulted 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 slandering 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, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do 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!*

### *Demonstrate Mercy*

#### *1. Do not show favoritism*

#### *2. Love your neighbor as yourself*

What's better; faster or slower? AT&T has recently developed a popular ad campaign in which a man in a suit interviews a panel of judges to answer some simple questions. The charm of this series of commercials is that the panel is made up of children who answer these simple questions in their own unique way. The ad ends by saying that it's not complicated.

So this morning I present to you a simple question for you to consider. What's better: mercy or judgment? It is certainly a weightier question than any question in the ads mentioned above and yet the answer is still rather simple. Mercy is better than judgment. The answer itself is not complicated, what's complicated, however, is how we carry out (or fail to carry out) this principle in our lives.

Today the apostle James calls Christians to **demonstrate mercy in our lives**. He **challenges us not to show favoritism** as he explains this is an action of unloving judgment. He then insists that we follow the royal law found in Scripture, which is,

## **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

In these opening remarks from the book of James, the apostle doesn't give his readers a choice or much of an option at all. He implores them, **“Don't show favoritism!”** He makes his plea on the basis that they are believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus certainly did not teach us, his disciples, to treat others better or worse based on their appearance or their social status. Our Lord Jesus led by example and he had compassion on all people. He sat and ate with the rich and the poor. He healed the blind beggar and the centurion's servant. He shared his message of salvation with the Pharisee Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman at the well. He showed mercy to all. So James addresses his readers as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. He calls them to lives that demonstrate the mercy and compassion of Christ. He calls them to show mercy and kindness to all people especially the poor. Mercy is better.

This lesson also makes us challenge social norms as it begs the question: what's better; being rich or being poor? When confronted with this simple question human nature is quick to answer, “It is far better to be rich”. If you are wealthy financial problems are gone and life is easy, right? The wealthy often receive special treatment while the poor are looked down upon and those in poverty treated with disdain and contempt. The answer *must* be simple; rich is better. James, however, challenges this view that rich is better. He does so in two different ways. First he constructs a hypothetical situation that is similar to the parable that Jesus shares in our Gospel for today, and then he calls the believer to listen to what Scripture and our Savior have to say about the rich and the poor.

The situation that James describes is one that certainly makes a person think about our own sinful tendencies. When a rich person, with fine clothes walks into your house or steps foot into our church, how do we respond? Is there not a part of us that wants to rush to that person and offer them the VIP treatment, holding in the back of our minds the hope that this person would somehow return the favor and we would someday receive VIP treatment in return? But when someone who is dressed in less than the best comes to church or otherwise crosses our path, we respond much less courteously as we think to ourselves, “What can I get in return for helping them?” Our reasoning is blinded by influence and wealth, and while the wicked judgments that we make in our minds may not come pouring out of our mouths they are certainly reflected in our actions. A double take, a glare, a ‘tisk, tisk’ and a shake of the head, a look away and a cold shoulder, all convey the flawed and wicked judgments we have immediately made in our minds. Too often we give special attention to the wealthy and we shun and ignore those we view as poor. This should not be!

James reminds his readers still today that this should not be and he reminds us of what our Savior and what Scripture teaches us about the rich and the poor. James

pleads with the Christians of his day and the Christians of today to, listen and to look. ***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?***

One cannot help but think of our Savior's words, when he tells the rich young man who loved his wealth more than God to sell all that he had and give to the poor. How can we forget the words of Jesus Sermon on the Mount, when he looked at his disciples and told them, "***Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.***" (Luke 6:20) How can we not also think of Paul's words of wisdom and warning when he urges believers to be content and to keep themselves free from the love of money which can plunge men into all kinds of other sins and troubles including wandering away from the faith! Listen and remember these words, "***those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.***" (1 Tim 6:9,10).

"Listen!" James says. Listen to the word of God and also look at the world around you. See with clear reasoning the evidence daily displayed in this sinful world. Why treat the poor with contempt and envy the rich and wealthy when many who are poor cling to Christ Jesus for eternal wealth but many of the rich are more interested in doing whatever it takes to get more earthly treasures. James pleads with them to open their eyes and ears to see that rich is not necessarily better. ***Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?***

After this eye opening comment James then goes on to explain that such favoritism of the rich is, indeed, a sin. It is a lack of love, a feeling of hatred that translates into actions of disdain. While some might insist that such reaction is common and try to brush it off as just the way things are, James reminds us that this is a sin. It breaks the fifth commandment for such favoritism indicates a certain level of hatred and a lack of love. It is a sin and therefore we cannot brush it off as something that just happens in our way of life, but we must confess that we have fallen short of God's standards. We have fallen short of Christ's example of mercy and compassion. We have brought shame to his name by our lack of love.

So what is the solution? Should we rid ourselves of all our earthly wealth? This is not the answer for money itself is not the problem; it is a love of money that leads to greed and favoritism. All our blessings, all our material possessions, come from the hand of God. He gives them to us so that we may provide for our families, fulfill our civic responsibilities, support the work of the church, and provide for the poor and needy. Rather than looking to our wealth and comparing it with others, let us instead look to Christ's mercy and love, which is beyond compare. Recall how

Christ who is rich in mercy died for us poor wretched sinners. The King of kings laid down his life for all people: rich, poor, working class, and middle class. He died for all because we are all undeserving beggars. He had nothing to gain. We had nothing to give, nothing to offer, but he had compassion on us. He paid the ransom for us. He offered his life of righteousness and his precious blood in exchange for sinners draped in sin and corrupted by evil. He had compassion on us and in his grace and mercy we are saved. He has taken away the filthy rags of our sin and we are clothed in our King's righteousness. We have a place at the King's table. We have a reserved spot at his banquet. Everyone, rich or poor, young or old, who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus can make that claim.

The mercy and love that was shown to mankind in Christ Jesus leads us and compels us to follow what James calls the "royal law" that our King and Savior gave to us, "***Love your neighbor as yourself***". How would you feel if you walked through those doors and you were ignored, and shunned, and shamed? How would you feel if you were in need and instead of helped you were judged and insulted? It would hurt, wouldn't it? Wouldn't you rather be treated with compassion and mercy and respect?

What's better; mercy or judgment? It not complicated, is it? It is better to show mercy than to be judged, just as it is better to be treated with compassion than to be looked down upon. Don't show favoritism. Reign in those glares. Ask for forgiveness when you are quick to judge. Ask for forgiveness when you covet and are envious. Welcome people of all kinds into this house of worship and in your daily lives. Treat others like you would want to be treated, be compassionate and merciful to all, and live by that royal law, "***Love your neighbor as yourself.***" Above all, live in humble reverence remembering the great acts of mercy that God demonstrated for you in Christ Jesus; for ultimately, that is how we will be judged.

When we stand before God we will not be judged by the amount of money in our checkbooks or the clothes that we have in our closets or on our backs, but we will be judged as those covered in the righteousness of Christ. We are declared holy in God's sight through faith in Christ Jesus. As humble servants who have known the mercy of the King, demonstrate your faith, show mercy to those in need, or as James puts it, <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!*** Judging people based on income and wardrobe is unkind and un-Christian. Showing mercy, helping those in need, being kind to all is how we as Christians, those privileged to bear the name of our merciful Lord, should live each day. It's not complicated. Mercy is better. Amen.