**The Great Sin of Favoritism**



**James 2:1–9**

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Before we get started, I want you to go back to perhaps an awkward stage in your life. I want you to go back to third grade. Now, if you are not quite a third grader yet, you can fast forward a few years. If you are in third grade, you are there. If you are like most of us, it is going to take a lot of imagination to get back to third grade, but I want you to imagine you are as recess as a third grader and it is time for kickball. So, here you are and one of your buddies gets picked to do one team and another buddy gets to pick the other team. You are in a crowd of your friends and you have that looming question. Will I get picked? As the choosing begins, you see the people who are choosing are picking those who are tall, fast, athletic, and strong. For me, when I was a third grader I was short, pudgy, and slow, so I would just know it is going to be a little while before I get picked. I am thinking…when am I going to be picked? Who am I better than? Who am I worse than? We can all remember that feeling. Do I matter? Am I valuable? When people see me, what do they see? Do they see a winner, or do they see somebody who should be picked over? But then you also remember being on the other side of it, right, when you got picked to pick the teams. How did you pick? You picked those who were strong, athletic, those who looked like they were winners. You looked and you picked as you saw. The problem is we do not really outgrow that. Oftentimes we become people who continue to look on the outside and make judgements about people. As we look on the outside and make judgements about people, we begin to determine their value. As we determine their value, we decide whether they should be honored or whether they should be dishonored. Whether they should be favored or whether they should be left out.

As we get ready to study James chapter 2, he is going to deal with the great sin of favoritism. He is going to say with the church it cannot be so. The reason I took you back to third grade is because I want you to remember that feeling you had in the pit of your stomach, the anxiousness. Do I matter? Does anybody care? Am I worthy of somebody’s pick? We do not grow out of those questions. We ask those all the way through our lives, and we as the church need to be the people that answer those questions for people and to say you do matter. You have value and my response is going to be to honor and love you. That is what James is going to try and get us to do this morning. Before we read this text, I want to just give a word of warning because it is going to be easy to hear this sermon or even hear this text read and start nodding your head and saying…*oh yeah, I know those people who do those things. I know those people who make distinctions about those other people. I know those groups who make distinctions about other groups. I know those kinds of people who commit those kinds of sins.* For this moment, James is not talking about those people doing those sins. He is talking about you and he is talking about me. We need to hear these words for ourselves because James is writing to the church as they gather together. They are showing favoritism. They are judging on outward appearance only. James is going to say, brothers, this cannot be. As we read these words, it is as if Jesus is standing on this stage speaking these things to us. Hear the very Word of God.

**Scripture**

***“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”***

I just want to walk through this text, so if you have your Bibles, you can leave them open. First, James starts with a command. The command is pretty straight forward. It is pretty simple. He says do not show partiality. So that is the command. What is the sermon about? What should I do with this message? Go and do not show partiality. Some of your translations say favoritism. Do not show favoritism. Douglas Moo, a New Testament scholar, says that the writers of the Bible actually made up this Greek word off of a word in the Old Testament Hebrew that meant to show partiality. What this Greek word literally means is ‘to receive the face.’ It is the idea of looking and judging based on someone’s face, based on the outward appearance. You are sizing the value of someone based on how they look, based on the outside. That is what it means to show partiality, to show favoritism. You look at somebody and you make immediate distinctions about them and then you determine are they valuable or not? Should I give them honor or dishonor? Should I favor them or should I reject them? Should I treat them well or should I just ignore them? That is showing partiality. James’s command is simple. Do not do this. But he says do not do this as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, so he is talking to believers…*hey, believers, as you follow Jesus you cannot do this!* In other words, he is trying to show that favoritism and the gospel cannot go together; they are incompatible. You cannot show favoritism towards people and also love and follow Jesus. The two are at odds with one another. So, if you are going to follow the Lord, if you are going to proclaim the gospel with your life, then you cannot show favoritism.

Now I just want to ask a question right at the beginning of these verses because James says, “…hold the faith in our Lord Jesus…” then he says, “…the Lord of glory.” I just want to ask, why does James insert the title, the Lord of glory, as he is about to talk about not showing favoritism towards rich or poor people for how they look on the outside. Why does he proclaim the Lord is the Lord of glory? I just want to ask that question. Just ponder that as we go through and we will try to give an answer to that at the end. But I do want to just note one thing in this title, the Lord of glory. James is writing primarily to Jewish believers who are spread out. Jewish believers knew the Old Testament. The Old Testament proclaimed in Isaiah 42:8 that God says, “I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.” God is very clear. He is the God of glory and there is no one else that shares His glory. There is no one else to be called the Lord of glory. Yet, James writes to a church and says Jesus is the Lord of glory. So here is a church that is understanding Jesus is the Lord of glory, which means what? Jesus is God. He is the second person of the Godhead. Jesus is the true Lord of glory.

So, here is the command…Do not show partiality. Do not show favoritism. Do not receive someone’s face. Do not just look on the outside and give a judgment of them. Now James is going to give an example that illustrates the point for us. Look at verses 2–4. It says, “For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” So, he gives an example of what favoritism looks like, what partiality would look like, and he does it in the context of the church. Think about it. They are coming together to worship the Lord of glory, they are coming together to say we love the gospel…God has saved us and redeemed us.

Now, in their meeting place you can presume the ushers are at the door welcoming people in and two guys show up. One guy comes in and he is dressed to the nines. He appears to be successful. He has fine clothing and wearing gold. You can just look at him and know he is important, he has power, he has a good job, and he must have some privilege. This guy is somebody who has great value. They automatically make that distinction just by looking at this person. So, what do they do to the rich? They say come here, we have a front row seat for you.I can imagine they are like kicking people off the front row so they can sit there. They are saying*…here you sit here. Can I serve you? Can I get you anything*? Now, you have to imagine that there are some pretty poor people there who are not really privileged in society. And then you have somebody coming in who seems to have some success and power and they are thinking…*hey, if we treat him good, maybe he will treat us good. Maybe if we show him some honor, he will show us some honor. This guy has a lot to offer. Imagine what his tithe check is going to be! We need to make sure this guy feels welcomed.* So, to the rich guy, they roll out the red carpet. They welcome him. They show him honor because they favor him. They make a distinction about him just based on the way he looks. But the other guy comes in and he doesn’t look so good. He looks a little more like a homeless person with shabby clothing. He doesn’t smell the same as the rich guy, doesn’t seem like he is anybody, maybe he doesn’t have a job. He does not have any clout, privilege, or power. He walks in and the usher tells him to just go find a seat wherever, preferably in the back. Or, he says…*how about you go over there. There is some room on the floor, how about you go sit on the floor.*

Here is a group of people, A CHURCH, following the Lord Jesus who sees no problem with that. The rich guy has value. The rich guys deserve honor because the rich guy is somebody; we can see it. That poor person, he is a nobody. He has no value, so we do not have to treat him with respect, honor, or love…*What is he here for anyways? Is he trying to get something from us? He is probably coming just to get a handout*. What happens is they end up dishonoring the poor person and they honor the rich person. Here, we see the sin in vivid color. It is what James is trying to show. It is the sin of favoritism. It is the sin of partiality, judging according to the face, looking at someone and saying I know you. I know your value and I can treat you one way or the other based on your outward appearance.

We see this sin. It has both a fruit and a root. All sin has root and fruit. The fruit is they show favoritism. They show partially. They treat differently. But there is actually a root that is deeper than that, and the root sin is they are making distinctions and judging according to their own standards. The sin is looking at someone and making a distinction right off the bat just by how they look, dress, where they are from, or who they are. You make a snap judgment. You make a distinction. That is the root sin of partiality, and then it comes up into this –– now that I have made a distinction, I have determined their value and now I can treat them one way or the other. That is the fruit. That is when it grows and you actually commit the sin of favoritism. You favor one over the other.

James is calling the church out for acting like the world. In their day, this was the world’s system. The system would put more value on a rich person because a rich person has power and influence. They obviously have more value, but a poor person has none of those things. The less you have the less you matter. That is how the world’s system saw everyone. So, the church used that same thinking and put it into practice. James is writing and saying we are not a part of the world. We are a part of the Kingdom and the Kingdom has different sets of values. The world calls this normal; James calls it sin. He calls it sin to be repented of. But I will say this; it not just a James problem, this is a human problem. This is an ‘us’ problem. This is a today problem. We never quite outgrow that high school lunch room scene where we come in and pick seats based on how you look and what group you are with. We shun people based on how they look and what group they are not with. We never quite outgrow that. We continue to be the mean girls all the way through. That is how we are according to our flesh, but it should not be the way we are as we walk in the Spirit.

We live in a culture that defines people by identities (that is plural). We have all these identities that we label people with or that people label themselves with. We start to look at people based on their identities –– where they are from, where they live, how much money they have, what skin color they are, their ethnicity, their accent, their vocabulary, their educational system, what gender they are, or what orientation they identify with. All of these things are identities that we give people or that people give to themselves. They are political views. As we see people, what do we see? We see all of those identities. As the world, we judge people often based on those identities, and depending on how you see the world, those identities are either good or they are bad. If it is a good identity in your worldview then you will favor them and honor them. If it is a bad identity in your worldview then you will dishonor them and you will treat them differently. That is the world’s systems.

We all have identities. We give and we self-proclaim those identities that are plural, and what James wants the church to see is as kids of the Kingdom we cannot judge people based on their identities. We have to judge people based on their single identity. Do you know what their single identity is? We all share ONE identity –– we are image bearers of God! That poor person that walked into the assembly, he is not just a poor person, he is an image bearer of God who deserves honor, respect, love, generosity, friendship, and encouragement, and he got none of those things because he was looked at by his face! I see you and I know you so I can disregard you. James says, brothers, how can this be? We are the people who know Jesus. We are the people who know the truth that we share the identity of image bearers of God. So every person you meet, every person you see, what do they deserve? Honor. What do they deserve? Love. They deserve to be picked by you, included by you. Why? It is because God came and God did the same for you.

James is trying to get the church not to act like the world, and we, as the church at Hardin Baptist, we cannot act like the world. We have to see people the way Jesus sees people. James goes on to say that how you choose the rich over the poor is actually in some ways the opposite of how God chooses. James saysGod actually chooses those you reject. The ones you reject are the ones God chooses. Notice what he says in verse 5, “Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him?” What he is trying to say is God does not share the value system of the world. The world system says let’s look at identities and let’s place value, and then let’s treat depending on if you are us or them. That is how we treat privilege. That is how we act and James is saying do you remember what God did? God actually chose the poor and made the poor to be rich in faith and to be an heir of the Kingdom. What matters to us often does not matter to God. What we see God often does not see or care about. God has a different value system and the way He sees the world. God often chooses the poor and we see this theme all throughout the Scriptures.

As an example, we can see that God chose David, not because David was great but because David was the last pick. Do you remember that story in 1st Samuel? You have Saul who is chosen to be king because he was tall, dark, and handsome. All of the people wanted Saul because he was the guy who looked like he could do the job. Saul was not the man; he failed at the job, so there had to be a new king that is chosen. Samuel goes to Jesse to see which son God is going to choose. The firstborn comes out as the obvious pick, but nope, it is not going to be him. Then comes out the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh pick and… nope. Then it comes to the point where Samuel saysis there anybody else? Jesse says, well, there is David. He is my youngest and he is out with the sheep. He is kind of a nobody, but I will bring him here. Then what happens? When he comes, God says this is the man; this is my chosen one.

Then notice what Scripture says, “For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” God does not see like we see. We see outside. We see differently based on how we look, what we have, or the power we wield. God looks at none of that. He doesn’t look on the outside; He looks on the heart. If we are going to be followers of the Lord, what should we do? We should be those who do not look and judge on the outside. We should be those who look at the heart of people because the inside matters much more than the outside.

Notice the same thing with Israel. God chose Israel much in the same way. Deuteronomy 7:6 says, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” So, the question is, why did he choose Israel? Were they the greatest or the best? What was unique about them? God says, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers…” In other words, here is a group of people that are choosing the best because they think the best are the ones who should have the favor. Then God says…*hey, remember your Old Testament story? Do you remember the people that came before you*? God chose the Israelites because they were the least. He did not choose them because they were great. He chose them and then they became great. He did not look on the outside, He chose because He loved them.

James wants to remind the churches that they are the same. God chose the poor to make rich. We see Paul expounding on this in 1st Corinthians 1:26–29. It says, “For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” That is the story of the church. Paul is writing to the Corinthians who are obviously boasting. He says…*hey look around. You are not the A-Team. You are like B and C, maybe.* *But guess what? God chose you because you are weak and helpless and you cannot do anything, but God chose you.* Here is the good news of grace. It is when God chooses a team He often chooses the little short guy with glasses or the chubby kid who cannot run very fast. That is who He chooses. He says I want you first. You are on my team because I am about to show out and win this game through you and it will show all of the others who boast in their glory that they are nothing. That is the grace that we see from God! He wants us to remember that. He wants us to remember that we are the ones who were despised, outcast, and weak. Most of us were not the A-Team, but God chose us. Now that we are chosen, what do we do? We then turn around and only chose and love and honor who we deemed fit. James is saying how can that be! Just a word in passing to those who feel like you are the poor, you are the outcast, you are the despised, or you are those weak. Do you know what James would remind you? You might be poor right now or you might be weak right now, but guess what? God takes the poor and makes you rich in faith and you are an heir of the Kingdom to come. In other words, things are not always as they appear and there is a day coming when the have nots become the haves! You have Christ and the Kingdom.

There are two competing value systems. There is a value system of the world that says what you do, what you have, and what you look like equals your value. Then we have the Kingdom of Christ that says who you are and whose you are determine your value. As people who know that and believe that, we are the people who then have to show that, because that was the disconnect. I am sure all of James’s people would have said amen to that statement, but then would have walked out and showed favoritism. They walked out and they did not live it out. James is trying to say brothers, this cannot be! We should be the people that do not look at all the identities that the world says are good or bad, but we are the people who see everyone’s identity. They are an image bearer of God and they deserve honor, value, dignity, and worth. They deserve my love and my friendship. I am for them. I pick them. I give them my seat no matter who they are because Christ chose me and I was nothing. I am going to give to the people around me.

James says this in verse 6, “But you have dishonored the poor man.” In this situation, in showing partiality, it was not just that you honored one; it was that you dishonored the other. You are supposed to honor people. You are supposed to go after people. But in doing only some, you dishonor others. James says the sin is that you would dishonor some. Here is a poor man, made in the image of God and you assume that his bargain tag on his clothes means he is a bargain human being. James says that cannot be so! He is an image bearer of God who deserves your love and respect and honor.

James also says it is just foolishness to favor people*.* How is it foolish to favor people? He writes this to the church and says this in verses 6–7, “Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?” See, the ones we favor, the ones who are above us, who are rich and favorable, often actually oppress us. You want to honor this rich guy, but he is the one who is dragging them to court and cursing Christ’s name in the community. So it doesn’t work, because what we often do is value the world’s system, and what the world values is power. We honor those with power, but power often just feels pride and hate, and it puts us into groups of us versus them.

So, what does the church do? What does the Kingdom value? The Kingdom values the cross! What does the cross promote? The cross promotes love and humility. There is no us and there is no them; there is we. We are image bearers of God. We are those who need love and respect and honor. It is foolishness to do so, and James says if you practice partiality and favoritism, you cannot keep the second greatest commandment. When I first studied this week, I was like…*ok, favoritism; it is not that big of a deal*. As I began to study, I realized, no, this is a big deal. That is why the title of the sermon is the GREAT sin of partiality. It is a great sin because if you favor people it keeps you from loving your neighbor as yourself and that is the second greatest commandment according to Jesus. Notice what James says in verse 8, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.” In Matthew 22, that is the second greatest commandment according to Jesus. (Next week we are going to figure out how to live out love your neighbor as yourself in a positive way, but for our time, we are just going to stick with the negative and not showing partiality.) We see is this great command, and then verse 9 says, “But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” In other words, if you show favoritism, if you judge people by how they look, what they have, their power, their group, and however we put people into groups, if that is how you judge people then you cannot keep the second command, which is to love your neighbor (and that is everyone that you come into contact with) as yourself. If you show favoritism, you cannot love your neighbor like yourself and you cannot obey the second greatest command. This is a big deal. We do not receive people by their face or just by how they look the way the world judges people, we judge people differently, not by identities but by identity. We are image bearers of God so I am going to honor and I am going to pick and choose and go out there and serve. I am going to give them my seat no matter who they are. I am going to privilege everyone because I am a servant after my servant King whose name is Jesus.

I want to circle back around. I want to go back to that first verse and I want to ask that question again. Why does James call Jesus the Lord of glory? It is a command: do not show partiality as you hold the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he says “the Lord of glory.” Why, in the context of a church favoring a rich person over a poor person, why would he say as you are doing this remember Christ the Lord of glory?Why would he bring that title in to remind the people that Jesus is the glorious one? I think he is trying to get them to see what you value is not the most valuable. You are valuing someone because they have gold and nice clothes. Do you know what you should be valuing? KING JESUS! He is the glorious one. We value power and privilege. What you should be valuing is King Jesus. He is the glorious one, and as we behold Him as glorious, then all the things that shine in this world are not so glorious anymore. We do not have to favor them. We do not have to try to get them to favor us because we have the favor of Jesus. Jesus is for us. He brings in Jesus because he wants us to remember that Jesus is the Lord of glory, and I think he also wants us to remember what Jesus actually did. Jesus, the Lord of glory, took the form of a servant. He lived in poverty to serve us. Here are a people who are casting out the very people that Jesus came to redeem. He wants us to call attention to the example that Jesus left us.

There was a reason the woman at the well was startled when Jesus spoke to her. She was shocked! In fact, that is why we see in John 4:9 that her response was how can you ask me for a drink, for Jews do not associate with Samaritans? Jesus comes to a Samaritan woman in the middle of the day and he asked her for a drink. She is shocked because He would talk to her. In other words, she is trying to say, Jesus, do you not see my face? Do you not see who I am? I am ethnically different from you. I am a Samaritan. I am here midday which means I am a great sinner. Do you not see who I am? How dare you talk to me? You should not value me. You should not communicate with me. You are making a mistake. Can you not see me? –– In that moment, Jesus flips it around and says no, you do not see me. I do see you, but I see past all of the external identities that people have cast on you or that you have cast on yourself. I see your identity. You are an image bearer of God and you need me as your Savior. What you need to see is me.

James wants us to be the people that go and do likewise, that we would love and go after those that the world would say you should be distinct or different. We are the people who know there is one identity and that is that we are all image bearers of God. If you want to kill favoritism in your life, you have to first behold Jesus as the glorious one. You have to behold Him and behold the gospel. Secondly, remember what He did. He left Heaven to become a servant and to serve. He served everyone and He served those that most people rejected. He went to the despised. He went to the weak. He went to the poor. He went to the ones the disciples would tell to get away, and Jesus would say, come. The Pharisees would say they do not belong here. Jesus would say, yes, they do and these little ones even own the Kingdom. Jesus saw past the external identities that we place on people and that people place on themselves. He saw through that and He looked at the heart. We have to be the people who do the same. We have got to be the people who loves everyone and that honors everyone. We do not show partiality. We do not make distinctions because the truth is as adults we all still ask those same playground questions. The same questions when we gathered for kickball. Do I matter? Am I valuable? Does anybody see me? Would anybody pick me? Would anybody want me? We are all asking those questions. Everyone around you is asking those same questions. We need to be the Jesus followers who answer those questions for people to say YES, YOU MATTER. Yes, you have value. I will pick you because Christ chose me. I am going to serve you and I am going to love you because you do matter because you are made in the image of God. I am going to love you and serve you because that is what Jesus did to me. We need to be the ones that tell everyone, I SEE YOU and I value you no matter if they are the rich man or the poor man. No matter their identities, we see and we value. We need to be the people who say, I see you. Now, let me show you Him because He is the one you ultimately need to see.