

James 2:1-9 | Jeffrey Smith

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Preacher: Jeffrey Smith

[0 : 00] Good morning. All right. It is good to see everyone. This morning we're going to be looking at James 2 verses 1 through 9.

! And I kind of mentioned this in the communion service, but the topic of this morning's passage is on not showing partiality. And I've titled it, Don't Play Favorites. So just kind of take that, park it to the side here.

I want to give a quick introductory story. And it's ironic because, well, you'll get it here in a second. Last week was what? What did we celebrate? Easter. And within the Jewish tradition, the days leading up to that is Passover.

Yes, Passover. So it's Passover. And to take another kind of side note to this story, to kind of piece it all together, is I've mentioned this to many of you guys, but for some that haven't heard this story, for my job I talk to a variety of people all over the country, customers from coast to coast.

But in the last six months I've had a very interesting interaction where I've been speaking to a customer in Tel Aviv, Israel. And it's been fascinating for a number of reasons. One, you know, with just everything happening in the news and getting his perspective on things.

[1 : 30] But not only am I interacting with this person, I'm talking to this person every day. He literally just called me 30 seconds ago. And for the last six months, I've talked to this guy probably 50 times.

We've had 50 meetings. And not only are we working out this project between our two companies, but when you talk to someone that long and that many times, you start to hear about them and hear about their perspective on things and, like, all of the things.

And he's in the military, which adds another just layer of just interest to this story. But specifically, what he mentioned last week was, he said, Jeff, you know, at the synagogue by our house for the week of Passover, if you give a little extra money, you can sit in the front row at the synagogue. I thought that's interesting. For two reasons that's interesting. One is because perhaps that is a new revenue stream for Bethel Community Church.

And I've been thinking about the parks and Phil, and I'm like, we've been giving away these front row seats for free. Yes.

[2 : 49] And so maybe we'll start to implement a seating chart. And, you know, just like you would go on, you know, StubHub or something like that, the closer you are to the front, the more expensive the tickets are.

The second thing that I thought that was super interesting was because this ties directly to this passage in James 2. I mean, directly. So we're going to be looking at the sin of partiality.

And I'm going to just start with the thesis, kind of the main point of this message, which is as believers, as disciples, as those looking to walk with Jesus, as brothers, as sisters, it says we are to not show partiality.

And this applies here at the church and beyond. So if you hang with me and you want to turn to James 2, let's read the first nine verses, then we'll pray and we'll kind of get into it.

So James 2, 1. My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

[4 : 00] For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing, maybe some Ohio State clothing, I don't know. That was my own variation.

No, stick with me. 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, you sit up 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. And are not the rich ones who oppress you, 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.

[5 : 28] Let's go ahead and pray. Heavenly Father, thank you again for the morning, a chance to be together. Thank you for your word, the truth, Lord. I just pray that it would go forth.

Give me grace, Lord, because I am a flawed person. And yeah, I just want your word to go forth, Lord. So thank you again for the group here this morning and just your word coming out of James. In your son's name, amen. Okay, so the term partiality. If you look at the Greek, it's kind of a two-part combination.

And the first part of the word partiality is defined as someone accepting or judging based on face value. So you're looking at someone, something, and without any kind of depth, you're making a judgment call.

The second half of that word out of the Greek is showing some favoritism based on social status of some sort. Okay, so put the two together. Looking at something from like a face value perspective and then showing partiality or showing favoritism based on some status.

[6 : 38] That status could be a lot of different things. We're talking about kind of money in this situation or wealth. It could be based on looks. It could be based on athleticism. It could be based on career. It could be based on, you know, oh, man, this person is just so funny.

This person is such a good speaker. This person, whatever it may be. And you start to kind of stack rank someone based on the surface level attributes that you are seeing. Everybody with me? Some versions, I think the NIV uses the word favoritism instead of partiality. So those two are synonymous. The definition, the English definition of partiality is the fault of one judging on the outward circumstances of man and not their intrinsic merits, like the inward merits, and so prefers as the more worthy, one who is rich, highborn, or powerful, to another who does not have these qualities.

And so James describes two men walking into a church, to an assembly. And one, the wealthy one, is wearing a gold ring, the fine clothing.

And what does that signify? That signifies this person is of wealth. This person may have influence. This person is bringing success. And quite frankly, we can often be, we can gravitate to someone like that, okay, for a variety of reasons.

[8 : 08] You pay attention to that person. Oh, who is this? Who's this big shot coming in? You may want to go talk to them. Make sure they're welcome. Make sure they feel comfortable. Hey, come over here.

I got, I have just a spot for you here at church. I'm glad you're here. Would you want a donut? Let me go get you a donut. Do you have a preference on the type of donut? Whatever it may be. You start to kind of show some preference.

Just picture again, a visitor coming to Bethel. We all do this. You may look at that person and say, yeah, that's someone that I want to talk to, or maybe not. And then the poor person comes in in the shabby clothing.

And maybe that's signifying a lack of resources or a lack of status or a lack of success or whatever it may be. And that person gets ignored or that person is hardly acknowledged.

I guess you can sit, find a seat yourself. You know, go sit in the back. Go sit with Brad at the, you know, the computer, I guess. You know, or sit at the feet, whatever. And you start to show this partiality.

[9 : 14] This story is an interesting one because it's very practical. But the application of it can come out in a lot of different ways. Are we really telling poor people to sit on the floor?

No, we're not really doing that. But is our perception of someone maybe dictating how we approach them or if we approach them or how we treat them or how we think about them?

I think if we're honest with ourselves, the answer is yes. And so if you look at verse 4, it says, Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

So when we offer the good seat to the influential and the footstool to the poor and the marginalized and the outwardly unappealing, James says that we aren't just being polite to the rich man, which we may try to justify it as, but we are making ourselves judges with evil thoughts and our motives are corrupt.

And frankly, we are acting foolishly and sinful. And so I'm going to just give you a very simple three-point breakdown of why partiality is incompatible with walking with the Lord, walking in faith.

[10:35] The three things are, I try to use all the same letter here, it's shallow, it's shameful, and it's sinful.

So when we are acting in partiality, it's shallow, it's shameful, and it's sinful. Those three things. And so partiality is a surface-level disease.

It distorts our vision, and it causes us to refuse to look at the whole person as God sees them. So I'm going to take this a bit further. I'm going to expand this out more than just wealth.

How much does someone have in their bank account? It's going to be much deeper than that. The first is, it's a shallow, it's a shallow perspective.

It distorts our vision of who someone is. As a personal note, I don't have this in my notes, I'm just thinking about this. When someone introduces someone to me, Tracy knows this about me, and the first thing someone says is their vocation.

[11:43] And I do this, so don't feel bad if you're someone that does this. But who someone is is not dictated by their position or their title at work or maybe where they work.

Okay? Maybe that gives some indication of the type of person. You know, oh, so-and-so is an engineer. When someone's an engineer, you've got to have an idea of the type of person they are. But I don't need to know, this person is the senior VP of the engineering firm that they work for. That, to me, at this point, meeting someone for the first time does not matter. Okay? I want to know, who is this person? Who is this person? I want to go beyond just the shallow, surface-level titles of what we can give someone.

Who did this? Well, Samuel kind of did this. When they said, you know, obviously, the Israelites wanted a king.

Samuel, or King Saul, did not work out. And so, the Lord says, I'm going to appoint someone else. And so, Samuel goes to Jesse.

[12:52] And he says, okay, let me see what sons you have and who we're going to anoint. And you start to see this heart verse height view.

Samuel cannot look into the heart of someone, but he can see the height. He's like, ah, this must be the one. This son must be the one. Look how tall and strapping he is.

He must be the one that God wants to anoint to be the next king. In 1 Samuel 16, it says, but the Lord said to Samuel, do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature because I have rejected him.

For the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. So, sun after sun comes out and God says, that's not the one, that's not the one, that's not the one.

Do you have any others? Oh yeah, there's one out, you know, shepherding. Yeah, bring him in and it's David. I will say on a side note, it does say David was handsome.

[13:57] So he had that going for him and he said he had beautiful eyes. so, but you get the point. We look on, we look at the appearance, God looks at the heart.

I will also say that God's nature is the standard and it says in Romans 2.11 that his judgment is righteous and that God shows no partiality.

And so to act with favoritism is to act unlike the Father. I read in the communion time the passage, is that Romans 9?

I believe it's Romans 9, where so Paul says, you know, God does not act or God does not show partiality but then later he says, Jacob, you know, I love Esau, I hate it.

You know, how do those two things go together? There's a lot to jump in there but I would just simply say this message is for us. This is, I'm not preaching to God. God knows the heart.

[15:10] We do not necessarily. And so we are just simply observing what we have and the Bible says to not act with partiality. John 7.24 tells us to stop judging by appearances and instead use

right judgment.

Shallow judgment always is wrong judgment. And so the application here is, again, when you meet someone new, don't judge them by the shallow outward appearance.

don't favor someone based on their looks, the job they have, the appearance of wealth, their skills in a various, in whatever it may be, their ability to play a sport.

Go deeper than that. Really try to understand who someone is, what their background is, how did they grow up, who is their family, all these things, these are important to understanding who someone is.

Don't judge a book by its cover. I often use this example of my stepdad, Scott, many of you know Scott, and Scott has many great qualities, but one that I really, really admire is he consistently treats people the same.

[16:28] And I always say, regardless of whether that person is the CEO of the company or he is the janitor, he will treat that person the same. And I think that is a quality that I want to emulate, and I think that aligns here with, again, not treating, not treating folks with partiality based on kind of this shallow surface look at who they are.

Does that make sense? So again, showing partiality is a shallow, distorted view of looking at others. The second thing is, it's shameful. James argues that when we favor the rich, we are honoring the very group that oppresses us, oppresses you, as he says in verse 6, and blasphemes the name of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1, 26, and 27, God intentionally chose the weak, chose what the world calls foolish to shame the wise.

He uses the weak to shame the strong. The bottom line is, you know, in a lot of situations, the way the Lord operates is different than how we would operate.

[17:48] He will often use those that maybe the world looks at and says, ah, that person is not fit for that job to accomplish his purpose. In the Beatitudes, Matthew 5, 3, it says, the poor in spirit, and often the physically poor, are the ones who recognize their need for the kingdom.

God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs to the kingdom. If we're going to be quite frank, the abundance of money can definitely cause us to be self-reliant.

And those that do not have money, those that are poor, will often have more reliance on the Lord. Mike Carey, I always think about, I think a passage that you have mentioned several times in communion, just in regards to praying that the Lord would give us enough, but not give us too much.

And I think there is a sweet spot there where we are looking for what the Lord would provide and recognizing that, again, when we have too much, sometimes we start to wane in our faith in the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 8, 9, Jesus, who was infinitely rich, became poor for us. And if we despise the poor, we are essentially shaming the state that Christ himself chose for our salvation.

[19:12] That verse says, he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that in his poverty we might become rich. Again, it is, if we are viewing someone, again, based on socioeconomic status, it is like we are rejecting the very state that Christ came into this world.

he became poor, so that in his poverty we might become rich. And then Galatians 2, 10, when Paul is challenged, I think this is when Paul is going to the Gentiles and he's challenged, and he says, they asked us to remember the poor, and it says, this is the very thing I was eager to do.

Paul's ministry is marked by an eagerness to remember the poor, a priority that I believe we must maintain. And so again, partiality, it's a shallow view of things, it's a shameful thing, and then lastly, it's a sinful thing.

It violates the divine image, and I'm going to just camp out on this piece a bit longer than the other two. partiality is not just a minor personality trait. James calls it a transgression.

But if you show partiality, you are committing sin. That's a pretty straightforward statement in verse 9. And so what I want to kind of just mention here in this piece is when you look at who an individual is, and you look at them beyond just, again, the bank account, beyond just the job title, the zip code they live in, whatever it may be, and you look at someone as an image bearer of God, okay, this is really what I want to encourage us in, as the whole person of who God has made.

[21:06] It starts to give a new perspective. The Latin term is imago dei, the image of God. And this is what really sets apart us from animals, quite frankly.

This is what makes us unique. Every human being is created in the image of God as a likeness bearer. And so my point is to prefer someone that is rich, someone that is outwardly successful, to someone that is not, is to really kind of violate viewing that person, all of us, as image bearers of God.

In Genesis 127, it says, so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female, he created them. And as image bearers, we all, we value all human life.

Some would say, this is why, this is kind of where we come, this is where we get the foundation of morality. Some would say, this is where we get the ability to reason with each other, to build relationship with each other, to love each other, to create art, all of these things that you don't see necessarily in the animal world.

And this all encompasses the whole being of what it means to be an image bearer. So because we are image bearers, we have this innate desire for what?

[22 : 38] Justice, reasoning, love. And so to treat someone poorly because of their shabby clothes is a direct assault on the dignity that God has given to that person in creating them.

This topic gets a bit deeper and you may, your antennas may go up when I use this word diversity. And that's a tough word to say because, quite frankly, it's been very polluted, I believe, in the secular world.

It's become an opportunity for virtue signaling. And it's an opportunity to lump a bunch of things into this category and say, look at this diversity.

You know, if I took a picture of Bethel Community Church and say, okay, look at this diversity or lack thereof depending on kind of your definition. but at the heart of it, there is value to recognizing the differences that we as humans have and understanding that we are created in God's image.

And that diversity is far more than just the color of our skin. That diversity includes, like it says in this passage, rich man, poor man.

[24 : 10] Okay? That diversity may include the type of work we do. That diversity may include, you know, the variety of family upbringings you've had.

It may be where you come from. Where in the, I mean, if you talk to someone that is from Mississippi and someone that's from New York City, you will get two very different perspectives.

But again, recognizing that as humans, we are image bearers of God. Okay? And we are to get below the shallow level initial view, the initial judge of book by its cover perspective on things.

Recognizing that humans are, that us people are not only created in the image of God, but we are, God carefully and wonderfully made us in our mother's womb, it really opens up a new perspective on things.

And so what I'm getting at ultimately is when we're, when we see people, when we interact with people, recognizing the deeper meaning of this person is created by God, regardless of, again, how they look, how much money they have, how successful they appear to be, but recognizing they are an image bearer of God and the value that that brings.

[25 : 37] Just as a quick disclaimer, diversity, again, can mean a lot of different things. And there's a lot of things that are not so good about how the world will often define that. Okay?

I'm not lumping in, you know, sin, quite frankly, and there can be a lot of that incorporated in this. I am just simply speaking about recognizing each of us individually as image bearers of God.

James even says this. I'm not going to, like, spoil it for whoever has this next passage in James 3, but if you want to just turn to James 3, look at verse 9, and then this whole passage is talking about taming the tongue and just how this tiny little thing can set ablaze.

But verse 9 says, in James 3, 9, it says, with it, this is again the tongue, we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

Again, this recognition of understanding that we are made in the likeness of God. In Leviticus 19, it also talks about, the law is clear, do not be partial to the poor or defer to the great.

[27 : 01] To love your neighbor as yourself is to them, is to see them as an equal under God. So again, when we show partiality that is shallow, it's a shallow view, it's shameful, and it's sinful.

And so, just in kind of practicality and application here, in social settings, I just want to challenge you. When someone walks into the room, who do you approach first?

Or when you walk into a room, who do you approach first? Is it the person that you say, who can help me? Who's going to make me comfortable? Who's most like me? Who do I want to talk to?

Or is it maybe the other way around? Do we subconsciously give more weight to certain people based on their, again, job title or perceived wealth?

In Deuteronomy 1 and 16, it says, we are commanded to be, we are commanded not to be intimidated by anyone and to hear the small and great alike.

[28 : 18] Leviticus 19, 15 says, do not be partial to the poor or defer to the great. This is also interesting in the sense that we're not to let the pendulum swing completely the other way to where all of our attention is on those that appear poor.

Do not be partial to the poor or defer to the great. Again, it's this equal recognition that we are image bearers of God. So just in conclusion, as we look at the dispersed assembly here that James describes, it's easy for us to point the fingers at the person offering the good seat to the man with the gold ring.

But if we're honest, we're all carrying this kind of internal seating chart in our hearts. We all have categories for who we think is important, who is useful, who is successful, who is maybe on the other side of it, invisible, who is in need.

But the gospel tears up those seating charts. When we show partiality, we aren't just being rude, but we're suffering from a shallow, shameful, and sinful nature. We are looking at the shabby clothing or the gold ring and forgetting that beneath all of that is an image bearer of God.

God, the very image of God. Every person you met last week, from the CEO to the person cleaning the office, is a lightness bearer. And so to treat one more valuable than the other is to tell God, the creator, hey, you made a mistake with that person, you did a little extra for that person, when that is not the case.

[30 : 02] Let's show no partiality. Our faith is built on the ultimate reversal of this status. 2 Corinthians 8-9 tells us, Jesus was infinitely rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that we through his poverty might become rich.

If the Lord of glory, the highest seat in the universe, was willing to take that footstool for us, how can we possibly treat others that same way? And so just to conclude, the musicians want to come up, James gives us a simple yet world-changing standard to live by.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your neighbor as yourself. That's what it boils down to. And if we truly love our neighbor as ourself, the partiality dies, the partiality goes away.

Because we never look in the mirror and think, you know, I deserve the back row. I deserve to sit on the floor.

We're always wanting the best for ourselves. You know, I should sit in the front. I think I deserve the front. And so if we're treating others the way we want to be treated, if we're loving our neighbors as ourself, that partiality goes away.

[31 : 25] So this week I would just challenge you to look past the surface. Again, when you enter a room, don't just look for the person that can help you. Don't just look for the person that you can honor, the person that looks successful.

Check your weight. This is the big takeaway. Check your weight. Not your weight on the scale.

Check who you are giving weight to and what you are giving weight to.

Are you giving weight to someone's words just because they have a title? title. And then live that royal law. Treat every person with the dignity of being an image bearer.

father. When we stop playing favorites, we start looking like our father. We show a world obsessed with status that there is a different way to live.

There's a different way to value human life. Love your neighbor as yourself. Show no partiality. And let the world see the glory of Jesus and how we treat one another.

[32 : 33] Father, I'm going to go ahead and pray. I'm going to pray for the lunch as well. Just as far as instructions, it's going to be our typical line through the kitchen past the drinking fountain.

And I'm excited for this business meeting. It's going to be great. So let me go ahead and close in prayer. And we want to close with one last sign. That'd be great. Heavenly Father, again, thank you for this morning. And just thank you for your word coming out of James.

And a simple example of just two men walking into a church, being treated differently based on how they look and how their wealth is perceived.

And just the challenge, Lord, to not show partiality, to treat everyone as those created in your image, not with mistakes, but just as you would have them to be made.

Lord, I just pray that we would look deeper than just the surface level, that we would truly love others, love our neighbor, and in that really get to know who they are, who is that person, more than just the gold rings and the fancy clothes.

[33 : 40] Lord, I pray that we can recognize that that is the state that you came into this world, you gave up ultimate wealth, ultimate position, ultimate title, to become poor, to be born of this earth.

Lord, and to frankly just call it for what it is, as your word says, it is sin when we show partiality, Lord, and I just pray that we would kind of re-underwrite our minds in that and really seek to treat others as you would treat them, Lord, to recognize others as valuable people, not just again based on outward appearance, title, all of that.

So again, we thank you for that, Lord, thank you for your word. I just thank you for lunch, thank you for just all the work that's gone into preparing the lunch, for those that are sharing for the business meeting, just thank you for all the work that they put in and again, yeah, just thank you for all that in your son's name, amen.