****

***“No Favoritism”***

**Pastor Wayne Driedger**

**Coast Hills Community Church**

**June 21, 2015**

**James 2:1-13**

*My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?*

***2****For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes.****3****If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well,****4****doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?*

***5****Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him?****6****But you dishonor the poor! Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court?****7****Aren’t they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?*

***8****Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”****9****But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.*

***10****For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws.****11****For the same God who said, “You must not commit adultery,” also said, “You must not murder.”  So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.*

***12****So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free.****13****There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.*

Introduction:

Worked with Jr. High and high school students for about 12 years. Obviously schools are divided into classes according to your grade and age. If you are a certain grade and age, you probably aren’t hanging out with a person from a class much younger than you. You also notice that there are different groups according to what you are into. The preps and the nerds and the socials and the jocks and the head-bangers and the academics.

You are judged according to your class. You favor the people who are most like you or who you want to be.

Friend peg going to UBC and studying philosophy and his roommate studying medicine. Downstairs there was a group of guys that were a total replication of Wayne and Garth from Wayne’s World. They talked like them, dressed like them. Peg and Brad were not really appreciated by these guys…totally separate worlds. Work a blue collar job and hang out with buddies in the evening and smoke up, try licks on their guitars, and drink beer. Peg and Brad are studying to be a Philosophy prof and a doctor.

They were having a party and just rocking the house. Peg and Brad were trying to study. Rather than just sit there and judge them, he thought he would join them. Put on a wig, a hat, a dark t-shirt and trucker type flannel shirt, ripped tight jeans and just walked in. Sat there on the couch for like half an hour, talked with a Wayne’s world accent and was completely accepted.

We accept people who we like or want to be like, and we judge those who are not like you or aspire to.

Adults do that too. Sometimes it’s blatant and most times it is much more subtle.

We were asked to house sit for some wealthy people in a gated exclusive community up on a mountain. Really down to earth parents who had students in our youth ministry and knew that we would have a lot of fun using the pool and the tennis court and the hot tub in the community club house….we began to realize that we really didn’t fit…people were not too pleased that our little dodge colt was out in the driveway…and our other young adult friends in their rusted out beater cars were showing up…not creating a ruckus but parking them on the street. One friend came over and said – you guys are up here…there is a buzz in the neighborhood about you. They all feel that you should not be here and using the club facilities or parking you cars on the street. We were definitely not the favorite house sitters in the neighborhood. It caught me in my tracks…how often do I favor some people over others. How does it make a person feel who, because of their economic class or race or appearance or spirituality do not receive the favor of others…people like me. How often have I been like the Wayne’s World guys or the Peg and his roommate guy and written off others and give special attention to someone else because they “fit” with me?

James addresses the whole issue of favoritism. He goes at it head on.

**My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?  James 2:1 (NLT)**

If you identify with Christ, if you really are a follower of Christ…how can you show favoritism? It is totally inconsistent with the spirit of who Christ was.

Do not hold the faith: The glorious faith we have, the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, should never be associated with favoritism (discrimination). The Lord of glory Himself shows no partiality so neither should those who put their trust in Him.

Here was a person who was completely impartial. He treated everyone with the same love and he himself was completely unconcerned with status and yet you create these categories. Christ himself was, it says in Matthew, without even a home. Driving with some junior high kids…talking about who was the losers in the school. “Jesus was a loser. What do you think of him?” He wasn’t a loser…he’s amazing! Well he is but ultimately he was considered a loser and rejected by everyone. As a Christ follower you can say that in one sense…according to the world’s idea of success…your role model…your hero…was a total loser.

In his life he had no status with the rich, or the religious or intellectual elite …though he moved in every circle with total grace – not intimidated, not threatened and not sending off airs one way or another.

He was a totally classless person in the good way. And yet… we classify… we create classes by the way we show favor to some and not to others.

 We do well to remember that James wrote to a very partial age, filled with prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, or whatever.

i. A significant aspect of the work of Jesus was to break down these walls that divided humanity, and to bring forth one new race of mankind in Him. The unity and openness of the early church was shocking to the ancient world. But this unity didn't come automatically. As this command from James shows, the apostles had to teach the early church to never to favor some people over others.

Here’s the dark, kinda dirty little secret that we all have…

1. **WE KEEP A SECRET UNPUBLISHED LIST IN OUR MINDS OF WHO’S IN AND WHO’S OUT.**

We enter into a little data base in our minds who are the desirables and who are the undesirables, the in crowd and the out crowd, the acceptable and the unacceptable.

James tells us to identify the list and tear it up.

James says that those of you who follow Jesus, those who put their faith in him must not show favoritism. The word ‘favoritism’ comes from a Greek word which means ‘receiving the face”. It’s receiving someone at face value. It’s accepting someone based on how they look or how they appear rather than what lies beneath.

Who is it for you? It might be a group, a certain kind of people, it might be a political group, it might be a race of people or it might be someone you can put a name or a face to. It may be that you favor the poor over the rich and the rich are the people discriminated against.

As individuals we do this thing, and then, when we come together…we end up doing that together within the church.

James gives us an example of this.

**For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well, doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?  James 2:2-4 (NLT)**

You can underline in that passage, evil motives. Pretty strong. James goes after what is going on in the heart when we spread out the welcome mat in our circle of fellowship to some…and not to others. In this illustration it is all about the bling…about having the wealth going on. "In Roman society the wealthy wore rings on their left hand in great profusion. A sign of wealth, rings were worn with great ostentation. There were even shops in Rome where rings could be rented for special occasions." (Hiebert)

The motive is this…that somehow if I get close to this person…I may get some special favors…I may get invited over to their house…I may get somehow a return on my goodwill. It’s pretty dark and yet how often are we guided by those kinds of motives when we go out of our way to include the people who we believe have it going on for our best interests

**2. THE CHURCH IS TO BE THE PLACE WHERE THE ONLY MOTIVE IS TO LOVE.**

There are so many contexts where people’s motivation is to impress, to get you to sign on, to get you to do something, to sell you something. In the new community which is Christ’s church – it is to always and only to be about love.

I worked for a few months in retail sales at an electronics store. As part of the training we were to distinguish who were the prime buying candidates. One of the indicators we were taught to look for is if they were wearing expensive clothing or jewelry. Why waste time with people who don’t have money? How crass, I thought as I was listening to the training. Yet in a much more subtle but maybe more toxic way, we do that in the way we spend time with people. Why do I get a little more animated – more involved in conversation when the person who I perceive to be advantageous in my advancement?

As Canadians we are known to be a very tolerant society and a helping society for the underdog. We have health systems that are there for equal access to all. We are known to be polite, to not say things that offend or put people in different categories according to their race or economic status. We like to pat our backs on this. But what does go on in our minds when we walk down the street and pass someone of another race or dressed really poorly. Is what goes on in my mind just a heart of love and goodwill toward the person or do I discriminate in my mind?

Illustrate the honeymoon bus ride: Supposed to be fun….best day of my life and she is ruining it.

Would I be just as willing to go out of my way for that person to make room for them on the bus? Would I be just as eager to invite them to be my neighbor? James is talking to those kinds of heart issues. We keep a secret unpublished list in our minds of who is desirable and who is not, who’s in and who’s out, the acceptable and unacceptable.

**Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you dishonor the poor! Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren’t they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?  James 2:5-7 (NLT)**

Check out the second line there – underline rich in faith. That is the true measurement of wealth

**3. TRUE WEALTH IS TO BE RICH IN FAITH.**

Why do we get so impressed with wealth? The power that gets associated with money can be so oppressive to others. James makes an important point – often the rich are the ones who get there on the backs of the poor. A lot of James audience in this letter are slaves. He points out the irony that we suck up to the rich but it is often their using of the poor who has gotten them there.

This has application at a global level. It is important for all of us to note – if we live in Canada, we happen to live in a country who is part of the G8 – a group of 8 of the richest nations on earth. On one level – we enjoy so much of what we have because we live in a rich country. Some of our wealth – let’s not kid ourselves – comes at the expense of the poor in some third world country.

The poor countries have a right to the table – not to come with their heads lowered and shuffling in but where we treat every person with dignity and not an arrogance because of our wealth. When we get our values right and we realize that our richness is not in what we have but the kind of faith we have…then we begin to see clearly how to treat each person with dignity. What is the practical application of this in our democratic society? We can honor the poor by electing and calling our governments to commit a significant portion of our budgets to aid and debt reduction. At a personal level we can support world mission movements that care for the poor and help them to be rich in faith.

These verses can be misunderstood.

When James speaks about the poor here, he is talking about those who have no money and also about those whose simple values are looked down on by our money-obsessed society.

It may be that the “poor” people are more focused on serving rather than managing, human relationships rather than financial security. It is not saying that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell.

Here’s the point. Poor people are usually more aware of their powerlessness. It’s often easier to admit their need for Jesus – that they need him to help them.

"The rich man may trust Him; but the poor man must. . . . the poor man has no fortress in which to hide, except the two strong arms of God." (Meyer)

The poor are **chosen** in the sense that the poor more readily respond to God in faith, having fewer obstacles to the kingdom.

i. "Church history demonstrates that comparatively more poor people than rich have responded to the gospel." (Hiebert)

ii. When we choose people by what we can see on the surface, we miss the mind of God. Remember that Judas *appeared* to be much better leadership material than Peter.

 One of the greatest barriers for the rich to following Jesus and making him your leader is pride. A person is rich…why do I need God? Money can deceive all of us into a false sense of eternal security.

So James continues…

**Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.  For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws. For the same God who said, “You must not commit adultery,” also said, “You must not murder.” So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.  James 2:8-11 (NLT)**

There is a law that trumps every other law…Love God and love your neighbor. That law is so binding in God’s books. James says that when we favor some people above others…we commit a sin. It is no small matter and he goes on to talk about the sin of adultery and murder. And at first read you go “Why does James all of a sudden go into talking about murder and adultery? Is he just going on a tangent?” Here is the point James is making. We see murder as being a really heinous sin – to take someone else’s life. And if you are the person betrayed through the unfaithfulness of a person who has an affair with another person? You take that very seriously…enough to break the trust of the marriage vows. James says – favoritism is in that category.

**4. FAVORITISM IS AMONG THE MOST HEINOUS OF SINS.**

It is so easy to minimize this sin of favoritism – of putting people in classes according to their benefit to our world…James point out that favoritism has broken God’s ultimate law and it’s serious. Don’t mess with this one.

The law of love is all –encompassing and it’s really important to God so James continues with that theme…

**So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you. James 2:12-13 (NLT)**

James so much wants his readers to be free…to be free of the judgment trap. Judgment is so circular and oppressive.

James is relating another principle of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount: For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you Matt 7

ii. "The law of liberty is the law which defines our relationship to God and man as love-mastered. To speak and do under that impulse, is to be free indeed. If that law be disobeyed, if no mercy be shown, then judgment based upon that law will show no mercy." (Morgan)

iii. "The law of freedom is not laxity but a strict ethical rule of God, and we shall be judged by our adherence to its supreme principle of brotherly love or mercy, i.e. compassion for the sins and sufferings of our fellows." (Moffatt)

Another translation reads “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” The law of love sets a person free – mercy is love that goes beyond treating everyone equally but even going beyond that. It is love in action. Mercy is an attitude that starts in the heart of love but it isn’t just about feeling for another person – it is something you express. Mercy says let me help you. It comes alongside another person and shows how much you love them.

1. **FREEDOM: I CAN BE MYSELF AND PEOPLE WILL GIVE ME MERCY NOT JUDGEMENT.**

Communities are changed when there is mercy. Favoritism- it looks at the face but mercy looks at the heart. Isn’t it great when a church community is about mercy? I have mentioned that this idea of favoritism has to affect how we treat people in other countries…how about right here, our own community, people right next to us.

It just seeps through when a church is about mercy…there is a joy and a freedom when we know that we are not going to be judged for what we have or what we can contribute.

There are some church communities that can become places of incredible judgment. Where people are discriminated against because of what they look like. I grew up in southern Africa where this kind of judgment was actually written into the theology of the dominant church of that area. How oppressive that society was and no wonder there was a huge cry for freedom.

Story is told of an African American man who was trying to join a church in the southern states that had a long history of bigotry and racism and they wouldn’t let him in. He went to the pastor and told him about it and the pastor simply said, “You need to just pray about it.”

Few weeks later the pastor saw him and asked him “Did you talk to God about it?” The man said “Yes and God told me not to worry about it; I’ve been trying to get in that church for 20 years, and they haven’t let me in either.”

Ya, we would agree with that. God wouldn’t do well in a church like that. But what about the ways that you and I so easily overlook in the way we treat people with judgment and not mercy? A church can be so unmerciful in other ways. A place where people feel like they have to look a certain way, act a certain way or contribute to the church in a certain way in order to feel the favor of others in the church. This is different than the issue of integrity and trust that is needed for leadership and the covenant we make with each other in membership.

My prayer, my hope for Coast Hills is that this is a place where we are free from the bondage that comes from those secret lists in our minds. Oh, that person is more desirable because they have a giftedness to contribute to the church. Or “That person is in the in-crowd because they have a more status like position in the church.” or “That person has become unacceptable because they are going through a season right now where they are not big contributors of their time or their talents.”

The law of love sets people free. You are celebrated for who you are. You don’t have to be a superstar Christian – have everything looking good on the outside…contributing heavily to the ministry with your gifts and your money. God himself judges according to this law of love…did the person love God and neighbor …was that their guiding motive?

Who is it in your life that could use mercy this week? Think of someone who God has brought into your life who is …by the wrong measurements, unattractive, who seems to have little to offer, who others wouldn’t understand why you would show any interest in this person. Maybe you have been guilty of ignoring them in the past. Would you take five minutes…have a conversation or reach out your hand to them. Have a coffee or a meal?

Anytime I see someone who is out in the margins, I have a choice. I can extend my hand or I can withdraw. I can notice them, I can feel their pain, I can pray and serve. Or I can avoid, withdraw, look the other way and ignore.

We can do it. We can be a church with no class. I mean that in the very best way. It’s a church that has no class distinction. God’s dream is that His church would be a warm and welcoming place for all people, a safe place to be loved and accepted no matter of race or what you have to offer, or money or clothes.

James says, show me your faith, be like Jesus, don’t show favoritism.