Correcting our Perspective on Partiality

James 2:2-7

January 7, 2024

Today we come to a section that would maybe be a little odd normally for a one-off sermon, but it is in the kind providence of God, it actually fits quite nicely with where Travis was last week at the end of Luke 20 and the beginning of Luke 21, in that excellent sermon that you should go listen to if you have not heard it yet.

But if you remember, last week Travis talked about in his message he talked a little bit about how one of the best tests for true religion is how we think and act toward those who are poor. How do we respond to those who might be in a more lowly state or whom we don't see as able to really offer us anything for our own advantage, anything in return? And we saw the stark contrast, last week, between how the scribes looked down upon the poor and used them for their own advantage, and then

contrasted with how Jesus showed love and concern for that poor widow at the beginning of Luke 21. And it's a love and concern for the downcast that marked the entire ministry of Christ, when Jesus demonstrates the heart of God for the poor and for the downcast that we see throughout the entirety of scripture.

So since being a Christian is to be a Christ-follower, since it means that we will be conformed more and more to the image of Christ, and since sanctification implies that we will grow more and more in our trust of God, then it makes perfect sense that a good test for true faith is how we treat those who are the most weak, the most vulnerable, those who lack the power or resources to offer us any tangible benefit in return. Do we see them as the rest of the world typically sees them, or do we see them how our Lord sees them?

What Travis pointed out last week from the life of Jesus is right in line with what Jesus' younger brother James says here at the end of James, chapter 1, when he says in verse 27, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to

keep oneself unstained from the world." And if you're able to remember the last time that I was up here, we did a little bit of an, kind of an introduction to this section in chapter 2:1-13, the section that immediately follows that verse, 1:27, as James kind of strategically brings into focus a specific application that he has in mind when it comes to 1:27. So here in this portion, James begins to address the problem of sinful partiality, and he brings in a particular, common case of showing favoritism toward the rich over the poor.

So let's look again at the entirety of that section, this section, from 2:1-13, just so we can have in mind the entire context even though today we'll be kind of focusing more on 2-7. James says, "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.

"For whoever keeps the whole law, but fails in one point, has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

So as Travis has mentioned, as Travis has mentioned earlier in his prayer, and as we talked about in the sermon that was on James, chapter 2, verse 1, the ultimate reason that we are not to show partiality is because God does not do so, and we are called to imitate his character. So in my last sermon, where we just went over verse 1, we looked at several scriptures, which we will not go over in full here, that makes this absolutely clear that the character of God is one of impartiality. So Deuteronomy 10:17 talks about the "God of Gods and Lord of Lords, who is not partial." In Acts 10:34 Peter declares that "God shows no partiality." In Ephesians 6:9 Paul says that "there is no partiality with God." In Romans 2 he reiterates, "for God shows no partiality." And in 1 Peter 1:17, among other places, Peter speaks of God as "the Father who judges impartially."

The Christian life should in no way ever be connected to showing personal preference towards other people based on our own sinful and selfish judgments of outward appearances, or of maybe what gains or losses we might see that this person might personally offer us. This type of double-mindedness, to borrow James' terminology elsewhere, this type of double-mindedness is

actually what is at the heart of the command in verse 1. So it isn't just a simple command to not show partiality. The concern is with, the concern in the command in verse 1 is with the absolute, irreconcilable contrast with holding to the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ on one hand, while at the same time also being someone who shows partiality.

I went back and saw that in my first message, I was maybe a bit confusing on this. But the actual imperative in the Greek isn't "show no partiality." That's the principle, but the actual command, which is seen better in the NAS translation, the actual imperative in the Greek is more like "do not hold your faith in the Lord." That's the command: "Do not hold your faith in the Lord with partiality." This is as though this is a far bigger issue, the sin of partiality is a far bigger issue when those who claim to know Christ show it than when we notice it in the broader culture.

So when you see this, when you understand that James' command is more along the lines of what James is often concerned about in his letter, what does true faith look like, this is

what his concern is here. Claiming to hold to a faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, while at the same time seeing others through a lens of preference based on unspiritual, personal biases is completely incompatible. Those two things cannot go together. It does not make biblical sense, and it does not make logical sense, as James will point out, to claim to be a Christian and to also be one who shows partiality. It is totally contrary to everything that we say, that we believe, about people as Christians.

So last time, we just walked through the wording of verse 1 to just demonstrate this, to just show a few ways that sinful partiality is totally at odds with the life that claims to have a belief even in the most basic of Christian doctrines. So we talked about how the life of Jesus himself, the life of Jesus himself, rebukes our sinful partiality. He is the one whom we claim to be followers of, and the fact that he was born into meager circumstances and even ridiculed for the town that he was from and the family that he came from, should cause us, just in that, to be very careful about judgments we might make of others. And the way he lived and ministered, as Travis showed last week, showing equal care and concern throughout his

ministry for Roman centurions and rich tax collectors as well as poor widows, as well as lepers, as well as the demon-possessed, unclean people, infirmed people that no one else would have anything to do with. If we claim that Christ is our example, then this, too, is how we ought to be. This is how we ought to think.

So the life of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality, and the gospel of Jesus rebukes it also. The Second Person of the Trinity humbled himself lower than we can even comprehend to die the death of a common criminal in order to purchase salvation for all who would place their trust in him, no matter what their economic station in life is, no matter what nationality they had. That truth should absolutely destroy any type of pride in us that would allow us to look with more favor on some than others, and also knowing that in him we have been given everything that we could ever need, everything that we ever actually truly need through our reconciliation with God and our adoption by God. That is what we have in Christ, and knowing that should free us up to live our lives in such a way that we're not looking to have any other needs met from other people.

We're free to love them in the way that cares only about giving, and not about what we could receive back from them.

So the gospel of Jesus rebukes our sinful partiality in the lordship of Christ that we claim. Also does the very fact that we have traded our old master of sin for our new good Master of Jesus Christ, and this merciful new Master commands us to live our lives patterned after him, to walk as he walked, to love others more than ourselves. Our Master has commanded this of us, so how can we therefore go and show sinful partiality?

So the lordship of Christ rebukes it, and the glory of Jesus Christ also rebukes our sinful partiality. He is the only one truly worthy of all glory, of all honor; and to show some type of honor toward others in order to receive personal gain from them at the expense of showing true honor to him by being obedient to him is in contrast with what we claim to believe about who deserves all glory and all honor.

And finally, the fact that James continues to remind us through the use of the term "brothers," reminds us of our true

family. We have a true family in Christ, and the way that God has orchestrated this true family also rebukes any sinful partiality in us. We have been united together through Jesus Christ, and therefore we have no business making distinctions among each other, sinful distinctions among each other. We are brothers and sisters who have been bought and redeemed in exactly the same way, at exactly the same price, out of a totally helpless and undeserving place.

So just with all of the wonderful wording that James uses in verse 1 alone, we can clearly see just how, just how disgusting it is whenever one claims to hold to the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ while also treating others with sinful partiality. And in the rest of this section, James goes on to explain one of the most prominent examples of this partiality, one that is still a difficult temptation for many of us today: the way we treat the poor and the rich. Do we see others through the lens of personal preference and selfish gain, or do we see them as Christ does?

So we're going to examine this issue today, and we're going to look at verses 2-7. We're going to do it through two points, two points. Point #1: the common practice illustrated; and point #2: the correct perspective articulated. The common practice illustrated, we're going to see that in verses 2-4; the correct perspective articulated, we'll see that in verses 5-7.

So point one, the common practice illustrated. Let's look again at the illustration that James gives in verses 2 and 3. So he gives the command, "My brothers show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory." And he gives us this illustration. "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 here James is giving what most commentators understand to be a hypothetical situation. It's a hypothetical situation,

but everyone also agrees that whether or not this was a real situation that James was aware of or not, it certainly is representative of the type of issues that the Christian community that he was writing to is dealing with. Whether it is hypothetical or not, especially when you consider the focus of the rebuke in the following verses, it clearly seems to be a well-chosen parable that is an accurate representation of the problem that he's seen in the community.

So let's just make a few observations about the example, about the words, about the context for the story, so that we can make sure that we are thinking about it the same way that the original audience would have been. So first, it's important for us to note something that you can't actually see in the English, that the word translated as "assembly" here is not the usual word we would expect to see. The usual word translated as "assembly" or "church," which is ekklesia, that's almost always used in the New Testament for "church." It's a common word. The word here is actually the Greek word for synagogues, synagoge, and this is the only place in the New Testament where it is used to represent a gathering of Christians.

So why this is important is because it once again points to the early date of this letter. Again, most likely, James is the is the first book written in the entirety of the New Testament, probably around a decade or so after the ascension of Christ. And that's important because it reminds us that the recipients of this book, as we're reminded from the greeting, also, of James, are, are, Jewish Christians. They're Jewish Christians. They still don't have a full-orbed understanding of God's plan branching out to the Gentiles.

This, to them, is just the next step of revelation in the history of the nation of Israel. God has now revealed his Messiah, and the Messiah has come and died as the perfect sacrifice that all of those Old Testament sacrifices were always pointing to in order to purify a people, his people, for himself, for his kingdom. And they have now come to understand that the actual establishment of his kingdom, the time where he will actually sit on David's throne and reign as king on earth and rule with a rod of iron, the way it was described in so many of the prophets, that is still future.

So they are either still meeting, it's still early enough that they're either still meeting in an actual synagogue, or they're just still borrowing that language of synagogue as the actual place for gathering to worship and to be instructed. So these recipients of this letter have come to understand this about Jesus Christ and therefore the direction that Judaism was supposed to go. So they understand this. They understand Christ as Messiah, but so many of their friends, so many of their family, have not. They're, they're, still practicing the, the, type of Judaism that Jesus was constantly confronting in his ministry, as we saw again last week, a Judaism that doesn't recognize that Messiah has come.

So again, this word "synagogue," then, it reminds us of the persecuted context of these members, of these members, of this early church, of this early Christian community. They're gathering together, but they are ostracized from the rest of the Jewish community. They've been rejected by the majority of the Jewish community. All of those, remember what Travis talked about last week, all of those offering boxes that he was talking about, the way that these gifts were distributed and used for at least some religious purposes? That no longer has anything to do

with them. They are no longer connected into a religion with any kind of financial or political power.

In fact, they find themselves now to be enemies of it, enemies of the established religion. So they're cut off from the nationally funded religious practices, and they're almost certainly financially restricted in their buying and selling, not only from their Jewish former friends, but also from the Roman government, also. Which also doesn't recognize this new branch of Judaism as a viable religion. These are some of the conditions that led to many of the trials that these early Christians were dealing with.

So if you remember in some of the introductory notes on James, we talked about how one of the primary trials that James most likely had in mind as he begins his whole letter, really talking about trials and how the Christian ought to respond to trials, those trials were probably primarily trials of poverty, trials of financial stress, trials of poverty that's much more difficult than the ones that we typically think of. How many of us might face financial trials? These people were experiencing

financial trials that are directly tied to the fact that they have embraced Christ as Messiah.

So if they had just remained in the old form of Judaism, they would most likely not be dealing with these trials, or at least not as severely. Though then you can clearly see why the situation that James lays out in this example would be such a temptation for them, right? By showing sinful partiality to the rich might be a good trade-off to start to ease some of those burdens. They maybe saw in the rich, potential for alleviation of their hardship. If this rich person would follow Christ as Lord, if they would just follow Christ as Lord, then they would follow the commands that Christ has given, and they'd become good stewards, and they'd start giving, and they'd help the poor and the downcast. And that's me. So you can kind of see why this is maybe more of a temptation for them.

So with that context in mind, then James sets up this example of two different men coming to visit the assembly. We probably need to recognize that the two people in this example are most likely visitors. By the way, there's no indication of

the spiritual state of either of them. The idea is that they don't know whether they're believers or unbelievers. They don't know anything else about them except for what they are observing with their eyes. So the way that James words it indicates that they are coming into this assembly for the first time. They don't know where they're supposed to go. So those in the assembly go to them to help them find their seats.

So he probably isn't indicating that they're making these distinctions between people they know. Again, these are visitors. They're helping them to their seats. They're trying to figure that out, and that makes sense because when you know someone, then there automatically become other factors that you factor in when you're evaluating them. And James wants to make it absolutely clear that these two people are being assigned a value based solely on their appearance in the first impression.

We actually need to notice that James goes out of his way to show that the heart of the problem is that they're showing partiality based purely on observations because notice that James doesn't actually say that the man is rich, doesn't

actually use that word to describe him. He doesn't say, "A rich man entered." He just describes what the man looks like. He's a man wearing a gold ring or literally a "gold-fingered" or a "gold-ringed man." And he's wearing fine and elegant clothing, like, literally, bright, shining clothing. It's obviously new. It's obviously nice. It's different than how we think of it now. We pay lots of money for clothes that look old. I don't understand that: it's worn-out and holes in it. They would have no understanding of that. But at this time, the normal sense of what nice clothing looked like reigned: bright, clean, elegant, new-looking clothing.

So they see that in this man, and the other man is, however, described as, as, poor, the word ptochos, which does literally refer to one who is materially poor, not just someone who's lowly. And he's wearing clothing that is described with a word that can mean, mean, filthy clothing or soiled clothing. So the point is that based purely on the appearances of these two, they have made a decision about the worth, the value of each man. They've made a decision about the honor that they will bestow on one and not the other.

So by just describing the looks of the one, James points out how sinful partiality is usually based on a reaction to external observations. The word in verse 3 that is translated as "pay attention to" is probably better rendered as "look with favor" on, as the CSB translates it. It's more than just noticing. It is the sense of a special attention that works for the benefit of the one who is being looked favorably upon. In fact, the only other two places that this word is used in the New Testament are in Luke's gospel: in Luke 1:48, where Mary describes the favor with which God has looked upon her; and in Luke 9:38, as Jesus is coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, and that father with a demon-possessed son comes up and asks Jesus to look upon his son with favor. So that's the sense of the word.

So there's a special way that this rich person is being looked upon that leads to the action that we see described here. The rich person is given a seat of honor, and the poor person is told to either go stand out of the way or to just "come and sit at my feet, on the floor." It's in a position of lowliness, and Luke's point is, this clearly demonstrates a preference for the person who looks rich over the person who is poor.

So this is the picture that James paints for his audience, and he expects them to be able to relate to it. He expects them to be able to see themselves in it. And if we're honest, it's not too hard to see ourselves in these positions, also, looking at people and evaluating them either positively or negatively based solely on our own preferences, based on our sense of what's worthwhile, based on our kind of idea of what this person may or may not have to offer me. "Am I going to get a good return on my investment in this guy?" And sometimes that could be a financial thing. Many times that can be a financial thing. Maybe we hope that this person might be generous and support us in some way.

We've certainly seen people take advantage of wealthy church members before, and we certainly can also fall prey to the sin of dismissing the poor in favor of the wealthy. We might find ourselves more prone to go out of our way to make someone feel welcome who dresses in such a way that's a little more aesthetically pleasing to us, and just look like the type of person we'd be more comfortable around or comfortable letting our kids hang out with.

But many times for us, this takes more of the form of asking ourselves in some way or another, "What am I going to get out of this if I invest in this person? Will I get out of it more than what I put into it? Will it at least be an equal return?" We wouldn't say that out loud. We know how that sounds. But we do those calculations in our heads and in our hearts, asking more about the benefits to our own personal, earthly life as opposed to the effect it could have on the church, or as opposed to treasures in heaven.

And it doesn't even have to be a visitor for us. We can just size people up that we know within the church or that we've seen within the church, and that's probably more of a danger for us as we see some of the issues that someone has, some of the sin problems. Maybe they just have a different personality that we don't prefer. So we make a decision about our relationship with them based on what will make us, in the end, most comfortable. It's going to keep us from as much awkwardness as possible. We might use some spiritual sounding excuses, so we sound good to ourselves and to others, but really that's what it's about. And of course, sometimes we have to make decisions

about stewardship of time. We have to make wise decisions about it, who gets our time and who doesn't.

But the point is that the deciding factor shouldn't be about what is easiest and most beneficial for me, personally. It's about what is best for the kingdom of God, what is best for the church, best for the people who he has placed around me. The idea, here, is to really think through the factors that would cause you to serve or invest in one person over another. What is in your mind? What are the factors? What's going into that calculation? The problem in the story isn't that one person sat in the good place and one had to go stand. You know, maybe that's all the room they had. Maybe they only had one seat, and that decision was going to have to be made no matter what. That's not the problem. The problem has to do with what factors were considered and what factors were given the most weight when that decision was made.

Our ushers here reserve certain seats, and we try to accommodate people of varying needs. They do that as best they can, and they do a great job of it, by the way. Thanks guys. But

the factors that they take into consideration all fall under the final category of what serves God, and what serves his church the best. What will make for the most efficient service that will be of the most benefit for the most people who are gathered to worship? And what will bring the most glory to the God that we are here to worship? So they reserve some seats for people who may have more difficulty walking or getting into the middle of one of the rows. They reserve some spots in the back for visitors who might have needed a little more time getting their kids registered for the first time, or, or, maybe had some questions that need answered, or maybe they didn't know exactly when the service started. But the seats are reserved in order to minimize distractions after the service is started, in order, once again, to serve the entire church best.

The final decisions are based on love of God, and service to the church. That is what goes into the thinking. They do not take into consideration the type of car that the person drove up in. They do not look at the giving statements or whatever and try and make a decision of who sits where based on that. No, they don't take those things into consideration. The question is always what serves God's people the best both corporately and

individually, and we make decisions that way. That's a righteous type of discrimination.

So this is the place that we are intended to be. We're intended to be thinking that way as we read this illustration from James, carefully considering within ourselves everything, everything that factors into how we see people, how we treat them. In what ways have I made judgments and distinctions based on external circumstances or perceived benefits or losses to myself? How are those factoring into my thinking? That's the type of stuff that James is trying to raise in the audience that he's writing to, because as we see in verse 4, the moment that we begin to treat others in a way that's influenced by sinful partiality, then we have made distinctions among ourselves and become judges with evil thoughts.

In other words, when these people would treat others with this sinful partiality, they were showing themselves to be far from the mind of God, the mind of the impartial God that we claim to serve. Another way to render the word "thoughts" is with the word "reasoning," and maybe that's more helpful for us.

They are making distinctions among each other that they had no business making. They're becoming judges over one another, and they're doing this by using corrupt and wicked reasoning. They're using corrupt, sinful, selfish reasoning, evil thoughts, wicked thoughts to issue their verdicts.

And this is the case because when they act like this, and when we act like this, we're essentially denying the truth about God and what he has revealed so that we can make our own evil judgments. When we begin throwing people into categories based on our own sinful partiality, based on what we like best, based on what we think is most beneficial, the moment we start doing that is the moment that we have either stopped prizing God's kingdom above all else, or we no longer believe what he has made clear about his Great Commission and how he intends for it to work.

Our task is evangelism and discipleship. That's our task. We do that while knowing that it is God who is the one who will ultimately save people and who will ultimately sanctify them. We do that, we know that, and then we trust that God will meet our

needs. We're faithful to obey. We trust that God will meet our needs, and we don't need to try and manipulate people into getting our needs met ourself.

So through this display of partiality, these people have lost sight of the task, and they've ceased to trust God to provide for all that they need. They're most likely looking for this rich man to give them some comfort, to give them some ease in their trials instead of looking to God. Or maybe even at their best, they're saying, "Boy, if this rich guy would just come to Christ, all of the resources, all the things that he could do." You know, kind of like the way, you remember, a few years ago when people were like, "Oh, Kanye West just became a Christian." And people were like, "Yeah, think of all the great stuff that Kanye West could do for . . .", that, that, type of wrong thinking, not evaluating people as God does.

So God may indeed use the conversion of a wealthy man to ease financial hardships of this congregation. He does that often. But if he does, it is because of his gracious plan, and it is not because they have taken matters into their own hands

and acted in contradiction to the character of God and his expectation that they show no partiality. In other words, God is the one who can be trusted to always provide for them exactly what they need and when they need it, and their responsibility is only to be obedient in their love and service to others.

Even if they think that they have made the decision to invest in the rich person over the poor person based on the fact that in their eyes, that person has more resources, more potential to having that positive effect on the church, they're still making distinctions with corrupt reasoning because God has actually said in multiple places that he likes to use the weak. He likes to use the poor to shame the strong, to shame the rich. He rejoices to use the poor and the powerless to grow his church because that brings more glory to him.

We, too, are unable to determine who will be most worthy of our time and investment purely based on external factors. We can't do it. So we could also, we could have a millionaire come in and visit the church, who has enough disposable income, enough resources to fund the church plants and missionaries and

building projects. And he could visit the same day as a poor couple struggling through some extremely hard times, who maybe had to walk to church because their one car was broken down. And based only on those factors, we have absolutely no idea which one might be the greater gift to the church, which one might be used to bring the most glory to God through their life. Our job is to love, evangelize, and disciple, to make no decisions based on sinful partiality, and then to watch and see what God is pleased to do with it.

So this is what James is doing with these verses. He is illustrating the common problem of sinful partiality and why it cannot, cannot be associated with those who claim to hold to the faith of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. And that brings us to our second point, second point, the correct perspective articulated. The correct perspective articulated. We see that in verses 5-7. So look at verses 5-7 again: "Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of this kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? 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?"

So James doesn't just give them that preview, that illustration we just looked at, and then tell them, "Now stop doing that," right? "You do you see what I'm talking about? Okay, now stop it." No, what he actually does is to call them out of that sinful, wicked reasoning and thinking that is leading to ungodly judgments, and instead call them to logical and godly reasoning and to making right judgments. So in here, in this section, the imperative, the actual command, here, is the call to pay attention and consider. The only command in this verse is the imperative verb translated here as "listen, listen."

And he doesn't just mean to be attentive with your auditory receptors. I mean, this is a letter. He's, he's, writing this down. The idea is to call them to attention, call them to attention to what he is about to say, I'm about to say something important. Be attentive, absorb it, and then act upon it. And it's not just "listen," like how a teacher trying to get the

attention of a distracted class might say it, or like how a military officer calling people to attention with a sense of, "You better listen up, you'd better obey me, you'd better submit," type of way. It's not just like that.

He does want to stop them in their current form of thinking and redirect them. That's certainly true. But he once again appeals to them through their shared identity in Christ. He says, "Listen, my beloved brothers." It's not just an "obey this command or else" type of thing. This is a "think about this in light of who you are," reminding them once again, strategically, that this is a family appeal for all those who are united to God as their Father through Jesus Christ. He wants their attention. He wants them to really think through what he is about to say, and he wants them to do it with the understanding of the bond that they have in Christ. He wants to do this in order to help them gain the right perspective.

And in order to gain the right perspective, he asked them what we see here as a few multifaceted rhetorical questions. So first he asked them a question to help them to think rightly in

their attitude towards the poor. And then he asked some questions to help them think rightly about their attitude toward the rich. These are questions that are meant to pull them out of their current bad thinking, their current sinful actions that are tainted by their selfish partiality, and to remind them of truths that they are not currently factoring into their living. He reminds them of eternal truths about the poor and the present reality concerning the rich, which they seem to have forgotten.

So let's look at what he says about the poor, first. So first he asks them this question as we look again in verse 5: "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?" So it's important, as we continue to think through this section, that we that we don't fall into the trap, as we read this, as some have, of seeing God violating his own principle and his own character by showing sinful partiality to the poor over the rich. James is not advocating for prioritizing the poor over the rich on an individual basis. Remember that the overall principle governing the entirety of this section in verse 1 is to not hold the faith of the Lord with an attitude of partiality, no partiality whatsoever.

You might remember, we don't have time to again go into it this morning, but this section in James has its Old Testament basis in Leviticus 19. James alludes to Leviticus 19 actually several places in his letter, and he does it prominently here. And if we were to turn to Leviticus 19, and maybe just write this down, Leviticus 19:15, you would see that God tells the Israelites, they're not only warned against showing partiality to the rich, but they're also told they'd better not show partiality to the poor, also. James is not trying to indicate that the wealthy have no place in the church or that God does not choose them sometimes, also. We just have to read our Bibles to know that there are many examples of wealthy believers throughout scripture. Job, Abraham, David, and then in the New Testament we see Matthew. We saw Zacchaeus in Luke. Joseph of Arimathea. There are many places where God uses the good stewardship of the wealthy to bless his people. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 1, we'll look at that in a little bit, but Paul says, "Not many of you were noble of birth," indicating that some were.

So this is not a socialist rant by James. Rather he's just reminding these people of what they seem to have forgotten about God, namely, that God has said that he cares for the poor. He is reminding them of the truth that the Bible is explicit about that, and we see that in the life of Jesus, that God has always cared for the poor, and he expects those who claim to belong to him to also care for them, to have the same attitude.

It's also important to understand that this isn't just a blanket statement that covers all the poor. There's a lot of poor people who are bitter about their condition, who've brought poverty on themselves because of their own sin, more so now than, than, in the system that was around then. Just being poor doesn't automatically qualify you for the promises that James is about to say. And you can see that by the fact that they're described as "those who are rich in faith." So these are believing poor, the rich in faith, the believing poor, the very same people that made up the majority of the early church and the majority of the original recipients of this letter. So what James is about to say is going to serve both as an encouragement to these hearers because of their own condition, and a challenge that they remember that as they interact with other people.

So he quickly, here, you can see, quickly reminds them of three important truths about the believing poor that these believers seem to be neglecting. First, they are chosen by God. He says, "Has not God chosen them?" The word here means that they're chosen out of a group. They're picked over others, eklego, "to pick out or to choose one from among others." This is the same word that we see in that famous passage in Ephesians 1:4, where Paul tells us that "God has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world."

And they would also be familiar, as Jewish Christians, with this concept because that's the same word that's used in Acts 13:17 to describe how God had chosen Israel out of other nations. The fact that God chose Israel out of all other nations was actually a demonstration of this principle that James is making, that he chooses the poor and the lowly, that he delights in that. In Deuteronomy 7:6-8, you don't have to look it up, but write down 7:6-8, we read, "For you are a people," this is God speaking to his people, "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. 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."

God delights in choosing the poor. He delights in choosing the lowly in order to shame the strong, in order to bring glory to him, that people might glorify him and trust him even more. That's the truth that Paul states in Colossians [1 Corinthians] 1:26-29 that I alluded to earlier. He 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."

So God has specially chosen them. And second, these believing poor are described as "rich in faith." "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith?"

While the poor Christian is, yes, at a disadvantage when it comes to physical resources in this life, it is that very thing that also puts them in an advantageous position when it comes to growing in their faith. They have been in the place time and time again where they have no other choice but to watch as God provides for them. There's no temptation in them to trust themselves over God. They oftentimes don't have the ability to provide for themselves. They don't have the means to make ends meet, so they have no choice but to trust in God. Remembering to ask God, as we're commanded, to "give us this day our daily bread," and then to trust him to provide it becomes much easier for them because they've seen it time and time again.

And just like a person who is rich in resources or money might grow in their dependence on money to help them, so, too, do those who are rich in faith grow in their dependence on God to help them. It's what we saw in Psalm 37 that Travis read from earlier. This is how they can speak because they've seen it. Psalm 37:25: "I have been young and now I'm old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread." So many who are rich and wealthy can say that just because they can see that their job or their finances have always provided.

But the poor person can say they've seen the hand of God, providing. They're not deceived. Even though God provides through our jobs, God provides through our money, but it's easy to forget that it's God's provision when we can see it like that, and the poor can see the hand of God. "I've not seen them go hungry."

Third, continuing on in verse 5, we see that they are heirs to the kingdom that has been promised to those who love God. They are heirs to the kingdom that has been promised to those who love God. The believing poor, they may not look like royalty now. They may be dressed in shabby, dirty, soiled clothes. That doesn't change the fact that they are heirs to the kingdom, that in the eternal context of things, they're just in a temporary state of physical poverty. In the full consummation of the kingdom of which they are certain heirs of, they will never be cold, they will never be hungry again. They belong to Jesus Christ the King.

So James is correcting the thinking of these early Christians. "Here's what's going on when a poor person walks

into your assembly. What is actually taking place is much different than the way you've been seeing it. What has actually happened is that one who has been chosen by God to be rich in that which is of true significance in this life, a fellow heir to the kingdom of Christ, has just entered. That's what happens when a believing poor man enters your assembly," and James is saying this is what is truly going on. "The God whom you claim to believe in has just brought this person to your gathering. He's just brought them to you." And then what does he say? "But you've dishonored him." "You've dishonored the poor man." And they've done this by seeing him through the lens of all their own personal preferences and selfish ambition, rather than the things that are most fundamentally true about him.

So not only are they not thinking rightly about the poor when it comes to eternity, they're not thinking rightly or fully about the rich right now, either. He points out how much of what was causing them pain and trials right now could be traced most immediately to the actions of the rich against them. So look again at verse 6: "Are not the rich the ones who oppress you and the ones who drag you into court?" So remember their context. They're impoverished believers. They are struggling in poverty.

And now he's pointing out that one of the primary reasons for that are "these rich people whom you're trying to honor," could very well be in reference to the Pharisees and especially the Sadducees.

We're not exactly sure everything that James is referencing here, but apparently it was those who were rich and in high positions that were making it so difficult on these early Christians. The rich are the ones who are taking them to court, who are bringing more financial hardships upon them or making things worse. It says that they're dragging them there, meaning that they don't want to go there. There's no hope in justice actually being done in winning the case. They're just going to lose more money in this exchange. It also says that they're oppressing them, and that word can mean exploiting or just holding a tyrannical type of rule over them. And this would certainly be the case with religious and governmental authorities.

So they oppress and persecute them all the while they are also, even worse, blaspheming the honorable name by which they

have been called. Verse 7: "Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?" The ones whom these Jewish Christians were being tempted to look upon with favor were people who had no problem oppressing them and mocking the God that they served. This is interesting. There's just something about the appeal of earthly riches, of earthly fame, of earthly power that entice these Christians, entice Christians today, to dishonor the poor in order to try and win the favor of those people.

And before we cast these recipients into too much of a negative light and wonder why on earth were they doing that, how could they do that, is this not the exact type of thing that we see today among many Christians when it comes to their attitude about celebrities? We get so disgusted, and rightly so, with all of these laws that are advocating for transgenderism or abortion, and then so many other things that are wicked and immoral. We get disgusted with them. We're easily bothered by the politicians we see putting them forward, or bothered by news pundits who are promoting them.

And yet we see nearly every celebrity that you can think of using their platforms to try and get immorality legislated, using their movies, their music, their social media to push the same ideologies and make people who have a Christian worldview look and sound stupid and foolish. And yet so many are so enamored with their lives. And it's not that they can't play a good character in a good movie from time to time, but to follow the actual person on social media, to fawn over them, to take a weird interest in their personal life. It starts to place you right into this category. And aren't these the people trying to push public opinions towards laws that are aimed to oppress us? Aren't these the people who mock the word of God and even blaspheme him? Why on earth do you know more about them and their personal life than you do the brother or sister who sits on the other side of the church?

I'm not advocating a boycott of entertainment. I don't think the passage is, is, advocating that. I mean, entertain that idea. But I think that there is a legitimate calling here for us to reflect on whether or not the way that God sees people, whether or not his characteristic of showing no partiality, is also our primary governing factor in our

decisions about people whom we invest in. So it might be good for us to consider an illustration as well, just to think about how our hearts are, where they are.

So if LeBron James or Taylor Swift or, you know, fill in the blank actor who plays a famous superhero, or just, you know, pick your own personal favorite celebrity, if that person was to come into our church, would the same reasons that you have used to keep your distance from others still hold the same sway over you? Or would you suddenly find yourself to be able to go to lunch with a visitor? Would you maybe go out of your way a little to make sure you got to say "Hi" to that one, make sure you got an autograph from them or a selfie with them, give a type of special treatment to a person who lives their life disdaining the God you serve, the one by whose honorable name you have been called?

I'm not saying if they came in we shouldn't evangelize them. Of course we should. But would that be the main reason you were over there? And even if it was, would that be the first time you went to a visitor for the purpose of evangelism? And

why is that? Why would that be? Is it a God-produced change in behavior in you all of a sudden that brings you over there? Or is it motivated by something else? These are just a hypothetical situation, a hypothetical question. But it is in pondering those types of things that helps us to reveal just how well we're doing when it comes to not holding our faith alongside sinful partiality.

Brothers and sisters, there is no partiality in God. Those who have been called by the honorable name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we ought to strive to follow him in this. Let's together commit to follow the example of Jesus, who availed himself to the rich and poor alike and gave his love and his time to every part of society: the Jew, the Gentile, the Roman centurion, the poor widow, the tax collector, and the leper. He made no distinctions based on outward appearance, based on what someone might offer him. And we are his followers. He is our Lord. We're called to emulate him. Therefore, beloved, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Father, we are indeed thankful for this word, and we do pray that we would rightly look at this passage today, look at it, as James said earlier, as a mirror that exposes us for who we are, for what we truly believe, no matter what we might think of ourselves, that we would ask the truly hard questions about ourselves that a passage like this demands. When it comes to our interactions with others, when it comes to our evaluation with others, are we judges with evil thoughts, with corrupt reasoning, or are we thinking of others the way that you do? Are we following our master? Are we following our master in this? And if not, why not?

Oh, God, I pray that Grace Church would be a church that that is reflected well in the statement to "show no partiality," that that would be us, that people would feel that when they visit here, that members would have that understanding when they talk to their family and friends about our church. May that define us, Lord. I pray all these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.