



*"In everything, treat others as you would want them to treat you..." - Jesus*

Imagine a world where everywhere who calls Jesus their king would live that out, where we choose to love, with no exceptions.

**James 2:1** (NIV) My brothers and sisters, **believers** in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ **must not show favoritism.**

**Jacob** (aka James), the Jewish follower of Jesus and leader of the believers in Jerusalem, is writing to Jewish believers dispersed in other places, **believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ**, ("Christ" means Messiah).

Jewish followers of Jesus met together often, but they also had to be warned to steer clear of some prideful practices. Evidently, they had the tendency to treat some people as more valuable than others because of their social status, clothing, or good looks.

**James 2:2-4** (NIV) <sup>2</sup> Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. <sup>3</sup> If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," <sup>4</sup> have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

We are to treat all people with **equal value**. God doesn't want us to treat another person with lesser value because of their social status.

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**Proverbs 14:31** (NIV) Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but **whoever is kind to the needy honors God.**

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In fact, God had prescribed special help for the Jewish people who were poor.

- Those unable to afford a bull, goat, or sheep to sacrifice could offer a dove or pigeon (Lev. 1:5, 10, 14).
- Every 7th year all debts would be canceled, in order that a person would not go into perpetual debt without hope of repayment (Deut. 15:1-2).
- Crops & vineyards were not to be completely harvested so that the poor could pick food for themselves (Lev. 19:9-10).
- The poor were never to be charged interest on a loan (Lev. 25:35-37)
- If a person had to sell all of their property because of tough times, a family member was to redeem it - buy it back for them (Lev. 25:25)
- Poor who sold themselves to fellow countryman were not to be treated as slaves (Lev. 25:39)

In all these ways, God commanded the Jewish people to protect and help the poor. God loves poor people, and so should we.

**BIG TRUTH: Love Without Exceptions**

**James 2:5** (NIV) Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

James/Jacob is not saying that all rich folks are prideful while all poor folks are humble, but he is reminding them that Jesus came to care for people that many others didn't value.

While Jesus was born into a family with many great names - Abraham, David, Solomon, his family tree was also full of common people and some who were known for great sin. Jesus was born to a modest young couple, in a small town, who gave the offering that poor folks would give. Further, Jesus grew up in a place with a tarnished reputation among other Jews (John 1:46).

When Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth, he took up the scroll of Isaiah and read these words:

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**Luke 4:18-19** (NIV) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim **good news to the poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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☛ John MacArthur *"It made no difference to Jesus whether the one to whom He spoke or ministered was a wealthy Jewish leader or a common beggar, a virtuous woman or a prostitute, a high priest or a common worshiper, handsome or ugly, educated or ignorant, religious or irreligious, law-abiding citizen or criminal. His overriding concern was the condition of the soul."*<sup>1</sup>

Jesus treated all people with value, but warned of the reality that the rich were less likely to recognize their need of God. It has been well said that...

***Jesus came to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.***

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**Luke 6:20-26** (NIV) <sup>20</sup> Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. <sup>21</sup> Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. <sup>22</sup> Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. <sup>24</sup> "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. <sup>25</sup> Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. <sup>26</sup> Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."

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Jesus cared for the POOR & the RICH. He commanded both POOR & RICH to find their hope in Him, not in their possessions, popularity, or social status. Jesus treated the poor with value and He demands His followers to do the same. We are to **love without exemptions**.

### **Spiritual Spankin'**

**James 2:6-7** (NIV) <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? <sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

Many Jewish followers of Jesus faced persecution from other Jews who didn't follow Jesus. Many no doubt lost their jobs and others were dragged into court by the rich who were trying

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *James, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 98.

to squeeze every shekel out of them. Just as many of the scribes, Sadducees, & Pharisees dishonored Jesus, so they were treating the poor believers badly, even **blaspheming the noble name** of Jesus. Followers of Jesus were to be DIFFERENT, to treat poor & rich with the same value, rather than honoring one above the other.

**Question:** What if God holds you accountable, not for how you treated the rich, popular, educated & athletic, but how you treated the poor, unpopular, uneducated, & physically weak? *Would you be grateful that God saw it all or ashamed that God saw it all?*

**James 2:8** (NIV) <sup>8</sup> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, **“Love your neighbor as yourself,”** you are doing right.

This command went WAY BACK to Lev. 19:18. Jesus quotes this when asked what the greatest command was, breaking down all the 613 commands down to 2 (Matt. 22:37-40).

When Jesus is asked, *“So, just who is my neighbor?”* Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), where we learn that our neighbor even includes the person we’ve never met who has a need we CAN meet. At another time Jesus says it this way.

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**Matthew 7:12** (NET) In everything, **treat others as you would want them to treat you,** for this fulfills the law and the prophets.

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**And the very first need we CAN meet is to treat that person with VALUE, like WE want to be treated.** Imagine a world where everywhere who calls Jesus their king would live that out; a world where we **Love Without Exceptions!**

**James 2:9-11** (NIV) <sup>9</sup> But **if you show favoritism, you sin** and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of **breaking all of it.** <sup>11</sup> For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

☀ **Kent Hughes:** *“James sees the Law as a seamless garment which, when ripped in one place, tears the whole garment.”<sup>2</sup>*

We have ALL broken at least one of those laws and therefore torn the whole garment.

☀ Imagine talking with someone on death row. He tells you what a good man he is, what a great husband he has been. He spotlights his faithfulness to his wife. But the whole time you’re thinking...yeah BUT...you murdered someone else!

☐ We could do that with the whole list in our own lives: “Well I’ve never stolen anything... BUT...you have LIED about your neighbor. GUILTY!

**Favoritism = the SIN of NOT loving my neighbor like myself**

\* The Good News is this: Jesus has made payment for ALL our sin - lying, stealing, adultery, murder...AND **favoritism**. HOW WONDERFUL it is to KNOW that you are forgiven!!!! Those who have surrendered to Jesus ARE NO LONGER JUDGED GUILTY!

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**Romans 8:1-2** (NIV) <sup>1</sup> Therefore, there is now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, <sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus **the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free** from the law of sin and death.

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IF we ARE no longer condemned - set free from our sin, shouldn't that make a difference in our daily lives?

**James 2:12-13** (NIV) <sup>12</sup> Speak and act as those who are going to be **judged by the law that gives freedom**, <sup>13</sup> because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. **Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

\*Read the story Jesus tells in Matthew 18:21-35).

Not only should we forgive our fellow believers, but we are to be people who are known for showing mercy to others. We are to...**Love Without Exceptions.**

☀ **Cal Thomas:** *"Love talked about is easily ignored. But love demonstrated is irresistible."*

## **Discussion Questions** <sup>3</sup>

1. **Read Luke 4:16-21** and **14:12-14**. What do these Scriptures teach about Jesus's attitude towards the poor?
2. Read **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**. What does Paul teach in this passage?
3. Grade your church on the matter of treating all people equally. How can it improve in this area? What steps will you take to help your church improve?
4. Why are poor Christians rich in faith? How can you become richer in faith?
5. **Read Matthew 23:23**. What example did Jesus give of the Pharisees' selective obedience?
6. **Read Romans 14:12** and **Hebrews 9:27-28**. What do these verses teach us about God's judgement?
7. What examples of selective obedience can you see in today's American church?
8. What can you do to develop a more merciful spirit?

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up James, Opening Up Commentary* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2009), 81 & 88.