

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

### **Rich Man, Poor Man James 2:1-13 Part Three**

Samuel when he went to the home of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as the next King of Israel to succeed Saul, he saw Eliab, and he thought to himself that this certainly would be the next king. But what did the Lord say to him in **1 Sam. 16:7?** **“Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”** And this is exactly right.

We do look at outward appearances. And there is nothing wrong in and of itself with doing this. It is human. And there is nothing wrong even in noticing the differences that exist in outward appearances. But there is something terribly wrong when those differences become the basis for whether we are willing to extend help to someone or not to extend help, when those differences become the basis for whether we are willing to extend service to someone or not to extend service.

Last week I shared the story of a black woman who attempted to gain membership in a white church in the early 60's and who was refused membership on the basis that there were other black churches in town and if she and her family wanted to enjoy church membership they could join one of them. This church that I was attending at the time was willing to serve white people by embracing them as members, but they were unwilling to serve black people in that same way. I believe that they were guilty of personal favoritism. They treated one person differently than another simply on the basis of race or, in other words, on the basis of outward appearance.

Partiality or personal favoritism is sin and it is this very issue that James addresses in **James 2:1-13**. **“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. (2) For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, (3) and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” (4) have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? (5) Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? (7) Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? (8) If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. (9) But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (10) For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. (11) For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. (12) So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”** This is a wonderful passage of Scripture dealing with a very practical area within our lives. But how does this passage of Scripture fit in with the epistle?

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You will of course remember the theme of this epistle, which is "Tests of Living Faith." This epistle was written so that we might be able to know whether we are saved or not saved. Whether we are a part of the family of God or not a part of the family of God. The first test that we considered in this epistle was the "Response to Trials test." This test is found in **James 1:2-18**. The second test that we considered in this epistle was the "Response to the Word test". This test is found in **James 1:19-27**. We are now considering the third test. We will call this the "IMPARTIALITY TEST" which is found in the passage that we have just read, **James 2:1-13**. Just as our response to trials can tell us a great deal about our true spiritual condition; just as our response to the word can tell us a great deal about our true spiritual condition, so also the way we respond to people in various given situations can tell us a great deal about our spiritual condition. If we treat one person one way and another person a different way based upon our fleshly biases and fleshly appetites then we are in trouble. How are we treating people? Are we treating people impartially? To help us in answering this question we have James 2:1-13. We will divide this passage into five different parts. Hopefully the study of this passage of Scripture will not only help us to identify those times when we could potentially fall into the trap of showing partiality but I would hope that this study would increase our determination not to fall into those traps. Hopefully the study of this passage will help us to become more and more in our thinking and actions like Jesus.

The first area that we considered was the principle in **V. 1**. Let us read **James 2:1**, "**My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.**" What is the principle which, in this verse, is so succinctly stated? For us to profess faith in the gospel of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ while holding an attitude of personal favoritism is contradictory and incompatible. Personal favoritism is a very ugly sin because it is the antithesis of how Jesus responded to people, Jesus in every situation was concerned only with what? Service! When He approached people Jesus did not size them up by their outward appearance and determine whether or not he was going to serve them or not serve them. He always, in each and every situation, was committed to serving, not looking at what He could get but rather at what He could give.

The second area of teaching that we considered was "the example" in **VV. 2-4**, "**For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, (3) and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "you sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "you stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," (4) have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?** James in VV. 2-4 gives us an example of "personal favoritism" that was particularly appropriate for their situation, and it involved the church's different responses to people of different degrees of material wealth.

This certainly is not the only scenario where personal favoritism can be exercised as we saw in the case of a black woman seeking membership in a white church but in the time period that James is writing, distinctions being made on the basis of material wealth were certainly a matter of great concern for James. And James continues to build on this example as we move to the third area of teaching involving personal favoritism and we will call this:

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### The Inconsistency

For the readers to show preferential treatment of the rich over the poor was shocking in light of what the readers knew from their own personal experience and this preferential treatment was totally inconsistent. How was it inconsistent? Their favoritism involved a double inconsistency. Their preferential treatment was inconsistent with God’s choice of the poor (VV. 5b-6a) and it was inconsistent with the hostile actions of the rich toward them (VV. 6b-7).

Let us first of all look at the divine choice of the poor. Let us read the end of V. 5 and the beginning of V. 6, “... **did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (6) But you have dishonored the poor man.....**” James is not talking about those who are humble or in other words, “the poor in spirit”, but the economically “poor.” He is talking about those who are in financial poverty and therefore considered by the world to be inferior. Throughout redemptive history, God has shown special concern for calling the downtrodden to Himself. The Lord, speaking to the nation of Israel through Moses, said in **Deut. 7:7-8, “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the people, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, King of Egypt.”** As we have mentioned before, there are a number of notable exceptions, but God’s elect are typically dominated by the “**poor of this world.**”

James recognizes this fact in the passage that we are now considering. When James asks the question, “**Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom....**” he is expecting a positive answer. When these readers stop to think about it they will have to conclude on the basis of what they have seen that what James is implying by this question is true. They will have to conclude that God has chosen the poor of this world. But let us not become confused about what this choice teaches us.

We should not conclude from this that God’s choice of the poor was based somehow on their poverty. This certainly is not the case at all. There is no spiritual merit in being poor nor is there any spiritual merit in being rich. God’s choice of those to be saved has nothing to do with them and their human condition at all. It has nothing to do with who they are, what they are or what they have accomplished. **2 Tim. 1:9** makes this very clear when we read that the Lord, “...**has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.**” If God’s choice of people were based on the fact that they were poor, then all poor people would be saved and all the rich people would be lost. That certainly is not the case at all. The truth is that God has chosen both the rich and the poor for salvation.

Even though God’s choice of those to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom is not based on their material wealth or lack of it, there is an advantage for those who are poor when it comes to spiritual matters because there is one less stumbling block.

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I am sure you remember the words of Christ in **Mt.19:23** when He told His disciples, "Truly **I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.**" Why? Because rich people will often times choose riches over Christ. Remember the rich young ruler? In **Mt. 19:16** it says, **"And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"** In an attempt to test the man's willingness to follow Him at any cost Jesus said to him in **V. 21** **"... If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me."** How did he respond to this? **V. 22** tells us, **"But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved, for he was one who owned much property."** The issue of giving up financial control to Christ obviously is much more difficult for those who have material wealth than for those who do not. That is why Christ is able to say, **"it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."** The poor do not have the issue of wealth to stumble over. Because of this where will we find the majority of those that God has chosen for salvation? We will find the majority of them in the ranks of the poor.

God is not guilty of personal favoritism. God is impartial. He has chosen the rich for salvation and He has chosen the poor for salvation. But clearly based on the words of Christ Himself, the vast majority of those that will be saved will come from the ranks of the poor. And certainly God's choice of the poor for salvation would have been evident to these readers. In fact, most of His readers were most likely themselves poor.

When you look at your financial situation do you see yourself as rich or do you see yourself as poor? If you see yourself as poor in respect to the things of this world then rejoice. Rejoice in the fact that you do not have to successfully navigate the treacherous waters of affluence. If you are rich, then pray to the Lord for grace, that those possessions will not become for you a stumbling block, but rather a tool that He can use to advance His kingdom and glorify Himself in and through your life. Hopefully there will not be a single person in this congregation, whether you are poor or rich, who would not be described by James as **"rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom."**

What does James mean by **"rich in faith?"** **"Rich in faith" does not mean that their faith is their wealth. "Faith" denoting their personal trust in God and His gospel, is rather the sphere or realm wherein their wealth is known and enjoyed.** Their wealth consists of their salvation and all the blessings accompanying it. Faith "is the open hand of the soul to receive all the bounteous supplies of God." James is fully aware of the fundamental importance of faith in the Christian life. This spiritual wealth is not earned by works but is appropriated by faith.

What does James mean by **"and heirs of the kingdom?"** **Being an heir is attained not through meritorious effort but through a personal relationship with the Ruler of the kingdom.** This is the only mention of "the kingdom" in the epistle, but the concept would be familiar to the readers. **The reference here is to the eschatological or future kingdom. Christ inaugurated His kingdom during His first advent, and now He rules in the lives of those who have accepted Him as their Sovereign.** The kingdom in its full manifestation is still in the future, awaiting the return of Christ in glory (Mt. 25:31; 1 Cor. 15:50-54; 2 Tim. 4:1; Tit. 2:11-13.)

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Those who know the present riches of God's saving grace are assured that they are also heirs of this future kingdom. They may now be poor and insignificant "nobodies" in the world's view, but they also possess the glorious prospect of inheriting the kingdom with their sovereign Lord.

How will we know if in fact we are one of those who are "rich in faith" and "heirs of the kingdom?" What does the verse say, "**Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?**" We will know that we are included in the "rich in faith" and "heirs of the kingdom" by the clear manifestation of our love for Him. And this of course would mean that we would be striving to live lives that are pleasing to Him.

James is telling these readers that when it comes to the poor of this world, the Lord has opened his arms wide to receive them and to bless them, which would of course be true of the rich as well, if they chose to come. But now James contrasts how the Lord treated the poor with how his readers treated the poor and we read about this in V.6 "**But you have dishonored the poor man....**" They have acted in contempt of the poor man by ordering him to stand "over there" in an inconspicuous place or to sit on the floor. It was an act of extreme discourtesy.

When James says, "But you have dishonored the poor man" he is in effect saying, "How can you claim to be God's child and yet think and act so differently from Him? It is inconsistent."

### CONCLUSION

We have been considering in this epistle, "Tests of Living Faith." The very first test was "Response to Trials test", the second test was the "Response to the Word test." And we are now considering "the Impartiality Test." In presenting this particular test James will give us five different areas related to personal favoritism. So far we have looked at "the principle," "the example" (VV. 2-4), and now we are looking at the "inconsistency" that was manifested in that example. We have only looked at the first aspect of the inconsistency that was exposed by the example that James has chosen. We will hopefully get much further next week. But I would again like to leave you with a personal challenge.

When you left here last week I challenged you to look at people in the same way that Jesus would look at people. And if you would do this, the question that you will find yourself continually asking is this: How can I serve this person? And this is my promise to you. If you will continually ask that question, as Christ would sincerely ask that question with the heart of a true servant, you will easily pass the test of impartiality.