

Sermon for August 31, 2025 – The 12th Sunday after Pentecost

James 2:1-13 EHV

Theme: Express your Faith in Christ

- 1) Not by showing favouritism to some,
- 2) But by expressing mercy to all.

My brothers, have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without showing favouritism. ²For example, suppose a man enters your worship assembly wearing gold rings and fine clothing, and a poor man also enters wearing filthy clothing. ³If you look with favour on the man wearing fine clothing and say, "Sit here in this good place," but you tell the poor man, "Stand over there" or "Sit down here at my feet," ⁴have you not made a distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil opinions? ⁵Listen, my dear brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him? ⁶But you dishonoured the poor man. Don't the rich oppress you, and don't they drag you into court? ⁷Aren't they the ones who blaspheme the noble name that was pronounced over you? ⁸However, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹But if you show favouritism, you are committing a sin, since you are convicted by this law as transgressors.

¹⁰In fact, whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For the one who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom. ¹³For there will be judgment without mercy on the one who has not shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

On the night before His death, Jesus gave His disciples a new command: "Love one another. Just as I have loved you, so also you are to love one another."ⁱ In other words, Jesus didn't just save us for heaven someday. He saved us so that His love would be seen through us now. That is how faith expresses itself: in love. However, our sinful nature loves recognition more than it loves people. St. James, the author of our sermon text, exposed this truth by addressing one subtle but deadly sin: favouritism. Let us heed God's call through James to **express our faith in Christ** — 1) not by showing favouritism to some, 2) but by expressing mercy to all.

Part One: Express your faith in Christ, not by showing favouritism to some.

Our sermon text begins: *My brothers, have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ without showing favouritism.*

Take a moment to meditate on these words. By calling us “brothers”, James reminds us that, in Christ, we are one family. We may differ in age, income, status, or culture — but before God we are all the same: equally sinful and equally saved through Christ.ⁱⁱ

And how did Christ save us? By humbling himself to become like us so that, by his death on the cross, he could pay for our sins in full and give us the gift of everlasting life with Him in paradise, as the Apostle Paul once wrote: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

Yes, God gives us every reason to believe in Jesus and freely reflect His love to all. Yet how easily we fail to express such love, all because our selfish, sinful nature wants to impress those it thinks can benefit us. St. James explains:

²For example, suppose a man enters your worship assembly wearing gold rings and fine clothing, and a poor man also enters wearing filthy clothing. ³If you look with favour on the man wearing fine clothing and say, “Sit here in this good place,” but you tell the poor man, “Stand over there” or “Sit down here at my feet,” ⁴have you not made a distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil opinions?

The temptation to show favouritism is not just a sin of the past; it is alive and well in the church today. For instance, we may be tempted to give more attention to the well-dressed visitor than to the struggling neighbour - hoping that they might help support our congregation financially. We may prize young families over the elderly or admire the influential while overlooking those who struggle. The devil even tempts us to justify such actions with thoughts like, ‘This person could really help our mission, while that one will drain our resources.’ But whenever we think this way - measuring a person’s worth by any standard other than God’s Word — we *become judges with evil opinions*. We dishonour Christ, who loved and died for all without distinction.”

James continues: *⁵Listen, my dear brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him? ⁶But you dishonoured the poor man.*

Jesus once said, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*^{iv} Who are the poor in spirit? Those who come before God in humble repentance, understanding that they deserve nothing from the LORD because of their sins. Nevertheless, they trust Jesus to grant them the forgiving grace they need for His mercy’s sake.

The Bible says: *“God chose the foolish things of the world to put to shame those who are wise. God chose the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are strong, and God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to do away with the things that are, so that no one may boast before God.”*^v

But if you show favouritism to those who are worldly rich, wise, or strong, you dishonour those God has chosen to be His heirs.

St. James explains that showing such favouritism makes no sense. He asks: *Don't the rich oppress you, and don't they drag you into court? ⁷Aren't they the ones who blaspheme the noble name that was pronounced over you?*

The worldly-minded wealthy are no friends of the Gospel. Behind their façade of kindness often lies a selfish heart that exploits workers, economically oppresses the poor, and sues everyone who gets in their way. Worse yet, they often blaspheme Christ with their boasting. Why, then, would we want to show them favouritism?

⁸However, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself," you are doing well.

Jesus once said that the greatest commandment of the Law was to love God with every fibre of your being and *love your neighbour as yourself.*^{vi} Faith in what Jesus has done to save us from our sins moves us to want to keep this commandment for all, rich and poor alike.

⁹But if you show favouritism, you are committing a sin, since you are convicted by this law as transgressors.

Withholding kindness from someone when you have the opportunity to express it is the opposite of love; it is a sin that separates us from God.

"But," someone might protest, "showing favouritism seems like such a minor indiscretion compared to the rest of God's commandments. Surely one minor indiscretion can't damn us to hell, can it?"

To that, James writes: *¹⁰In fact, whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point has become guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For the one who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

Yes, breaking God's law at one point makes us guilty of breaking all of it. Why? Because all the commandments are really just an exposition of His one command to love God and your neighbour. And who among us can claim to have perfectly loved everyone, having never sinfully neglected anyone in thought, word, and deed? This exposes us all as people who stand condemned under God's law and who are in desperate need of a Saviour who must both keep God's law perfectly in our place and fully pay for our sins.

And thanks be to God—we have a Saviour who did all those things. In our place, Jesus loved without favouritism. He touched lepers, ate with tax collectors, welcomed children, and died for all. On the cross, He carried even our sin of loveless favouritism and paid for it in full. Moreover,

as we hold on to Him in faith, He covers us with His perfect love. In Him, we are free—free to no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again for us.

Part Two: Express your faith in Christ by showing mercy to all.

Therefore, James writes:

¹²So speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom.

What is the “law of freedom”? It is the spiritual liberty Jesus won for us through His cross that compels us to love others as He loved us. St. Paul speaks of it in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians, where he wrote:

¹⁴For the love of Christ compels us, because we came to this conclusion: One died for all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again. ¹⁶As a result, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.^{vii}

And in his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote;

¹³After all, brothers, you were called to freedom. Only do not use your freedom as a starting point for your sinful flesh. Rather, serve one another through love. ¹⁴In fact, the whole law is summed up in this one statement: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”^{viii}

Yes, the more we bask in Jesus’ love for us, the more we can’t help but reflect it indiscriminately to others. But for the one who continually fails to express such love, James warns, “...there will be judgment without mercy on the one who has not shown mercy.”

This verse reminds me of Jesus’ parable of the man who, after his master mercifully forgave his great, unpayable debt, shook down a fellow servant – unwilling to forgive his little debt. When his master found out, he reinstated the unmerciful servant’s great, unpayable debt and sent him to jail until it was fully paid.^{ix}

God’s point is this: if you fail to show others the same merciful love the LORD has shown you, you dishonour Him. In response, He will hold you to the same standard you hold others. May the LORD keep us from such a fate.

But, St. James writes, *mercy triumphs over judgment*. Showing mercy isn’t about earning God’s favour. It’s a fruit of faith—the proof of Christ’s love at work in us. On the Last Day, Jesus will point to our simple acts of mercy as evidence of His saving grace in us, as He once explained to His disciples.

³¹“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne... ³⁴Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶I was lacking clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me... Amen I tell you: Just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.”^x

Oh, what joy there is in knowing that our loving words and deeds, no matter how small, are precious to Jesus. They reflect His gracious work in us and will be His revelation on the Last Day that His *mercy triumphs over judgment*.

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, have faith in Jesus. Rejoice in His impartial love that saved you, forgave you, and freed you to love others as He has loved you. Let that saving love shine in your life, not by showing favouritism to some, but by being merciful to all. Amen.

ⁱ John 13:34-35 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Galatians 3:26-29

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 8:9 EHV

^{iv} Matthew 5:3 EHV

^v 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 EHV

^{vi} Cf. Matthew 22:34-40

^{vii} 2 Corinthians 5:14-16

^{viii} Galatians 5:13-14 EHV

^{ix} Cf. Matthew 18:23-35

^x Matthew 25:31,34-36,40 EHV