

Discrimination is the Anti-Gospel

James 2.1-13, Mirrors Pt 3 – April 17, 2016

Announcement: **Missions Night Recap / Celebration**

Introduction

In 2008 Seth Gordon released King of Kong. A short documentary chronicling the duel between the two greatest....Donkey Kong players in the world. Billy Mitchell the Legend against Steve Weibe the science teacher. It's fascinating and pretty sad / funny. The funniest thing though is how the small little following of Donkey Kongers gives such honor & reverence to Billy & Steve Weibe. I mean, we are talking 35 year old men ignoring their kids to play a video game. But these two guys are HEROS in the Kong subculture. You are only taken seriously if you have the real arcade game with the joystick & buttons that you have to stand up to play... not some video game version. They actually look down condescendingly on the guys making the film and by extension the audience because "We don't understand" how much skill is required to be that good at Donkey Kong... which they claim is the greatest video game in the history of the world. And the whole time you watch you are like...what bizarre world are you living in where you guys....the Donkey Kong guys...are looking

down on the rest of us? I'm telling you, you will thank me later if you watch it.

Today we are going to talk about how and why we show partiality towards others. That is, why we play favorites with some and discriminate against others. The discriminations we are going to look at today are going to get weighty. They corrupt our city and are usually the biggest hindrances to the gospel. We are going to see we are a lot more like Billy Mitchell and Steve Weibe than we realize, and that God sees our partiality towards some over others just as out of touch with true reality as we think Donkey Kong fanatics are.

Much like last week I'm going to walk through the passage and show you what James says. Here is James' flow in this passage: He's going to show us

- 1) How we discriminate
- 2) Why its so counter to the heart of God
- 3) Where the power for change comes from
- 4) What a way forward could look like

You ready? I'm not sure if I am so I'm glad you are.

1. How we discriminate

[1] My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Alright don't let this first verse slip by you. In truth, this verse holds everything you need to understand all 13

verses. If you had to underline and memorize a verse, this is the one. Because every phrase in it matters.

There is only one command in these 13 verses. And it's here in verse 1.

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. – Talking to the church. This is for Christians. Don't expect non-Christians to act like Jesus.

My brothers, **show no partiality** as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Greek word translated partiality here literally means 'receiving the face.' To receive someone based on their face is James' way of saying you are receiving or judging them based on what they look like. And James is saying don't do this. Now what makes it even more important is that in the Greek this word 'partiality' is plural. Which means you could translate this 'show no acts of favoritism.' And this is consistent with the rest of the passage. Are you starting to catch what that means? It means this prohibition against partiality has WIDE ranging applications. Don't show partiality based on dress (which we'll see in a second), don't show partiality based on skin color, on age, physical appearance, or anything else.

My brothers, show no partiality **as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ**, the Lord of glory.

He's saying you can't show partiality and be a true follower of Jesus. Remember James is one of the earliest NT books written so he relies a lot on Old Testament in his teaching. Here he's recalling what Moses said about God in Deuteronomy:

The Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing' (Deuteronomy 10:17-18)

Notice that fatherless and widow? That's from our passage last week. True religion in Ch. 1.27 – look after the fatherless and widow. What James is plainly getting at here is the God who created men, all men, in his image, does not show partiality towards *anyone*. This God even makes a point to care for the helpless and marginalized. And James [\(screen go back to James 2.1\)](#) is saying you cannot call yourself a Christian and discriminate against people.

Then he gives us a scenario that is happening in his church

[2] 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, [3] 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," [4] have you not then made

distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

You catch what he is saying? That on some occasions when the church assembled together to worship, there were some in the church who showed favor to wealthy looking people and discriminated against poor looking people. So the wealthy were given the good seats and the poor got were put on the floor or in the standing room only section.

I'll never forget visiting the old north church in Boston, MA. Ever been there? One where Paul Revere was going to put 2 lanterns? Anyway, 300-year-old church that has box seats on the floor for wealthy families...with name plates so you had your seat. And then the poor sat in the balcony. The church was actually built in direct violation of James 2.

I imagine this sounds absurd to some of you. It'd be like us having VIP seating for wealthy people. Ahhh, right this way Mr. Moneybags. We've reserved the finest white folding chair for you. Sorry poor college student...you get a carpet square in the back. Don't get your smelliness on our nice folding chairs. The idea of special seating for people in our church gathering based on wealth is so absurd, not to mention blatantly in violation of God's word, most of us don't relate to it. But this is just an example for James. There are so many ways we show partiality...ways we discriminate...

- Remember High School? Some of y'all are in it right now... Cafeteria Cliques –
 - Jocks, Theater Kids, honors kids, Goth & IMO, Band, Mean Girls, Mathletes...and the umm...Herbal Crowd.
 - And I always wanted the jocks to like me. And didn't care what the Mathletes thought of me. This is what happens when you play a varsity sport but also are in the theater club. You are confused. So I would show partiality towards the jocks and laugh at the Mathletes when the jocks made fun of them. And I did that So that certain people who I thought were important would finally like me.
- What about now? In many ways we adults are still in high school.
 - Ford people show partiality to ford people
 - Workout people show partiality to workout people. If you can't box jump onto this stage right now you are a disgrace!
 - What about how moms show partiality to certain moms! Like the mom who only serves their kid organic cucumber water & vegan almonds. That mom sees my kids scarfing down Chick-Fil-A and thinks about my wife...WHAT KIND OF A MOTHER ARE YOU!? And my wife thinks...WHAT KIND OF CRAZY

PERSON ARE YOU!?

- Let me get a little more real...We discriminate based on where in the city you are from: the old “from the other side of the tracks.” If you are from West Charlotte...look down on South Charlotte because they think they are all that with all their money, etc. You think you don’t own anything nice enough to even be admitted entrance into Southpark mall. And if you are from South Charlotte you think...don’t drive through west charlotte at night! I know you do. And watch out while in NoDa cause those folks keep it weird. That’s discrimination and those ideas build walls up in our hearts and minds against other people.
- Now let me bring it to Mercy Church. James is talking about the gathered church. What are ways Mercy shows favoritism? I’ll tell you one I’ve been convicted of this week: It’s not in wealth or even in age. I feel like we are doing well there. But I’ve noticed a blind spot we have and that is we often, unintentionally, show partiality to our majority culture. We sing songs written by white people, I largely quote white theologians, and most of our leaders are white. Listen, every person has a certain deference to his or her culture. This is not a “white people are bad” comment. It’s hopefully an awareness moment that God does not have a favorite culture. God is not white or black or Latino

or Asian. In fact when the bible talks about Heaven it says there are people of every tribe, tongue, and nation singing to him. And if we want to be a church that truly reflects the heart of God, we must fight for a truly multicultural church! I had some great conversations this week with mercy family members from minority cultures who I love and trust who, when I asked, graciously reminded me we still have room to grow to be a fully diverse church. Our staff and I had a convicting conversation this week that we need to intentionally pursue more diversity in our weekend gatherings, in our leadership, and in everything we do. Which by the way will make us a healthier church.

- Former role: community pastor. Help people build community. Used to think one of the great ironies is that they had a white guy doing that. Because white people are the worst at hanging out at church. I didn’t know this until we launched a Spanish speaking service. It let out at the same time the English speaking one did. English one, lots of white people, place completely deserted in 15 minutes. Spanish speaking service...3 hours later everybody is still there. Food has appeared...kids are playing soccer. I kept sneaking down there to eat Sunday lunch. I asked my wife about us going and she said, “our kids gotta nap!” And I’m like “well I gotta eat.” Our church grew so much in an

understanding of what church “family” meant through those believers that came from a stronger group culture than I did modeling church family for us.

- When we make room for every culture, God blesses the church and makes it a more vibrant healthy expression of himself.
- James says when you show partiality... in any form...race, wealth, etc you are making a distinction that God doesn't make. And those distinctions are evil.
- Then in verse 5 – 11 he tells us:

2. WHY discrimination is evil in God's eyes

[5] 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?

Why shouldn't you discriminate against people?

Discrimination is counter to God's heart.

James says those poor in the world, literally in the “eyes of the world,” are the ones God chose to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. God seems to have a pattern in the bible that shows us he delights especially to shower his grace on those whom the world has discarded & marginalized.

Now this is important: He does not say that **all** poor people are ‘rich in faith,’ nor does he exclude **all** rich people from the ranks of the saved. ¹ He's saying we are to treat all people as God treats them. You guys will hear me knock prosperity theology sometimes, but poverty theology is just as dangerous.

Prosperity theology is the thinking that rich people are good and poor people are bad. By contrast, poverty theology is thinking poor people are good and rich people are bad. Both ways of thinking are at odds with the teaching of Scripture:

The Bible says... everybody's bad...be encouraged! . . . And the issue is that different churches behave in worldly ways where they show partiality either to the rich or the poor, but both—both—are wrong. The answer to those who favor the rich is not to favor the poor. The answer to those who favor the poor is not to favor the rich. The answer is not to show partiality to anyone but to treat everyone equally as God does. And what puts everyone on equal footing is his or her identity as a son or daughter of God. An identity we all acquire the same way: belief in the gospel.

God's heart is for all people. And when we show partiality towards any one group, we run counter to his heart for all

¹ Burdick, “James,” 12:178-79.

people. His next reason why discrimination is bad is great. It's almost purely logical:

[6] But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? [7] Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

I love this because James is basically saying another reason it's wrong...**Discrimination is not just evil...it's dumb!**

You want to show partiality to the rich...but they don't love you back. To the contrary, they are throwing you in jail. And they are blaspheming Jesus in the process! How often do we go looking for approval from people who don't care about us? Oh man that gets into a different sermon on identity but James' point is: These people aren't going to give you the love & identity you hope they will just because you gave them a good seat. No, on the contrary they defame the name of the one who can actually give that to you.

Treat everyone equally because the only one you need to find your identity in is Jesus! That's going to be huge at the end of today's passage.

We should never have to dishonor someone in order to get the honor of someone else. Ever. That's dumb and that "approval" never really lasts anyway

Then James really drops the hammer:

[8] If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

Catch that word? The "Royal Law?" James gives this command a regal status. Why? Because in Matthew 22 Jesus was asked a question. Which commandment is the greatest? And Jesus said "Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind. This is the greatest, and the second is like it...You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

So James is reminding his readers that Jesus' own command to love your neighbor forbids them from discriminating against anyone who enters their doors. And then James starts to go heavy on them. He finally pulls out the big gun:

[9] But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Here is his third and probably most important reason WHY discrimination is evil in God's eyes: **Discrimination is Sin**

It is sin. You guys know what that word means? Sin "hamartia" means to miss the mark. When the bible uses this word it's saying God has set a way for you to live that James is referring to as a law. Think for example of a speed limit. When you go 85 in a 45, you miss the mark on the speedometer and thereby break the law. And when you

miss the mark, or break the law, you are now a lawbreaker. And you have to pay a penalty. "Nuh, uh...its only illegal if I get caught...well, tough news...God is the one watching. So, you are always caught."

Then James tells us why this is so bad.

[10] For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. [11] 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.

If you break any one of God's laws...you are guilty of breaking all of it. To which you might say...WHAT!? That's garbage. If there are 100 laws and I keep 99 of them...that's an A+ by any school's standards. To which I'd say you are right, but you are viewing God's laws all wrong. James is saying God's law represents your relationship to him. And when you break any law, that is you being unfaithful to him.

Think of it this way...if I were to go out on a date tonight with Courtney...Sunday night date night. We are over at Amilie's gazing into each others eyes with over priced French pastries in front of us...and I say "Baby, I've been faithful to you 99% of our marriage...You are looking at an A+!?" What is she going to say to me? "Oh what a great husband you are....NO! Ya'll know her. She's going to SLAP me so hard they hear it in FRANCE and my marriage & family are going to be in shambles.

Why? Because 1 act of unfaithfulness is TOTAL unfaithfulness. Same way with God and his law. Once you break one, your relationship with him is broken. And what James is saying is showing partiality towards some over others is just as severe as adultery or murder.

So let me ask you this. Brutally honest moment with yourself. Have you ever shown partiality towards some people in a way that discriminated against others? Do you treat customers that look & act wealthier different than those who do not? Or...Ever chosen where you sit at a place like the DMV based on skin color?

Other day a 14 yr old African American teenager walked up the sidewalk while I was getting into my car and asked if he could have a ride to school. He missed the bus, mom was already at work. And I just froze. Here's why. I wasn't scared of this kid. But my first instinct was "no way." And my next was...what if this kid was white? What would I say then? And that's why I froze. I was convicted, confused, etc. So I said ok, lets call your mom. I'll call my wife. Accountability and all that. Then I drove him to school. Seemed like a great kid. Freshman basketball player, family from Nigeria. After I dropped him off I thought of the courage it took for him to ask a 30yr old white guy for a ride. And I realized, y'all I've been actively pursuing racial reconciliation in the church for years...and I still show partiality to those who look like me.

Which means I've broken God's law. And I need help. Have you ever discriminated against someone? You need help too. You've broken God's law and are guilty just like me. And that's where verses 12-13 come in:

[12] So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. [13] For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The power to change comes from believing the gospel

This is the only other command for James. He says to speak and act as those judged under the law of liberty. He's saying...judge others like God judged you. You actually deserved punishment because you have broken God's law. But instead of punishment, God gave you mercy. He gave your punishment to Jesus and let you live. Not only that, he gave you life everlasting.

Do you believe that? That you were spared the punishment you were owed? Because if you believe that, you will act like a merciful person. Like a gracious person. If you really believe the gospel, you will NEVER meet another human being who is undeserving of your love and respect.

Not only that...let me show you one other place the power to change comes from.

Back in verse 1 James called Jesus the "Lord of Glory."
(verse 1 back up)

The word glory in the Bible means "heaviness or weight." It means how important you are, how much you matter. And so in James' example, the rich man is showing his glory and the poor man is showing his lack of glory. But how did God show His glory?

We are told that when God appeared, He didn't show up with rings and in nice clothes, He did it in a cloud. It was a cloud, illuminated from within by a blazing fire. It looked like this incredible white, bright light. But at night it was a pillar of fire. It was simply God showing people, He's here and showing forth His glory.

The glory of God was both dangerous and desirable. Moses comes up to God and says, "Show me your glory." And God says, "I can't it will kill you."

Whenever anyone has ever gotten a glimpse of the glory of God, they hunger after it. The Bible tells us that there was an original glory that we were made for in the Garden. But we lost it.

And now here is James saying something astonishing because he is a Jew. How can he say that Jesus Christ is "the glory?" Because Jesus Christ is the way that you see God. How do you see the glory of the rich man? Look at his clothes. How do you see the glory in the Old Testament? You looked at the blazing fire. Now? Jesus is the rings on God's fingers. He's the cloud!

- Do you want to know about the wisdom of God? Read the Gospels. Look at God being wise. You want to see the love of God? You want to see His glory? Look at CHRIST! That will fulfill your longing.
 - Hebrews says He is the expressed image of God's glory.
 - He and He alone can show you God's glory.
- Jesus Christ doesn't just show us God's glory; He brings us God's glory.
 - How? He became poor that we by His poverty might become rich. He pardoned our sin. He paid for it. The ultimate glory in the universe is when someone who had glory gave it up for someone else.
 - There has never been greater glory than this! This glory is ours through Christ!

How does this change you?

When you look at the glory of God you won't care about the glory of men, which will free you of your desire to discriminate against people.

Once you see this you will never be awed by the world's glory. You won't be intimidated by someone's wealth or skin color. You won't show partiality. You'll be happy to sit and talk with people who are different than you. It gives you a small way of becoming like Jesus.

4. A way forward

One of my buddies here at Mercy, Ramone, sent me a great article on racial reconciliation by Jemar Tisby. While Jemar was writing on racial reconciliation I think his action steps apply so well to any area where we show partiality. He called it the A.R.C. of reconciliation

1. Awareness. – That's where you are awakened to the way you show partiality towards one type of person. That's a crucial first step for so many. That's why James wrote this. To wake up his church to the fact that showing partiality to the rich was sin and it needed to be repented of. That's largely what a sermon like today is for. To awaken us to our blind spots. And if done right, to awaken you to the power of change found in Jesus. Maybe your action step from here is to pray and evaluate your heart and your life to see where you may show partiality towards others. Maybe you need to repent of where you have discriminated against people for a long time. Wealthy, poor, minority, majority. Check your heart.

2. Relationships – Awareness isn't enough. No matter how aware you are, you will really only start to change when you interact with others. Think about it this way, God came down to us to reconcile us to himself. Likewise if you are going to reconcile with others it will mean going to them. Start with any acquaintances you have. In particular when it comes to race, maybe there's someone you know who is a different race than you. You know each other, but you've

never spent significant time together or had a substantive conversation. Why not invite that person or couple out to coffee or have their family over for dinner? It's natural, organic way to deepen a relationship you already have. I'm convinced FOOD is God's greatest bridge builder.

3. Commitment – Committing to consistent, long-term change is the hardest part. Awareness and even a meal with someone is easy. But your partiality did not happen overnight. It's been developed over years. And maintaining a changed posture will mean laying down your preferences for the sake of Christ. It will most likely result in change and change is usually not comfortable. If you have awareness and a relationship, how is God calling you to commit more to that?

This is why I keep pointing you back to James' point about the Mercy of God. Because Jesus says in John 15.9 "Abide in me and you will bear much fruit." Unless you rest your hope on Christ, your attempt to change will likely be a flash in the pan and it won't last. But through the power of Christ you can see lasting change.

I want to end with some really good news. As a church, you are one of the most welcoming groups of people I have ever been around. I call our first time guests all the time and they say how welcomed they felt among us. Praise God! But we are far from where God wants to take us. I believe a church where people from all backgrounds and cultures feel at home here is the church charlotte needs.

Homework: Find yourself on the ARC and take a step.

Take a step. This is your most challenging homework assignment yet. Maybe your step is Awareness. You need to leave today and search your heart and repent of where you show partiality towards others. That's what the past few days have been like for me. Hasn't been easy. Preaching isn't easy. Always go through it before I give it to you. Painful but good. What is your step?