



EVERYBODY MATTERS
James 2:1-13

The late Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, told a marvelous story about two creative vandals in London, England, who caused quite a stir at a well-known department store in that great city. Dr. Tony Campolo hijacked the story and made it famous on this side of the Atlantic.

It seems that the vandals broke in during the night, but didn't steal or damage anything. Instead – during the night they simply **rearranged the price tags** – putting a **\$50** price tag by a **\$5,000** item - and \$1,000 price tag next to a \$50 item. Then they watched the next morning with a kind of sinister delight as people were so confused in their shopping.

Something similar has happened in the spiritual dimension of life. Almighty God created the world and the human race placing the highest value on items like faith, honor, character, compassion, commitment, sacrifice, servanthood and eternal life. During the night the thief came in and switched the price tags. The things God said are worthy in life are the things which our society so often neglects or ridicules. The things that God declares have little value are the things on which our society places the highest value. Someone has come in and switched the price tags. This book declares that sharing, servanthood, sacrificing for other people and selfless love are the highest values; not race, class, greed, or social status.

Last week in preaching from **James 3:13-18**, we learned the great difference between godly wisdom and human knowledge. Today we are given a word of instruction from James about racism and favoritism and how they are not a part of the kingdom of God that Jesus came to build and establish.

In our lesson today – James holds a mirror up to the church as it is – and the image we see in that mirror often makes us uncomfortable. Forty years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, challenged the institutional church – when he shared that on 11 o'clock Sunday morning the most segregated hour in America took place. Nobody disagreed with him. Nobody disagreed with this observation. When we practice racism and favoritism everyone is wounded and loses their value. Everyone here today knows the joy of being included – and the pain of being uninvited.

You do not need a Ph.D. in sociology to know that people of certain classes and racial heritage have had a difficult time. This is **not to be true** in the body of Christ.

Remember, Jesus was God's answer to the bad reputation that He practiced favoritism with Jews and disliked others. My Bible tells me that **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

Ray and I both believe and preach that here in the church house – that this is the one place that all distinctions must be erased. At the foot of the cross – we believe that the ground is level and equal for all.

If anyone can ever prove by the pen or the tongue we have participated in racism or classism – we will repent of it. The same rules apply to those who sit on the other side of the pulpit today as well.

Racism, classism, and favoritism are chronic problems in the body of Christ – and must be dealt with in transformational ways.

So let's dig in and see what James has to teach us in our lesson today.

IN VERSES 1-4 JAMES IS TEACHING US THAT EVERYBODY MATTERS TO GOD.

In our lesson today – James issues a clear and concise call to avoid certain aspects of Roman culture – particularly those aspects of Roman culture which support social and economic stratification.¹ They were not to adopt the traits of their oppressor. They were to provide a greater and more excellent way. Remember how Jesus taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, the requirement of going the second mile.

James reminds the church that they were called to a life devoted to God lived out in counter-cultural contrast instead of the divided and fragmented world we live in. The church needs to provide that hope and example.

While James acknowledges that the Christian has the gift of **'eternal life'** through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ – he does not want the church to forget the **'external' life** – the way other people see us operating. A congregation should be taught sound doctrine – but instructed in sacred duty as well. We need to live what we read.

James had heard about his half-brother Jesus' ministry and mission to those beyond the Jewish race and nation. He heard about the women at the well – Zacchaeus – Nicodemus – the blind beggar – the deaf mute – Matthew - and the list goes on and on.

Jesus spent a great deal of time "working with and healing those on the low end of the influence ladder. As a matter of fact in the parable of the widow in prayer in **Luke 18:1-8**, he shares he hears the prayers of the poor with equal footing with those who are powerful figures in society.²

In other words ‘everybody matters.’ In God’s eyes no one is less valuable than another. So much of John Wesley’s ministry in England and beyond was to the least, the last, and the lost – or as Joel Green of Asbury Seminary describes as the least, the lost, and the left out.”

Let us now look at **verses 5-9**. Here we find James reminding his church and audience of a very important Old Testament truth found in **I Samuel 16:7**. Here we are counseled not to judge by outward appearances. God looks inwards before he looks outward. This is the ‘extreme makeover’ that our world does not participate in.

We all know that labels can be very deceptive. We often say, “Don’t judge a book by its cover. However, we all use labels – and we all make value judgments.

Dr. Harold Brack, my speech and communications professor at Drew University, once gave our class an assignment to write as quickly as we could all the images and word associations we could think of when we heard the ‘waitress.’ We came up with a list of words like:

“Always looking for a tip – runs in their stockings.”
Forgetful – tough/rough – airhead.”
All kinds of less-than-flattering words.

Then he said, “My mother was a waitress and she worked to help me get through college/seminary. She was the most godly woman I have ever known. To this day, every time I see a waitress - I remember that story.

Our society is hooked on outward appearances. Ask the teenagers of this congregation and beyond how looks and their dress affect how people respond to them. If they do not look like a Barbie doll model or achieve the status of sports heroes – or have a sexual conquest, they are made to feel like inferior young people. We label and stereotype people in the stadium and unfortunately in the sanctuary as well. We try to switch the price tags. James gives us a word of wisdom here.

Recently Penn State football coach Joe Paterno took his wife, Sue, on vacation to a small seaside town in Maine. He’d heard it was a quiet place where they could relax without anyone paying attention to them. It seemed wherever he went, people would always say, **“There’s the famous coach of Penn State.”** They went to a small theater, the lights were on and the show hadn’t started. To their surprise, a scattered handful of people gave them a round of applause as they seated themselves.

Secretly pleased, Paterno whispered to his wife, **“I guess there isn’t anywhere I’m not known.”** “You’re known and loved the world over,” she replied – with just a touch of sarcasm.

A man with a friendly smile came over and shook hands with Paterno. **“I’m really surprised you know me here,”** Paterno remarked.

“Should I know you?” the man replied. “We’re just happy to see you folks. The manager said he wouldn’t start the film until at least two more people showed up!” There are no celebrities in the Christian faith – only servants. James began his epistle by sharing he was a servant.

Remember, in the Christian faith, we all lean on the grace of God. We are all beggars – telling other beggars where we have found the bread of life. The bread we all will partake of today. Yes, be careful about how we judge on outward appearance.

NOW IN VERSES 10-13, GOD’S LOVE MUST BE EQUALLY SHARED BY ALL.

It is said that when people would leave after hearing Dr. Charles Spurgeon preach, they would comment not about Mr. Spurgeon, but about Mr. Spurgeon’s savior. Malcolm Muggeridge said that the first time he met Mother Theresa, he knew he had met a person for whom Jesus Christ was more important than herself. Joy in life comes as Christ increases and you and I decrease. We did not let anyone switch the price tags. These people knew the royal law was higher than any law made by man.

The Bible teacher, Steve Brown, of Key Life Ministries shares about a very conservative Presbyterian pastor who has a special calling and ministry to those who drive Harley Davidson motorcycles. He has even written a tract to pass out to those whom he calls “those tough, rough, black leather types.”

“JESUS WOULD HAVE RIDDEN A HARLEY”

“He was a lot like you and me. The government didn’t like Him. The church thought He was weird. His friends were few. What friends He had, denied Him. He was persecuted by hypocrites. He hung around people like you and me, not the goody-two-shoes Pharisees. Yes, if Jesus were on this earth in the flesh, He would be next to you on His Harley telling you He loved you . . . enough to die for you.”

Anne Lamott – in her latest novel – both asks and answers a question she posed to herself in a reflective moment. She asked: “You want to know how big God’s love is?” The answer is: “It’s very big. It’s bigger than you are comfortable with.” The cross is a testimony to that.

This royal law guides our treatment of everyone. This is the law of the King Jesus and the kingdom he is about. Only this kind of law set us at liberty to love in this depth and length and height.

When Robin Leach was the host of the TV show, “**The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous**” he discovered, “After interviewing hundreds of rich and famous people – it is clear to me that money and fame do not automatically make people happy. It has to come from within. I’d rather have a million smiles in my heart than a million dollars in my pocket.” James would agree with this.

Because we live in a world that has switched the price tags of life – God has given this table and this meal to lead us in the greater and more excellent way. The market and the marketplace is not always what it seems. Be careful what we invest our church and our lives in.

Here we see the real and great values in word and deed. Here is the one place where ‘everybody matters.’ Here is the one place we are all invited and nobody is left out.

I close with the words of Isaac Watts:

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small.
Love so amazing – so divine,
Demands my soul – my life – my all.”

Come one. Come all to the gospel feast.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
August 5, 2007
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ENDNOTES

¹ David P. Nystrom, **“The NIV Application Commentary: JAMES,”** Zondervan Publishing House, 1997, page 113.

² Eugene H. Peterson, **(CHRIST PLAYS IN TEN THOUSAND PLACES,** W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2005), page 277.

PASTOR’S NOTE:

This sermon was preached at both the 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. services on August 5th.

Pastor Eric will be out of the pulpit on August 12th and 19th. He will return to the pulpit on August 26th preaching at the 10:30 a.m. service.