

**2** My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. **2** 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. **3** 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,” **4** have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

**5** 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? **6** 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?

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Sometimes when I stand up here, I think there is nothing more I can add, that the Scripture was enough of a mic drop that going on probably distracts from the point more than helps. Nevertheless, I will do my best.

The context of this passage is simple and heartbreakingly familiar. The church was showing favoritism to the wealthier members, and leaving only scraps for the poor. James points out the irony that the world was behaving in the same way; the rich got the best and the poor got whatever was left. The world continues this way. If you don’t believe me, I could give you about a million examples.

I went dress shopping with a friend of mine that was getting married at a certain chain wedding dress shop. When they found out her budget they literally ignored her for the other girl with a much higher budget.

I used to be a surgery coordinator in another life for a doctor. They hated when patients came in on medicaid because they weren’t paid as much.

Jake and I went carpet shopping once when I was pregnant with Clara and I don’t remember the circumstances but they got the impression we were broke probably from the sloppy work clothes I was wearing and wouldn’t

show us the nicer carpets because they assumed we couldn't afford it. We walked out and went somewhere else.

I think we all suspect that we are queuing for a seat at a restaurant with, say, John Rockefeller, in most cases, he's getting the seat before us. Not at my restaurant, its first come first serve.

This sort of attitude had crept into the church and was blatantly sinful. For one thing, one of the things which attracts people to Christianity is the complete reversal of hierarchy. If you are poor or oppressed, a faith that promises equality probably sounds pretty good. It's a tougher pill to swallow if you're the one in power. So, this church had lost sight of this, and James is attempting to correct them and show them the hypocrisy of their actions.

I wish I could say such behavior ended there. It didn't.

In my time in ministry I've seen some things, unfortunately. I've worked in churches where the pastor knew what everyone gave and what certain people wanted, went. That's why I refuse to know what anyone gives, because I reject even the temptation to be swayed by someone's pocketbook over what I think God wants. I was briefly with a church that would drive over to your house to ask you to give more. At least until one ornery member made it clear that such behavior was not welcome in the more rural parts of our state, if you catch my meaning. Signs that read trespassers will be shot, survivors will be shot again are common in this part of town. I've known churches that would pressure people for their jewelry if they had no more money to give, or would insist on ever increasing amounts of money to progress through the levels of leadership in the church. Sadly, I've seen people deemed big donors whose sin was allowed to just run rampant and unchecked at the harm of their family because we wouldn't eat to offend them and lose that money.

And I hate all of it. And so does God.

God wants us to be giving, and to give generously, but what that means for each of us is different. Remember the widow's mites? She put in two little coins into the temple collection that most people wouldn't have stopped to pick up if they'd seen on the ground, but God honored and loved and appreciated that offering. Meanwhile people were throwing in their gaudy,

load offerings and God looked very differently upon those because they were not generous and sincere.

Who do you want in your church? The widow who gave from the heart or the people who gave for show?

I don't consider myself a fiery preacher. I'm pretty chill in my opinion. But I do have principles. There are truths that I hold dear, and one of them is that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male nor female for we are all one in Christ Jesus. I believe that Jesus loves the poor. I believe Jesus loves the rich, Scripture says he looked with compassion on the rich young ruler. I believe that God is no respecter of person and never shows favoritism praise be to God. And I believe that favoritism in the church is a sin. A lot of the drama in Scripture comes from people being shown favoritism. Think Joseph and his brothers. Rachel and Leah. Jacob and Esau. Even some of the sons and wives of David.

Let me be clear. I don't care who you are. What you give. Where you come from. What you look like. I care about one thing. Have you accepted the free gift of grace, the salvation of Jesus Christ. If yes, you are my brother or sister. If no, we've got some work to do, but you're still a beloved child of God. Any other response is sinful. No person in this church is better than another, more important than another, more loved by God than another. No person in this church is disposable. God commands that we show no favoritism. God has use of everyone here and loves everyone here.

And if you think otherwise, I'm sorry, but you're wrong and have strayed into sin. And if you think it's okay to neglect certain people for their class, race, or status or whatever other stupid reason just to gain the approval of the world, you'll soon find that you have neither the approval of the world or of God. Such institutions won't flourish and thrive. Only when Christianity is practiced as it should be, with love and equality for all, do we find life. And these are revolutionary ideas. We live in America which has, not always successfully, strived for equality, so this is common to us, but in the history of the world equality is not the norm. It is the counter-cultural teaching of the gospel that has spread equality.

My friends, I invite you to stand against favoritism, racism, classism, and any other ism you can think of. Has anyone seen Lilo Stitch? Ohana means family, means no one gets left behind? It's pretty sad when a Disney movie

does better than many modern churches. Look to your left and right. These are your brothers and sisters. You are one family. And that means no favoritism, and no one gets left behind.

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