

A Study in James
Part 6 – “Box Seats”
James 2:1-13

James is most often thought of as a book of exposition concerning the practical side of the Christian life. In fact, for those who know me very well at all, it may be a bit surprising that I would preach from this book at all. It is a difficult exposition from the point of view in grace at first glance. However, when we understand James' purpose is to instruct in conduct, not creed; in behavior, not belief; and, in deeds, not doctrine we can easily see the deep theology in it. Today's passage is one of those fundamental declarations presenting the doctrine of faith as a principle element in Christian character and conduct.

TAKE YOUR BIBLES PLEASE...

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 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, 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," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 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. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. (James 2:1-13 ESV).

The word "faith" appears in this passage at the outset. In fact, in the entire New Testament only Romans, Galatians, 1 Timothy, and Hebrews use the word in the noun form more often than James. Chapter 2 is often thought of as the heart of the epistle for this reason and faith is the key concept of the letter. The overriding statement is found in verse 1: *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.* It is nearly identical to the reference in the salutation of the first chapter. *It is not a faith that belongs to Jesus Christ, nor the faith that comes from him; it is the faith of which he is the object.*

There is one important difference to note between chapter one and our passage today. Previously he merely said *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Now he adds another descriptive: *it is the faith of the Lord of glory*. This reference to the "Shekinah Glory" of God is a declaration that Jesus is the full manifestation of the divine presence and majesty. The kind of faith we are to have is to center in this Jesus, the Divine Glory.

One of my favorite commercials from years ago featured Bob Uecker. The product he is endorsing is not one I would endorse, but the underlying message is interesting to note.

Perhaps you remember it. It's the one where he is walking down the aisle of a big league baseball park and takes his seat in one of the "front rows." It appears to be one of the choicest seats in the stadium, a "box seat." Of course, as the ad evolves, he is moved to the upper deck in the outfield, where no one would want to be for a ball game. The thought follows that even though he's not in the best seats, he is still happy.

It seems that all of us are at one time or another involved in a *search for happiness*. There are hundreds of books lining shelves in libraries and bookstores written on this very subject. To me, the very thought of searching for happiness is a contradiction. In fact, James taught that the thing to search for was the kingdom of God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* (Matthew 6:33 ESV). In our text today James seems to be taking up that thought and explaining the process where faith centered in Jesus brings us to the Kingdom of God.

He declares this kind of faith transcends social distinction. No one can truly be happy living a life of "me-first." The key to this passage is in the phrase translated in the King James Version as "with respect to persons." I like the Amplified Bible for this verse:

MY BRETHREN, pay no servile regard to people [show no prejudice, no partiality]. Do not [attempt to] hold and practice the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ [the Lord] of glory [together with snobbery]! (James 2:1 Amplified Bible).

It is just one word in the Greek language. It literally means "acts of snobbery," "personal favoritism," or "worship of rank." The meaning is clear. We must not show favor to persons on account of external advantages such as position, wealth, or power. So, both Jesus and James would say seeking first the Kingdom of God means that we must never show favoritism, or make distinction based on these outward things. James goes on to list four reasons why we must not defer to rank and privilege while shunning the poor.

First, Partiality Is Inconsistent with Faith in Christ (vv. 1b-4).

Partiality and faith are mutually exclusive, and the Christian must not attempt to combine the two in his experience. The tense of the verb James uses in this verse indicates that his readers were doing just that. Williams translates this verse with great clarity: *My brothers, stop trying to maintain your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ... along with acts of partiality.* The gist of it is don't continue to show partiality, that is sin. James knows how difficult this is to recognize and he proceeds to illustrate the principle.

I have often visited with people in the hospital as they waited for the news from surgery or treatment of a loved one. Often I might ask if they had eaten. The answer is almost always the same, "Not yet." What happens is they become so concerned for their loved one, they don't even think of their own needs. That's the cure for partiality! When we look beyond ourselves we cannot be partial. Isn't that consistent with the God who saw beyond justice and extended mercy in the death of His own Son? Partiality is simply inconsistent with faith in Christ!

Second, Partiality Is Contrary to the Purpose of God (v. 5).

Notice what James says about the poor. They are special objects of God's concern. Discrimination against the poor is therefore an affront to God; it defies His will. This does not

mean that God's choice has been limited to the poor; nor does it mean that all the poor have been chosen. **There is a three-fold dignity that James explains they enjoy as a result of this concern:**

1. **First, they are chosen of God.** This is a word that indicates that God deliberately chose the poor. It is not a result of their being poor, but of God's will in choosing.
2. **Second, they are rich in faith.** This means their wealth consists in faith. In this manner we speak of a man being rich in oil, cattle, properties, and so on. However, when God speaks of a man's riches, he talks about a man being rich in faith.
3. **Third, they are heirs to the kingdom.** God has chosen the poor not only to be rich in faith, but to be heirs of the messianic kingdom. The language of heir-ship is common in the New Testament. It is a concept that means inheriting eternal life, the blessing of God, the promise of God and much, much more.

Third, Partiality Is Not in the Best Interests of the Christian (vv. 6b-7).

If the knowledge that partiality is a sin is not enough to cause us to change our way toward others, then James uses another tactic. He simply says it is best for us not to be partial. The source of happiness is to be found in this principle. **Faultfinding is the most relied upon trait of the unhappy. Out of that comes jealousy, self-deprecation, competition, hatred of oneself, low self-esteem, or even narcissism.** **Let me make some observations in this regard based on my experience over the years...**

- ✚ The Christian should live by affirmation rather than denunciation.
- ✚ The Christian should see good in others. As you read the Gospels you will not find where Jesus ever criticized a sinner. He never approved of the sin, but always affirmed the sinner.
- ✚ The Christian should give wholehearted effort to something worthwhile. There is no room for shirkers in the family of God.
- ✚ The Christian should be eager to give and willing to receive.
- ✚ The Christian should know that that life is too short to be unhappy.
- ✚ The Christian should know that problems of life are no more than challenges and opportunities in the hands of God.

It is not in your best interest to be a me-first person. What are you?

Fourth, Partiality Is a Violation of the Royal Law (vv. 8-13).

The Royal Law is the law of love Jesus taught. Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was; his reply was simply that we should love God with all our heart, mind and soul and our neighbor as ourselves. James outlines three important points:

1. **First, believers should think of themselves as those who are to be judged (James 2:12 ESV).** Those who make a habit of judging others are inclined to forget that they will face a day when God will judge them!

2. Second, the standard of judgment will be the *law of liberty* (James 2:12 ESV). Our lives must not be dominated not by rules and regulations so much as by love.
3. Third, words and deeds are to be regulated as awareness of that judgment. A strong word is issued here. The justice you give will be the justice you receive.

We often fail to realize James is saying the same thing as the Apostle Paul. [Listen to his words to the church in Corinth:](#)

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8 ESV).

So, our question today is whether we are willing to serve, or must we be served? Do we demand the “box seats,” or can we be happy in the upper deck of the outfield?

There’s an old gospel tune that has been recorded by many of the classic country singers like Hank Williams, Sr., Roy Acuff, Charlie Pride, and Porter Wagoner. The title is “Give Me a Cabin in the Corner of Gloryland.” When we pastored Southern Oaks Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, one of our elderly men would always sing it on the nights of “Sunday Singings.” Here are the lyrics:

Many years I've been looking for a place to call home
But I've failed here to find it so I must travel on
I don't care for fine mansions on earth sinking sand
Lord build me a cabin in the corner of Gloryland

Yes build me just a cabin in the corner of Gloryland
In the shade of a tree of life that it may ever stand
Where I can just hear the angels sing and shake Jesus hand
Lord build me a cabin in the corner of Gloryland

Perhaps that should be sung more often!