

Seeing People Through God's Eyes

James 2:1-13

If you're a nobody, raise your hand. If you've ever been a nobody, or if you ever feel like a nobody raise your hand? The truth is most of us feel like a nobody sometimes. It can be kind of surprising to look around and see who else feels like a nobody. No, not you. You're a somebody.

One thing I've learned over the years is that God loves nobodies. Or maybe I should put it this way- people the world sees as nobodies, God sees as something very different. He doesn't look at people the same way our culture does. He doesn't measure us according to the same standards. The world sees loser. God sees winner. The world sees wimp. God sees a mighty warrior. The world sees lowly shepherd. God sees great leader. The world sees a whore. God sees somebody who can change the course of history. He uses nobodies to accomplish great things. Biblical history is a long line of losers.

Noah: Rejected from society. Preached and built an ark for 120 years and had no converts.

Abraham: Offered to share his own wife with another man, not once but twice. And they didn't even have Ashley Madison.

Joseph: Ostracized by his dysfunctional family; fired by his employer, and word on the street was he even served time.

Moses: A modest and meek man, but poor communicator, even stuttering at times. Lived life on the lam. Wanted for murder.

David: Great warrior and military leader, but he has a violent history. He has a lot of blood on his hands. But his leadership is compromised. He had an affair with his neighbor's wife; murdered her husband to avoid charges. Makes the David Petraus scandal look like Sesame Street.

Elijah: Chronic battles with depression—He's known to collapse under pressure.

Jeremiah: Emotionally unstable, alarmist, focuses on the negative, always lamenting things.

Hosea: Wife was a prostitute. Need I say more?

Peter: Aggressive, hot-tempered, uneducated fisherman, loose cannon who denied Christ.

Paul: A terrorist and religious extremist who threw men, women and children into jail because of their faith. Had people stoned to death who didn't agree with his view of God.

The Bible is the story of the Hobbit again and again. God using small, insignificant people to accomplish great, important things. Here in James 2 we are given a pointed lesson that we as the people of God are not to look at people the way the world does. We are to see them the way God does. We aren't to measure a person's worth by our culture's standards. In our text, we are specifically warned

against gauging the value of a person according to the worth of their bank account. You are not how much you make, how much you've got in the bank, or the size of your portfolio.

But we shouldn't stop at the dollar signs in applying this passage to our lives. There is a deeper principle underlying this text. We aren't to value a person according to their externals, be it money or anything else. We aren't to be swayed by the outward things that make the world "ooh" and "aah." Your value is not determined by the car you drive, the clothes you wear, or the house, apartment, or trailer you live in. We don't put you in a box because of your accent or skin color. We aren't influenced by where you went to school or what you do for a living, or how many people follow you on Twitter.

This is the lesson God had to teach the prophet Samuel when selecting the next king of Israel. Samuel kept looking at the guys' outward appearance, his externals, and God told him, "*Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*"ⁱ

James says it this way in the first verse of James 2, "*My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.*" The word that James uses for favoritism here literally means "to receive the face." It is the idea that you judge based on appearances. You show partiality to the face of people, rather than their heart.

Then James gives an illustration of just what kind of favoritism the people he was writing to may have been struggling with.

²Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³If 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," ⁴have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James' readers were showing favoritism because of a person's apparent wealth. She's wearing nice clothes. He puts a lot of money in the plate. They drive a nice car. They live in a nice house, we better give them preferential treatment. Let's give them the best seat at the table. Let's let them lead this ministry. Let's put them in charge of this committee. They've obviously got money, so they must be important. They must have influence.

On the other hand, this other person comes into church wearing shabby clothes. The word translated shabby may imply that these clothes smelled bad. It's been a while since they've showered or washed their clothes. This is the person who comes to church in an old beater that barely runs. They live in a dump, and did you see what they were wearing. We certainly don't want them in charge of anything. Maybe they can serve in the background somewhere.

You know what James calls this? Judging with evil thoughts. It comes from an evil place in our hearts. When we let someone's money, position, popularity, or any other external issue become a gauge of someone's spiritual value, that is an evil judgment. Years ago, while serving in a previous ministry, our church was really growing. We were reaching a lot of people, having a lot of baptisms, and making a huge difference in people's lives. However, most of those that we were reaching came with lots of baggage. Their lives were broken. They were just beginning to put pieces back together. These weren't people who were going to be able to put a lot of money in the plate. They weren't able to immediately jump in and lead ministries or teach classes. Then we got this postcard picture, white picket fence perfect family. Mom and dad had it all together. Dad was a major executive at the largest corporation in town. Mom was one of these social butterflies that was plugged into all these community and civic organizations. Kids were well behaved. They were star athletes and honor students. They lived in a beautiful house in an upscale neighborhood. They were already Christian, but they had lots of money. At one of our elder's meetings, one of our elders said, "Now that's the kind of family we need to reach." I don't think he even realized what he was saying. But he was prioritizing them, because of their money, as being way more important than all of these broken, lost, and poor people we were reaching.

It also holds that if we use our money to try to get our way in the church that is evil as well. Many times over the years I've heard people make their sales pitch to the church leadership to get what they want, and they conclude by saying something like, "and you know just how much we give," or "If you don't do this, we just might need to cut back on our giving." By using our money to influence the spiritual judgment of others, we are tempting them to do what the Bible calls evil, and that is sin.

What judgments do we make about guests when they come? Do we draw conclusions based on their appearance? What they look like? What they are wearing? Who do we talk to when service is over? Do we go straight to our friends and ignore those we don't know? Might this be a form of partiality? Do we make certain judgments based on what ministry people are involved in, or the way they worship? They're not as committed. They're just going through the motions. It's just ritual. They're not excited about their faith. They're just there for the show. It's all about feeling and emotion with them, there's no depth.

In our text, James gives us three reasons why we should give no room in the church for this sort of favoritism and discrimination. We cannot show favoritism-

I. Because of the Character of God

We cannot show favoritism because of the character of God. It doesn't fit with who God is. Judging based on appearances goes against the nature of God. Listen to verse 5.

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?*

God himself gives no credence to the way the world views people. God ignores the price tags that people place on others, so why should we give them any attention? Our own attitude and character are to reflect that of God. Warren Wiersbe points out, “The way we behave toward people indicates what we really believe about God!”

Here’s the problem about letting appearances influence how we look at others. You can’t always trust the packaging.

James tells us that God chose the poor of this world. James isn’t saying that God hates the rich or that he engages in some sort of reverse discrimination. He’s simply reminding us that he pays no attention to someone’s net worth. It is irrelevant to their spiritual worth to God. Your income and material wealth don’t score you any bonus points.

This tells us two things here: First, the circumstances of James’ original readers. They were poor and oppressed. Secondly, God and the world use different scales. Just because the world rejects the poor and underclass, doesn’t mean God does. He welcomes them and loves them. He will welcome the rich too, but they come to Him on the same basis as the poor.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are. – 1 Cor. 1:26-28

God chose the foolish - D. L. Moody was an uneducated and uncultured man. With no educational advantages, he established the Moody Press, Moody Bible Institute, the Moody radio stations, and the list goes on. He's an example that God's power is not resident in our wisdom.

God chose the weak – In Judges 6 God chose Gideon and called him a mighty warrior even though at that very moment he was hiding from the enemy. Gideon’s response, “How can I save Israel? Lord, I come from a nobody family, and I’m the lowest nobody in my family.” God uses nobodies.

God chose the despised – Of the four women mentioned in Jesus’ genealogy. One was a hooker. One was a Gentile. One was an adulteress, and the other played the harlot in an incestuous relationship.

Jesus was a friend of sinners. God loves the nobodies and the dropouts. His favorite hangout is on the wrong side of the tracks. You often find him in wrong part of town with the wrong sort of people. So what does that tell you about the character of God, and what does that tell us about how we should view people?

If we always give preference to the things the world looks at- wealth, power, and influence, we are forcing God out of the process. We're trying to build the church by our own strength and power, instead of relying on Him. We have a tendency to take credit for what God does. We're like the woodpecker pecking on a tree. In the middle of his pecking, a bolt of lightning hits the tree, splitting it right down the middle. The woodpecker backs off, surveyed the situation, and flew away. Later that day, he returns with nine other woodpeckers. Proudly he said, "There it is, gentlemen. Right there. That's what I did."

It's our weakness gives God room to show up and show off.

Mensa is an organization whose members have an IQ of 140 or higher. A few years ago, there was a Mensa convention in San Francisco, and several members lunched at a local café. While dining, they discovered that their saltshaker contained pepper and their peppershaker was full of salt. How could they swap the contents of the bottles without spilling, and using only the implements at hand? Clearly this was a job for Mensa! The group debated and presented ideas, and finally came up with a brilliant solution involving a napkin, a straw, and an empty saucer. They called the waitress over to dazzle her with their solution. "Ma'am," they said, "we couldn't help but notice that the peppershaker contains salt and the saltshaker pepper." "Oh," the waitress interrupted. "Sorry about that." She unscrewed the caps of both bottles and switched them.¹⁷ⁱⁱ

This is how God works! He likes to turn the world's values upside down, or rather I should say he likes to set them right side up. When it comes to the kingdom of God, what you see isn't what you get, so it is wrong for us to show favoritism based on appearances. Your take home from this first point is this – because of the character of God, I can't judge people based on their packaging.

James then gives us another reason we cannot show favoritism.

II. **Because of the Command of Scripture**

We cannot be influenced by appearances because of the command of Scripture. To show favoritism goes against God's word. It violates His law. Remember James was a leader in the Jerusalem church and he is writing primarily to Jewish Christians. These are people who grew up with the O.T. law, and they prided themselves on keeping the law. And so James reminds them that by showing favoritism they are in fact breaking the law, not just one tiny little, insignificant part of the law, but the whole thing.

⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Favoritism isn't just not nice or unloving or immature. It is SIN. Let's be honest about what it is. In Luke 14 Jesus tells the parable of the great banquet. The banquet there is a picture of eternal life in the kingdom of God, and who is invited: Well, everyone is invited, but all the important people had excuses and didn't come, and so he invited the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. The world's book of Who's who, and God's list of Who's who in the kingdom of God are very different.

When the world throws a party, the beautiful people are always invited. They rent a club and hire security to keep the ordinary out. Only the "in crowd" makes it past the security line. Paparazzi stake out positions to get the best pictures. The next day the tabloids and blogs are filled with pictures of the who's who and what did they wear. When God makes the guest list, however, things look quite different.

Several years ago, 22 year-old Katie Hosking was engaged to get married. The date was set, the invitations sent, the country club reserved, the chef and musicians hired. 12 days before the wedding, things fell apart. Katie broke off the relationship and cancelled the wedding. It was too late for her parents to recoup the nearly \$9,000 they had spent on the wedding. What they had planned as the best day of Katie Hosking's life was turning into a complete disaster.

Her father was understanding, and would rather lose the money than see her daughter enter a disastrous marriage. This is when God decided to show up. They went ahead with the scheduled event, 50 Family and friends were joined by about 40 residents and staff of the Interfaith Family Shelter, a homeless shelter in Everett, WA. They rode to the club in the limousine. They dined on baron of beef, salmon, shrimp cocktail, fettuccine, fruit and strawberry shortcake. They danced to music and were treated as guests of honor. What a beautiful picture of the kingdom of God.

What if we threw a party for those who have no money to put in our offering plates? They wouldn't be able to chair any of our ministries, or lead worship, or teach a class. Who would that be? What would such an event look like? Will any of you accept the challenge?

Here is the take home on this one. We don't let appearances influence us...because the Command of Scripture is that everyone has been invited by God. Thirdly, we don't discriminate...

III. Because of the Consequence of Judgment

Why would we judge others, when we know that one day we too will be judged? James makes the point that the same standards we use to judge others will be applied to us.

¹²Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

By the same measure we judge, we will be judged. These verses call us to judge as those needing mercy. Now why would James say such a thing? For one thing, it is exactly what Jesus taught.

In Matt. 5:7 Jesus promises, *“Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.”* In Matt. 7:2 Jesus says, *“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

This is one of those teachings of Jesus that we don’t take half seriously enough. I believe in grace. I’m dependent on grace, but we need to remember Scripture also teaches that those who show grace will be the ones to receive it, that those who forgive, will be forgiven; that the merciful shall receive mercy. I don’t know how to unpack all of this and arrange it in some sort of systematic theological sort of way, but we must examine our hearts in light of this truth.

If God were to judge you according to the same standards you hold others to, as Dr. Phil might ask, “How would that work out for you?” Would you receive grace and mercy? We need to show the very same grace and mercy we one day hope to receive.

Here is the one thing I want you to take away from this point - because of the Consequence of Judgment I will give the mercy I want to receive.

Conclusion

There is no room in the church for favoritism, for judging on appearances. We can’t play favorites because it goes against the character of God, it violates the command of Scripture, and it makes us vulnerable to judgment.

So what do you need to take out of the box this morning? (Pull out blacked out sunglasses) We don’t judge based on appearances. We don’t see people the way the world does. We need to see people the way God does, which isn’t what we see with our eyes. We look at the heart.

ⁱ 1 Sam. 16:7

ⁱⁱ Krell Keith. 4. Humbled by Choice (1 Corinthians 1:26-31. Bible.org

<https://bible.org/seriespage/%E2%80%99Humbled-by-choice%E2%80%9D-1-corinthians-126-31>