**Favoritism and the Kingdom**

**The Word**

Read together James 2:1-13

**The Big Idea**

James calls us out of a favoritism where we measure and judge each other according to worldly standards, and he invites us into the kingdom way of seeing and treated one another within our common experience of God’s grace and mercy.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Describe a time when your snap judgment on someone based on externals ended up being totally wrong in the end.

2. On Sunday we talked about the “kata sarka” lenses we often bring to relationships. Honestly assess yourself in this issue. Where do you see favoritism (whether explicit or subtle) playing out in your heart and actions?

3. Verse 5 says that “God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit his kingdom.” Consider this question together: Does God favor the poor over the rich?

4. On Sunday the following statement was made: “when you are in the place of power in a relationship, you don’t necessarily feel powerful. You just feel comfortable and safe.” Consider that idea, and discuss the dynamics of varying levels of wealth and status in a relationship.

5. What’s a concrete way you can let the gospel realities James and Paul describe shape your view of the people you interact with this next week?

**Neighborhood Question of the Week**

On Sunday we talked about judging people through a “kata sarka” lens of worldly externals. Honestly assess how you may have done that with neighbors on your street. What comes to mind for you?

**Sermon Outline**

I. James addresses the issue of favoritism

A. Favoritism (v. 1) is judging people “according to the face”

1. We put on a face to meet the faces that we meet” -T.S. Eliot

2. We often judge based on externals (clothing, success, beauty, fitness, and wealth)

B. James presents a scenario common in 1st century church gatherings where strangers/newcomers enter their service and receive different levels of treatment based on their clothing and, level of wealth, and status.

1. The believers make a snap judgment in their minds about the worth and honor of this person based purely on externals. They “look favorably” (v. 3) or they “discriminate” (v. 4)

2. And this snap judgment determines their actions towards this person. “Here’s a good seat” vs. “stand over there” (v. 3)

C. His scenario may seem too obvious and over-the-top to us, but we all do this in very subtle and sophisticated ways. We give certain types of people more cognitive weight in our minds, treating them differently, thinking they have more to offer than others.

II. Paul similarly addresses this issue

A. 2 Corinthians 5:16-17

1. We used to view people through a “kata sarka” lens (a worldly point of view)

2. But when we discovered the cross of Christ, we found our true riches and honor in the shameful poverty of the death of the son of God. Now we think about riches, glory, and honor in such different terms. 2 Corinthians 8:9

3. So we’ve taken off our “kata sarka” lenses, and we show no partiality

B. Colossians 3:11

1. In the family of God those old categories, Jew/Gentile, slave/free, etc, no longer matter.

2. Now “Christ is all” (all that matters to us) and “is in all” (we see each other not in light of our external differences but in light of Christ who dwells in each of us).

III. James gives us a set of lenses through which to see this issue

A. We are now “believers in our glorious Lord.” (v. 1)

We no longer focus on worldly glory, wealth, riches in light of the riches we seen in our amazing Lord.

B. We recognize that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith (v. 5)

1. Historically, the gospel spread primarily among the poor, and that was precisely how God wanted it.

2. Consider 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 and God’s intentional choice of the poor so that no one might boast.

3. In reality, God has no favoritism for rich or poor (see Dt 10:17 and 1 Sam 16:7), but his consistent choice of the poor exists to subvert the world’s standards of wealth.

C. It’s the rich who are taking advantage of the poor, so why should we actually honor and favor them? (v. 6-7)

D. Favoritism is a violation of Jesus’ command to “love neighbor as yourself.” (v. 8-13)

1. We wouldn’t want someone else to discriminate against us based on some external quality of ours, so we shouldn’t do that to others.

2. We might think favoritism is a fairly benign sin compared to other things like murder or adultery, but to fail at one point of the law is to be a lawbreaker.

3. To the extent that we make these judgments on others, that same measure of judgment can be used against us by God (v. 12-13). See Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt 5:7 and Mt 7:2.

IV. Favoritism at Grace

A. Our favoritism probably isn’t determined by judgment as it is by comfort. We gravitate towards people who are in comfort zone, who are like us in worldly metrics, who we don’t have to work hard around.

1. How many close friends do you have who are in a significantly different socio-economic level than you?

2. Who do you choose to invite over to dinner? Would you invite someone a lot richer than you? A lot poorer than you?

3. Judgment can go both ways: from richer to poorer or from poorer to richer

B. God is inviting us to be a community for whom these worldly categories don’t matter at all

1. To become that kind of community we have to push through discomfort and pursue people we wouldn’t otherwise pursue

2. Those on the lower end need to be courageous to push past their insecurity or intimidation of those who have more

3. Those who have more need to be sensitive and self-aware of the power dynamics inherent in the relationship.

4. Together we can become a family where “mercy triumphs over judgment”