

Kindness: A Heart that Sees

James – God's Work in Us and through Us

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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Rich Goldfinger and Bum Poorboy arrive at the church at the same time. Rich Goldfinger walks in looking like Donald Trump...gold rings, cut jewels, flashy clothes. Bum Poorboy walks in looking like the guy on the freeway on-ramp...holes in his jeans and his shoes...his hair is a mess and he has body odor. They both enter church...obviously strangers because they don't know where to sit. The usher takes Rich to the front row and says "We want everybody to know you're here. You let us know if you need anything...anything at all." Then the same usher says to Bum "You stand over there."

This is the scenario that James lays out for the Early Church...but it could be played out in any church since...including HPC. In **James 2:1-13**, God inspires James to write this to get through to His people about how to treat other people...with kindness...seeing them through God's eyes.

2:1 "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism." Listen up when James says "my brothers". Here James is talking about prejudice, partiality, and favoritism. It literally means judging "on the basis of how they look"...superficial judgment. James says, "Don't do that. God does not do that with you...so you don't do that with other people." Sadly, it happens all the time...for a variety of reasons.

Appearance -- We judge people on how they look and how they dress.

Ancestry -- We judge people according to their race, their nationality, their ethnic background.

Age -- We judge people as too young or too old.

Achievement -- Our society gushes over winners and forgets the losers.

Affluence -- People are judged by their wealth...what they make...how much they have.

Though prevalent -- favoritism, partiality, and prejudice are unchristian, unreasonable, and unloving.

Favoritism is unchristian * 2:2-4 "have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"

Faith and favoritism are incompatible -- we are family. This word "favoritism" is used only 4 times in the Bible and each says "God does not show favoritism" Jesus treated everybody with dignity. If there is one place in the world where there should not be any kind of discrimination it ought to be among God's people. James addresses it because it does happen among God's people...and it doesn't come from God...it comes from the evil one.

Favoritism is unreasonable * 2:5-7 "Has not God chosen those who are poor...to be rich in faith?...Is it not the rich who are exploiting you?...slandering the name to whom you belong?"

God isn't impressed by wealth. God chooses the poor because we are all poor in God's eyes...the poor just know they are. No one's salvation is based on their savings account. Then James says, "The rich could care less about you. So why worry about catering to them?" At that time it was the Roman nobility who were feeding the Christians to the lions. Remember: the upper crust is just a bunch of crumbs held together by their own dough! Why kiss up to people who don't give a rip about you -- or about the God you worship? It doesn't make sense.

Favoritism is unloving * 2:8 "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."

It is called the royal law because it sums up the rest of God's law. "Love God. Love others." They go together. How I love others shows how I love God. Since God does not show favoritism and we love God, then favoritism is unloving. James calls it sin. People may think favoritism is a small sin. But James says, "Sin is sin." James talks about murder and adultery as he talks about favoritism! It is breaking God's law of loving others. It is serious business.

2:12 "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom because judgment without mercy will not be shown to anyone who has been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

God's love treats people with mercy. God's love gives people what they need, not what they deserve. If Christians know that because of Jesus, they are judged by the law of love, then they will show mercy to others. If Christians are not merciful in word and deed, then they will be judged without mercy. Judgmental attitudes will lead to God's judgment. Mercy triumphs because of the Cross. Jesus breaks the power of sin, fulfills the law, and transforms believers into "Christ-ones."

So, **how does God want us to treat others?** With kindness. With God's love. Think of it as "AAA" service -- Acceptance, Appreciation, Affirmation.

Acceptance * Romans 15:7 "Accept one another just as Christ accepted you." Kindness is to have an attitude of acceptance. Acceptance does not mean approval. You can accept somebody without approving the sin that person is involved in. Christ's church is to be a hospital for sinners, not a hotel for saints. Some people go to church to close their eyes; others go to eye their clothes. If you're perfect, you don't belong here. Christ's church is for people who are growing...people who don't have it all together. We have every kind of background you can imagine in this church. It doesn't matter where you've been. It matters where you are now and that you know Jesus. In the essentials we have unity, in the non-essentials we have liberty, and in all things we have charity.

Appreciation * Philippians 2:35 "Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interest but also the interest of others." Kindness is to show appreciation. At HPC, today is Appreciation Sunday. A day we intentionally say "thank you" to people who do thankless work. They may do it for the Lord or because it needs to be done or because it makes a difference...whatever the reason, they do it...and we appreciate them...each and every one who minister here.

Affirmation * 1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Encourage one another and build each other up." Kindness is to build somebody up...to affirm them. To know them well enough to highlight the things of God that you see in them. In our Youth Groups, if a student is caught saying something negative about someone...they immediately have to say seven positive things! What a great way to learn how to treat others. If HPC had a patron saint, it would have to be Barnabas..."the encourager". We want to encourage each other in the Lord and in their lives of faith...and in their lives.