

THURSDAY 25 August 2022 "Favoritism?"

(James 2:1-13)

Good Thursday morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I wonder what you feel when you see someone being shown either favoritism or disrespect? Sadly, it happens all too often in every part of the world. A phrase that has been coined in the recent past is '*type casting*'. You understand, don't you? It's when prejudice is evident in the manner a person is being treated and people presume it is because they appear to be of a particular ethnicity or socio-economic class, or they are dressed in a particular way, or they speak a particular language, or they have tattoos or piercings, or their hair is dyed a fluorescent color or is dreadlocks.

We've come once again to the home of James who is one of the apostles and is writing a letter of encouragement and challenge to Jewish Jesus followers throughout the Roman Empire about the year 48 ad. James has welcomed us into his home and he picks up his stylus ready to write. *Today James begins a new chapter.* In our Bible it's chapter 2 of the little book which bears his name, near the back of the New Testament. James speaks each word as he writes it, *as though he's contemplating what is being spoken into his heart and mind as the Holy Spirit leads him to write.* **"My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism."** (James 2:1) One thing about James, he doesn't hold back, nor does he sugarcoat what is important to be said. The truth is, over the centuries the organizational structure of Judaism, particularly in Jerusalem, had become elitist. Those at the top, with the most influence and power, were those learned men called the Council, or the Sanhedrin. These powerful people had sentenced Jesus to death and sent Saul to Damascus to arrest and persecute any Jewish Jesus followers there. And then there was the High Priest, and the Pharisees, and Sadducees, the priests and the Levites, and the teachers of the Hebrew holy books and the Rabbi's. *Oh, there was no shortage of prestigious and too often pompous religious royalty in Jerusalem!*

And then, of course, there were those successful and influential businesspeople, and then those high ranking political or government officials, and finally the Roman military in their regal uniforms with their weapons, their chariots, their palaces and their power. All across the Roman empire there were many, many people of high and exalted position. *There was a great divide between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'!* There really wasn't a very large 'middle class' as we would call it. Rather there was a very large population of the disadvantaged, the poor, the indentured, the uneducated, the unemployed, the unfortunate. And usually most everyone knew their place in society and the poor, the disadvantaged, were very careful to keep their distance, and stay in the groveling place.

James had grown up in a simple carpenter's home in the small town of Nazareth which had a Roman garrison stationed there as well as a Synagogue and therefore some religious elite. James had seen it every day since he was a boy.

Most people in Nazareth felt quite insignificant almost every day. It was normal for folks to get out of the way when 'important' people came rushing through those narrow streets. It was normal for most folks to bow slightly in respect for nobility or military power or the influential, in hopes they'd just be left alone.

Jesus had grown up in the same home as James, and his parents Joseph and Mary, and James' other siblings. Mary and Joseph tried not to treat Jesus differently from their other children, but occasionally something was said or inferred or done that everyone in the family understood, *there was something special, something unique about Jesus. I wonder if Joseph and Mary struggled with WHY?* If Jesus really was God the Son, God in human flesh, then why oh why would Almighty God allow Jesus to be born in an animal stable of all places? And why did God allow Herod's soldiers to come running into Bethlehem intent on killing every little boy, so they'd be sure to kill Jesus? And why did God then lead Joseph and Mary to flee to Egypt and together raise Jesus, for many months, as a refugee family, eeking out an existence among the poor in a foreign place? And why a carpenter's home in Nazareth, the very hometown of Mary, where no one believed her preposterous story of her pregnancy and therefore looked at young Jesus too often with a scowl. Why was Jesus not raised in an educated house, an affluent home, a house of nobility or even royalty? How often was there simply not enough food for everyone in James' house at night before bed?

Have you ever thought about this my friends: Jesus never owned a home of His own, never any property. He never owned a camel or a horse or any other means of transportation as far as we know! He never received a paycheck, not even an honorarium for the miracles or messages that He delivered. He never held any public office, never authored a song or a book or a play. *Yet this Jesus had created the world and every living human being, according to John 1 and Colossians 1.* For those who followed Jesus, they very often saw Him respond to the needs of the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, the demon possessed... all the social outcasts; while at the same time Jesus seemed reluctant to engage very significantly with the popular, the influential or the powerful. *Jesus obviously had unlimited power, yet He never used it in anger to harm anyone nor to retaliate for the injustices being done to Him!*

May I urge you, my friends, to listen to the dramatic audio Bible rendition of James 2:1-13 at the end of my thoughts today? James was quite graphic and detailed as he challenged his fellow Jewish Christians around the empire to live their lives in a very counterculture way, *by showing respect to EVERYONE and not showing any favoritism to anyone!* Many of you have heard this phrase: "One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." Now think about it a moment, isn't that exactly what James is advocating here as the lifestyle of Jesus followers? Some years later Paul wrote this to the Christians in Philippi: ***"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain***

conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others." (Phil. 2:3,4)

And then Paul went on in that letter to explain how Jesus, God the Son, had come to earth and humbled Himself to take on human flesh and live among us very humbly and obediently, even all the way to the cross in fulfillment of the redemption mission for which God the Father had sent Jesus to earth! *And then, of course, God raised Jesus up from the dead, and restored Jesus to reign in heaven as King of kings.* In fact, Paul went on to write: ***"God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:9-11)***

There will be a day of reckoning, won't there. When all injustices will be made right. Hebrews 4:13 says it this way: ***"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of HIM to whom we must all give account."*** So, James called out to his fellow Jewish Jesus followers, most all of whom felt maligned, berated, humiliated, even persecuted most of the time: ***"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who is not merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment."*** (James 2:12)

James set down his stylus and again he strolled over to the window looking out on a busy street, watching the people... the poor, the affluent, the educated and uneducated, those in royal robes and those in rags, those with big money purses and those holding out clay bowls hoping for a coin. Oh, the harsh, heart wounding attitudes and words too often spoken humiliating so many people. *Oh, what a difference it would be if we all walked through life as Jesus did... treating everyone as a unique, wonderful creation of God whom God loves, and with whom God longs to have a Father-son, Father-daughter relationship.* May I ask my friends, what difference would it make in our towns, if you and I treated everyone as Jesus would if HE was walking in your shoes or mine today? And here's a song to help us contemplate that...

Today's Scripture is James 2:1-13.