

James 2:1–26 | “Being a Welcoming Community, Part 1”  
 September 29, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown

Turn this morning to James chapter 2. *[pauseee]*

As you may know, me and the other elders of the church have been doing a lot of survey taking and evaluating recently. *[pause]*

We have asked you a lot of questions on two separate surveys and the purpose of this was to see where we are at as a church. *[pause]*

This has allowed us to really zero in on some key objectives that we would like to focus on for a year. *[pause]*

There are obviously other things that we could have chosen, and which will be a focus in the future, but for a year, we would like to focus on two objectives. *[pauseeee]*

Objective #1 is to increase the friendliness of our church in order to assimilate new people in. *[pause]*

We believe that we are a somewhat friendly, welcoming church, but we need to get even better at it, and especially by being so welcoming that we actually help people to connect and commit here. *[pauseeee]*

What’s encouraging is that I’ve actually seen this get better even in the last couple of months, and that’s awesome to see! *[pauseee]*

So since being a welcoming community is one of our objectives, I am planning on preaching on being a welcoming community today and next week. *[pauseeeee]*

The second objective that we are focusing on is the objective of deepening the relationships that we have with one another in the church.

And I will be preaching two sermons on that in a few weeks. *[pauseeee]*

Now maybe you are here this morning, and you are thinking, “Is there really a need to talk about friendliness? Aren’t we doing fine?” *[pause]*

Well I wanted to bring out some of the results of the recent survey that we did among you. *[pause]*

Most people believed that it’s important to welcome new people—that’s great!<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

That’s an important first step: to know that welcoming people is important.

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<sup>1</sup> 84% of the people in our church believed it was *very important* to welcome new people.

But here's an interesting result—64% of people rated our church's friendliness as a 4 or 5, but 36% rated it as a 2 or 3. *[pause]*

So what does that show us?

There is obviously a mixture of thoughts about how friendly and welcoming we are here.

So there is certainly some work to do, and let's look to God's Word this morning to help us grow even more in this area. *[pauseeee]*

James chapter 2—I'll READ it for you. *[READ]*

“The story is told about a poor woman who lived across the tracks and wanted to join a very fashionable church. *[pause]*

She talked to the pastor about it, but he sought to discourage her. *[pause]*

He suggested she go home and think about it carefully for a week, [and] at the end of the week she came back. *[pause]*

He said, ‘Go home and read your Bible for an hour every day this week. Then come back and tell me if you still feel you should join.’ *[pause]*

Although she wasn't happy about this, she agreed to do it. *[pause]*

The next week she was back, assuring the pastor she wanted to become a member of the church.

In exasperation he said, ‘I have one more requirement. You pray every day this week and ask the Lord if he wants you to come into our fellowship.’ *[pause]*

Unfortunately, the pastor did not see the woman for six months.

He met her on the street one day and asked her what she had decided. *[pause]*

She said, “Yeah, I did what you asked me to do. I went home and prayed.

[And] one day while I was praying, the Lord said to me, ‘Don't worry about not getting into that church. I've been trying to get into it myself for the last twenty years!’”<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

That's not a very welcoming church, is it? *[pause]*

That poor woman just wanted to go to church, yet because she wasn't deemed “high enough” for the church, the pastor didn't want her to come. *[pause]*

Now I certainly hope no actual church says something like that to somebody...

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<sup>2</sup> Original from Precept Austin. Found at:  
<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/102367/the-church-that-voted-god-out-by-dr-larry-petton>.

...But the truth is that while churches may not say what that pastor said outright, how they treat visitors can communicate those very things. *[pause]*

It's that harsh treatment of visitors that James goes after here in James chapter 2. *[pause]*

Now this morning we will be looking at the whole of James 2, but we will be especially focusing on verses 1–7, so I will expound a lot upon point 1, and then points 2 and 3 will be much shorter. *[pause]*

*So what does James teach us this morning? The first thing is that...*

### **I. Partiality in our welcome of others goes against God's values. (1–7)**

In verses 1–7, James gives a situation that may come or possibly has happened in the church, and he wants to stamp it out. *[pause]*

The problem is that when two different kinds of people walk into the gathering of believers, they are treated differently based on external appearance. *[pause]*

One person is rich and they *look* rich. *[pause]*

They have a gold ring and fine clothing. *[pause]*

This is the person, who at just one glance you can tell that they are very “well-to-do”.

They are the kind of person who walks into the room, and everyone notices them and thinks, “Wow, they look wealthy. They look put together. They look good.” *[pauseeee]*

The other person is a poor person, and you can tell that they are poor. *[pause]*

Their clothing is shabby, meaning it's clothing that is dirty and very much used, possibly even cheap. *[pause]*

This is the kind of person that everyone notices, but instead of being looked on with favor or high regard, they are looked down upon for their appearance. *[pause]*

When people glance at them, their first impulse is to draw away. *[pauseeee]*

So you have a rich-looking person and poor-looking person, who both come into the church gathering, but how will they be treated? *[pauseeee]*

You would think that the place that should be the most welcoming to *all people*, no matter what they look like, would be the church, yet that's not always the case.

For James says here that there is a temptation to treat the rich person well, and to disregard the poor person. *[pauseeeee]*

The rich person in James' scenario is given the best place to sit, while the poor person is told to either stand or to sit on the ground. *[pauseeee]*

Now for us, we have plenty of available seating here, but just imagine if we had very limited seating – would we give the wealthier people the seats, and make others sit on the ground?  
*[pause]*

I sure hope not! *[pause]*

As you can see, in James' case study, there is something deeply and drastically wrong with the thinking of people who would do this. *[pause]*

James makes the point that this is *partiality*, for in verse 1 he says, “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith.” *[pause]*

He says that by doing this you have “made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts.”

And they have dishonored the poor man. *[pause]*

You actually disgrace, degrade, insult, and treat the poor man shamefully, if you do this. *[pauseee]*

Here is a person who is made in the image of God, just like the rich man, and yet he is treated as if he were nothing. *[pauseeee]*

The problem here is that this church did not welcome everyone the same into their gathering, but judged people based on external appearances, and then treated them differently based on that.  
*[pauseeee]*

They had made a judgment in their mind as to who was higher up and more deserving of better treatment, and then went ahead with it.

But we must understand that partiality is unjust, for you are treating people unfairly based on the wrong things. *[pauseeee]*

In numerous places in the Bible, we are told that “God shows no partiality,”<sup>3</sup> for He is a just God, and so by showing partiality, we are actually acting in *ungodly ways*. *[pause]*

In fact, that's the thing that James makes clear—partiality goes against God's values! *[pauseeee]*

Their thinking was *evil*. *[pause]*

He even says that if they did this, they would “become judges with evil thoughts”. *[pauseeee]*

We must realize that showing partiality like this is ungodly and evil.

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<sup>3</sup> See Acts 10:34–35, Romans 2:9–11, Ephesians 6:9, & 1 Peter 1:17.

As one commentator says, “Rather than being hosts or brothers or servants of their guests, they are behaving like judges.”<sup>4</sup> *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that this kind of thinking is following the world’s standards and values, and not God’s. *[pause]*

Our world caters to and pays special attention to the prominent, popular, and prosperous. *[pause]*

Why else do you think there are VIP sections, and first-class seats on airplanes, with even a curtain blocking them from the “common people”? *[pause]*

If you are wealthy, you get the special access, the back-stage pass, the front row seat.

Everything is catered to the rich and prominent, where now even at amusement parks, there are people who get to walk ahead and get first in line at a rollercoaster because they paid more. *[pause]*

What is that communicating but that: “If you pay enough, we will roll out the red carpet for you. But if you are poor, sorry, back of the line please.” *[pauseeee]*

We need to be careful that we are not influenced by the world’s values instead of God’s values! *[pause]*

In a world where high regard for the celebrities and influencers of the day is widespread, we need to be alert to how that may tempt us to think that way. *[pause]*

I’ve even heard of a church that would have a section especially for celebrities who attended the service.

Church, that ought never to be! *[pauseeee]*

In comparison to this, how are we to live in accordance with what God values? *[pause]*

In verse 5, he says, “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?” *[pause]*

James is getting us to remember how God looks on people. *[pause]*

He doesn’t look at people and say, “Oh, you’re poor. Sorry, I don’t want you.” *[pause]*

He doesn’t say, “Oh, you don’t have at least 50,000 followers on social media. Nevermind, I’ll pass on you.” *[pause]*

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<sup>4</sup> Robert L. Plummer, “James,” in *Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. XII, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 244–245.

No, the Bible actually makes it clear that He sheds His grace especially on the poor and the “down-and-out”! *[pause]*

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>5</sup> *[pause]*

He said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup> *[pause]*

He’s not saying that rich people can’t be saved, but that it’s actually the poor person who more readily believes in Christ, for they know they have nothing in themselves! *[pause]*

That is why it is actually more common for a poorer person to turn to Christ than for a rich person to do so.

So if God has showered many poor people with spiritual riches, and has lifted them up to be heirs of the kingdom, how could we dishonor such people?!

That’s James’ point! *[pausee]*

How could we dishonor the type of people that God has made rich? *[pauseeeee]*

You see, when we view people through a worldly lens, we see rich and poor based on external appearances.

But when we put on our faith lens, we see that that poor person who loves God is actually *rich*. *[pauseeee]*

This is not make-believe riches, like having a bunch of Monopoly money or something.

But they are *actually* rich in faith and are an heir of the kingdom of God! *[pause]*

And so James makes it clear that they are dishonoring those who are rich in faith, and then honoring those who are against the faith. *[pause]*

They are honoring the type of people, who oppress them, drag them into court, and blaspheme God. *[pause]*

James is saying, “You have honored those who blaspheme the honorable name of the Lord, while dishonoring those honored by the Lord.”

Talk about being against what God values! *[pauseeeee]*

Now I would like to think about how this applies to us. *[pause]*

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:3.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 19:24.

You may say, “Well we don’t ever tell a poor person to stand or sit on the floor, while giving the rich the best seat.”

And I would agree, but I believe that there are still ways that this text applies to us. *[pauseeee]*

Let’s bring it down to this basic question—how do we treat visitors? *[pause]*

Are we welcoming to *all* visitors, no matter what they look like or appear to be? *[pause]*

Now you may say, “Well we let anyone come in and we let anyone take a seat here.”

Yes, that’s good, but this text is showing us that it’s possible to welcome someone in the door, but to not make them feel welcome once they get in. *[pause]*

That’s what happened in this text!

Both the rich and the poor person were both welcomed in the door, but the poor person was not truly *welcomed in*.

And so our doors may be open to new people, but are our hearts, minds, and arms? *[pause]*

Do they truly feel *welcome*? *[pauseeee]*

The truth is that we could be guilty of this kind of partiality, too. *[pause]*

Do you make judgments about someone new who walks in the door, and do you let that affect whether you will talk to them or not? *[pause]*

According to James, if you do that, then you are guilty of this. *[pause]*

It shouldn’t matter what a visitor looks like, they should be greeted, welcomed, served, and shown love. *[pauseeee]*

Sometimes people look at a visitor, and if the visitor looks put together and well-dressed, they will readily go up to them and talk.

But if someone looks a little shabby or rough around the edges, they avoid talking to them.

And that’s how we could be guilty of this. *[pauseeee]*

This mentality could even be in the fact that you don’t talk to *any* visitors or *not many* visitors. *[pause]*

Have you ever evaluated why you don’t talk to many visitors? *[pause]*

Could it be that in a way, you are being partial to the people you know over the person you don’t know? *[pause]*

Could it be that in practice, you are treating people you know with high regard, while disregarding the stranger? *[pause]*

We need to show honor to everyone that walks in the door, not just the people we know.

We need to make people feel welcome here. *[pauseeee]*

It's one thing to just greet someone with a "hello".

That's a great start, but to make people actually feel *welcomed in*, our welcoming of visitors must go deeper than a mere "hello". *[pause]*

May it never be less than a "hello", but it should be more.

Because the truth is that someone can greet you by saying, "Hi," but then you could still feel unwelcome by their lack of further interest in you. *[pauseeeee]*

Think about if you went somewhere new. *[pause]*

People said, "hello" to you as you walked in, but then for the rest of the time no one said anything more than a "hello". *[pause]*

You are glad that they acknowledged your presence, but they didn't seem to want to get to know you any further.

So consider how deep you go with visitors. *[pause]*

"Hello" is a great start, but show interest in them by talking further, and making them feel especially welcomed. *[pauseeeee]*

Now I understand that you can't always greet and get to know every single visitor that comes through the doors on the first day they come in, for if we each did that, then the person would never be able to leave!

But you should be *willing* to go out of your way to greet people, get to know them, and step outside of your comfort zone. *[pauseeee]*

If you see a visitor come in, and no one is currently talking to them, why not be the person to go and talk to them? *[pause]*

We sometimes think, "Oh, someone else will talk to them," but why aren't *you* that person? *[pauseeee]*

Every single person who walks through these doors should be greeted and valued, no matter who they are or what they look like.

And when we do that well, we are reflecting God's character and values. *[pauseeeee]*



The next two points will go quicker, but I wanted to mention them because they really do add more to what James is saying here about partiality.

*And the second point is this....*

## **II. Partiality in our welcome of others is not loving our neighbor. (8–13)**

In verses 8–13, James makes this point abundantly clear. *[pause]*

He talks about how loving our neighbor is a part of the royal law, which is the Law of the King, King Jesus. *[pause]*

If you do that, that is, if you love others, you are doing well.

But if you show partiality, you are sinning, for you are not loving your neighbor. *[pause]*

By treating the poor person like they did in that scenario, they weren't loving that poor person at all.

Rather, they were treating him shamefully. *[pause]*

James' point is that you must see that showing partiality in welcoming others *is a big deal*. *[pauseeee]*

Some people or churches may wonder, "Does it matter if we aren't a welcoming church? Is it that big of a deal?"

And James would say, "If it's because of partiality, then you are sinning." *[pause]*

If you are welcoming some people and not others, or if you aren't welcoming people because you favor known people over strangers, then that's wrong. *[pause]*

We need to love the person who comes in and is new—there is no question about it, according to Scripture. *[pauseeee]*

It's our love for others or our lack of love for others, which will impact our friendliness as a church. *[pauseeee]*

Put another way: how we welcome people is an outworking of our love for our neighbors. *[pauseeee]*

From the moment someone starts coming in here to the moment they leave, they should feel like we love them. *[pause]*

You may think that everyone shows love to guests, but I've heard of people kicking a visitor out of a pew because they said it was their pew. *[pause]*

It's actually happened to me in another church, and I've heard of it happening in other churches. *[pause]*

Last time I checked, there are no names on the pews, and there will never be names on the pews, as long as I am pastor here. *[pause]*

If you can't open up the pew that you sit in every week to a visitor, let me be clear with you, you are being extremely unwelcoming and unloving. *[pause]*

And even if you don't kick them out of your pew, but let's say that you grumble to yourself or to someone else about it, your heart is in the same spot as if you kicked them out. *[pauseeee]*

If a certain pew is more important to you than the fact that a new person is here, there is something seriously wrong with your heart. *[pauseeeee]*

Think about it: when you are new to a church, you don't know where to sit! *[pause]*

You just sit wherever you see an open spot, and you are just happy that you got a seat.

And yet someone is going to come up to a guest, and say, "That's my pew.?" *[pause]*

Imagine you are that new person, is that really going to make you say, "I feel so welcome here! I just can't wait to come back!" *[pauseeeee]*

James wants to banish any kind of thinking that thinks that unloving unwelcomeness is OK.

It's not OK—it's sin and shows a lack of love and mercy.

And James reiterates that we must beware, for if we don't show mercy to people, then we will be judged with no mercy.

So do we truly know and love the mercy of God? *[pause]*

If so, it will lead us to show love and mercy to others, no matter what they look like. *[pauseeeee]*

*Not only does partiality show a lack of love, but also...*

### **III. Partiality in our welcome of others may reveal a dead faith. (14–26)**

Verses 14–26 is the famous 'faith without works' passage. *[pause]*

This morning, I'm not going to expound on this section deeply, but I want to think about how it connects with what James just said about partiality. *[pauseeee]*

He talks about how faith without works is dead. *[pause]*

It's not that the works save you, but that the works demonstrate and show your genuine faith.

And so if you have no works, then you have no faith. *[pauseeee]*

No works reveal a dead faith, the presence of works reveal an alive faith.

So connecting this to the context of what James was talking about in regards to partiality, we see that partiality in our welcome of others may actually reveal a dead faith! *[pause]*

If we aren't showing love to others, and instead, we are treating people with disregard, it may be a sign that our faith is dead.

And that's a sobering thought! *[pause]*

This should cause us to each slow down and evaluate our hearts—is my faith truly genuine and alive?

Or have I been just going through the motions of looking good, but have not truly been changed by grace? *[pauseeee]*

One part of the Christian's works is how you treat others, that is, whether you love others or not.

And as James makes plain, loving your neighbor includes those people who come into your church off the street. *[pause]*

How do you treat and think about them? *[pause]*

Do you avoid them and just keep going on with your day without talking to them? *[pause]*

Do you love them enough to want them to feel welcomed and loved? *[pause]*

Is your greeting and welcoming of people inconsistent, all depending on what the person looks like? *[pause]*

How do you treat people who look lowly or even rough around the edges?

These are all questions that we each should think through. *[pauseeee]*

As you can see—how we welcome and treat people who walk into the church building is so important to God.

And it reveals our hearts and our faith. *[pause]*

This should lead us all to run to the mercy of God once more!

We need to remember that we are all just poor, undeserving messes who are only what we are and have what we have because of the great mercy of God. *[pause]*

His mercy triumphs over judgment, and it's our only hope. *[pause]*

As that song, "His Mercy is More," says...

“What patience would wait as we constantly roam. What Father so tender is calling us home. He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, *the poor*. Our sins they are many, His mercy is more.”<sup>7</sup>  
*[pauseeee]*

*What we found and were challenged with this morning was this...*

**We are to welcome all kinds of people in love and mercy.**

“It is said that soon after the end of the American Civil War, [Robert E. Lee] visited a church in Washington, D.C. *[pause]*

*During the communion service he knelt beside a black man.*

[And] an onlooker said to him later, ‘How could you do that?’ *[pause]*

Lee replied, ‘My friend, all ground is level beneath the cross.’”<sup>8</sup> *[pauseeee]*

We welcome all kinds of people, and we do not show any sort of partiality.

*Rather, we love them, honor them, and welcome them in. [pause]*

It doesn’t matter if it’s someone who the world deems as lowly, we treat them highly. *[pause]*

*It doesn’t matter that it’s a stranger, for we are not to turn away from those who we don’t know.*

Rather, we willingly, in love and mercy, step outside of our comfort zones, and welcome anyone new, who comes in here. *[pause]*

*We do this remembering the love and mercy of Christ, who though we were foreigners and strangers of God once, now He has made us fellow citizens with the saints, and members of His household.<sup>9</sup> [pauseeee]*

Going back to the survey results that we received, there was something that popped out to me. *[pause]*

*Only 68% of people think that it’s very important to make a deeper connection with a new person. [pause]*

So what does that tell me?

*It shows me that we know that it’s important to greet a new person, but a portion of us don’t see the importance of connecting with them on a deeper level and of connecting them to the church. [pause]*

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<sup>7</sup> “His Mercy is More” by Matt Boswell & Matt Papa.

<sup>8</sup> Original source unknown. Found at: <https://bible.org/illustration/general-robert-e-lee>.

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:12,19.

So if we were in the situation that James talked about, we may greet the visitor, but the visitor may not feel cared for in a way that they can tell we are interested in them on a deeper level, and desiring for them to come back and be connected here. *[pause]*

They would maybe walk out saying, “They greeted me, but they didn’t want to *know* me.”  
*[pause]*

We must see the need to be so welcoming that we see being welcoming as not just the initial greeting, but also the welcomeness of open arms and open hearts. *[pause]*

By our actions, we should be saying, “We love you, and want to get to know you, and would love for you to connect deeper here with us.” *[pause]*

I say all of this preaching to myself.

And I say all of this in love for you, fully recognizing that some of you are great at welcoming people...

...But I’m just speaking like Paul who would commend his readers for doing something, but he would urge them to do it more and more.<sup>10</sup> *[pause]*

So fellow brothers and sisters of First Baptist, as you have been greeting and welcoming people, so do so more and more. *[pause]*

Greet them more joyfully. Welcome them in more generously. Talk to them more lovingly and deeply. Connect them in more readily.

And by doing so, we will reflect God’s values, love our neighbors, and demonstrate that our faith is truly alive.

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<sup>10</sup> See 1 Thess. 4:1,10.