

## Sermon Summary | Sunday 1st February 2026 | James 2.1-13

James 2.1–13 addresses favouritism in the church. James imagines a gathering where a rich man in fine clothing is given a place of honour, while a poor man in shabby clothing is pushed aside. In our setting, the “best seats” may be less visible, but they still exist. They may be the comfortable conversation after church, the familiar group, the socially easy person, or the person who seems useful or rewarding to know. The “worse seat” may be the awkward conversation, the lonely person, the visitor who does not know the code, the person who talks too long, or the person who cannot offer us anything in return. James is clear: this is not merely a social mistake. It is a gospel issue. Faith in Jesus kills favouritism.

First, James tells us to stop sorting people by comfort and usefulness. He begins, “My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.” That title matters. When we see the glory of Christ, human rankings begin to collapse. Status, polish, social ease, influence, and usefulness lose their controlling power. Yet favouritism is often subtle. It is not always hatred; it may be self-interest, self-protection, or uncorrected social instinct. We move towards those who feel familiar, rewarding, or safe, and we move past those who might cost us time, energy, or awkwardness.

James says this is partiality. The church is not a marketplace, networking event, or social tribe built around people who suit us. It is the body of Christ. We therefore need to ask honestly: who do I naturally move towards, and who do I naturally move past? Who do I consistently include, and who do I consistently overlook? James is not asking merely whether we are friendly. He is asking whether we are impartial.

Second, James calls us to let the gospel retrain our values. God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. James is not saying poverty saves, nor is he romanticising hardship. He is showing that God’s values are not the world’s values. God repeatedly draws near to the lowly, exalts the humble, and exposes the emptiness of human status. The church, however, can easily copy society’s honour system, giving attention and warmth to the impressive, the confident, the connected, and the polished, while dishonouring the lonely, anxious, struggling, poor, or socially uncomfortable.

The gospel teaches us a different pattern. Jesus did not move towards us because we were useful, impressive, or socially rewarding. He moved towards us because we were lost. Therefore, those who are socially confident should spend that confidence on the socially anxious. Those who are established should spend that stability on newcomers. Those who feel comfortable should move towards those on the edge. Hospitality is not merely a personality trait; it is a Christian discipline. Welcome is not optional; it is part of maturity.

Third, James tells us to work out what it means to love our neighbour. He quotes the royal law: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Partiality is sin because it breaks the law of love. Love is not merely politeness, warm feeling, or good intentions. Biblical love moves. It gives, includes, notices, bears burdens, and takes practical action. James is concerned with real things: seating, welcome, attention, dignity, speech, and behaviour.

He then says we are to speak and act as those judged under the law of liberty. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” This is both warning and promise. If our lives remain persistently merciless, we should question whether we have understood mercy at all. But for the believer, mercy is the defining note, because God has dealt with us in mercy.

This mercy is seen supremely in Jesus. He did not seek the best seat, but took the lowest place. He did not move towards us because we were impressive, but because we were helpless. He did not love passively, but actively, to the point of the cross. There, judgment fell on him so that mercy

could come to us. Christians do not show mercy in order to earn God's love. We show mercy because we have received it. If mercy has triumphed over us, it must begin to triumph through us — in our welcome, friendships, conversations, hospitality, and church family life.

#### Questions for personal reflection

1. Who am I most likely to move past, overlook, or avoid because they feel awkward, costly, unfamiliar, or unable to offer me anything in return?
2. How can I take one concrete step this week to show active mercy — not merely kind thoughts — to someone outside my usual comfort circle?