

## JAMES 2:1-5

*My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.*

*2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

*5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*

## HEBREWS 4:12

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

## NOTE TO LEADERS

If you have not yet listened to the Sunday message, please do so before your life group meeting. This is a subject of the heart, and the approach I took was to lead us to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal our prejudices to us so that we could change them. The discussions this week are aimed at transforming our hearts rather than defending our prejudices!

## START TALKING

1. What were you challenged by in Sunday's message?
2. Share an insight or conviction that the Holy Spirit laid on your heart following Sunday's message.

## START THINKING

1. Read Hebrews 4:12. What does it mean that God's Word is living & active? Can you think of a time when God's Word has highlighted poor thoughts or attitudes in your heart?

Read James 2:1-5.

2. What does it mean to show favouritism? What are some ways that favouritism shows up in our lives today?
3. How is showing favouritism/prejudice damaging to the Gospel message Jesus has given us to proclaim?

## START SHARING

1. Time for a courageous look in the mirror: Where do you see favouritism or prejudice in your attitudes towards others? (This may be based on social status, culture, race, gender etc.) What steps do we need to take in order to see and treat those people in the way Jesus does?
2. If Jesus was to come and work in the same place as you as an "Undercover Boss", what would He conclude about you? What prejudices would He observe? And how would He want you to change your actions?

## START PRAYING

Father God, may we keep this James passage in our hearts so we don't "discriminate among ourselves and become judges with evil thoughts." We pray that we will see each person as your amazing creation and deeply loved by You. Help us love them in a way that reflects your heart for them.

## START DOING

This week, ask the Holy Spirit to identify 2 or 3 types of people that you have prejudices against so that you can repent. Ask the Spirit to help you see people as God does and love others as Jesus did.



This Sunday, Steve shared a challenging message from James 2:1-5. The title of Steve's message was *Pride & Prejudice*. While this may also be the title of a Jane Austen novel, it definitely also fits the topic of this passage of Scripture!

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*5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*

James 2:1-5

What is interesting about that passage's last sentence is that the Gospel has flourished around the world in countries with weaker economies and found great resistance in countries with greater wealth. The Gospel has found willing receptive hearts throughout Africa, South America, China, and many other places!

In Hebrews 4:12, God says: *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.* We pray that this message will judge the thoughts and attitudes of each one of us.

Back to the passage in James. He is probably recounting an incident that he had observed. James was the half-brother of Jesus and the lead elder of the church in Jerusalem for several years. His teachings are therefore based on what he had seen happen in church. Our relationship with Jesus is not just a technical or theoretical thing. It touches every part of our lives.

Interestingly, the primary prejudice referred to here is economic (rich person and poor person) rather than racial/cultural, but this verse challenges all of our prejudices. We can have prejudices based on culture, race, wealth/poverty, beauty, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental disabilities etc.

### **1. All of us have prejudices (even if we don't know what they are yet).**

Most prejudices live in the zone of our blind spots. They are rooted in pride and arrogance and can be recognised in the feeling that "I am better than you."

Take the closest to the surface prejudice in your heart and examine it. You will see it to be full of pride and arrogance – considering yourself better than 'those people.'

### **2. Christ calls us out on our prejudices because He loves us.**

Our prejudices are much more damaging to us than those we are prejudiced against. James puts it this way: *4 have you not discriminated ... and become judges with evil thoughts?* James 2:4.

Our country has a history of division, discrimination and prejudice. A study of South African history would show how much conflict there has been in our country:

- KhoiSan and the first Dutch settlers
- The Dutch and the British – later resulting in the Great Trek

- The British and the French Huguenots
- Conflict between different Afrikaner groups – few of them could agree on anything
- Conflict between many of the different African tribes
- The formation of the Zulu nation – was a conquest of many smaller tribes into 1 'umbrella' nation. The tribes displaced by Shaka Zulu fought for land and survival
- The British & the Zulus. Many black Africans fought with the British against the Zulus
- The English & the Afrikaners resulted in the Anglo-Boer Wars 100 years ago

These are just a few examples, and all of these were before even the atrocities of apartheid!

Whatever 'tribe' we identify with, it will have a history of prejudice and conflict.

Prejudice is part of the story almost all around the world. But here is the thing: what other hope is there for our prejudiced human hearts outside of the love of Christ? He prods us and awakens us to the problem because He wants us to know His love more.

We need to allow the Holy Spirit to highlight the people we're prejudiced against and then allow God to work on that area with us.

### **3. How do we change?**

If we can't change, we're stuck in the human condition of looking down on people. This was the whole basis of James' argument in this chapter: *My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.* James 2:1

### **The solution for every prejudice is looking at "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (v2).**

#### **He did not show favouritism against us.**

If we look at these verses from James in a spiritual sense, Jesus is the wealthiest, holiest, most perfect Being. And He enters the room of our lives. Imagine He had the same prejudices towards us that we have towards others – not a single one of us would get accepted by Him. By contrast to Him, our best efforts are like filthy rags (Isaiah). And YET He accepts us. WOW! He invites us into His grace, love, and forgiveness and then challenges us to LIVE like Him and LOVE like Him.

#### **He is glorious.**

"Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ". One of the metaphors that help us understand some of His glory is the light of the sun. When the glorious Son shines into our hearts, it exposes our prejudices that have been hidden in the darkness, and we realise that we have discriminated against others and become judges with evil thoughts. The appropriate response is repentance which opens the door to Divine Love flowing into us and through us.