

“James’ Favorite Sermon”– James 2:1-7

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in the second chapter of James...

I told you we were done with chapter 1 (although I’ll make a callback to chapter 1 later). But we are going to focus primarily today on the first seven verses in chapter 2. Yes, seven whole verses!

While you’re turning there, let me mention to you that this is the season for the Mary Hill Davis offering, so for the next month or so, if you have some extra income you are looking to put to good use, then the Mary Hill Davis is something you should consider. It’s one of three mission offerings that we participate in each year. One goes to international mission work, one to mission work in North America, and this one, the Mary Hill Davis offering, is an offering that goes to support various mission efforts in the state of Texas. At the exits you can grab a prayer guide and some materials about this offering when you depart today. And I hope you will give them a look and join us in praying for this effort.

Hopefully, you have found the text by now. I’m going to begin reading in the first verse of chapter 2. Follow along as I read. This is God’s Word...

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ while you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there,’ or, ‘Sit down at my feet,’ ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ 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? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?” (James 2:1-7)

It seems pretty clear that James’ intention in this passage is to show the incompatibility of our faith with favoritism. He makes his case in three moves. The first is found in verse 1, which serves more or less as his thesis statement for the section...

People of Faith Shouldn’t Play Favorites (2:1)

Look at verse 1 again.

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

He addresses them “*brothers*,” which suggests that James considers them to be his fellow-believers. And as believers they are to be mindful that the outworking of their faith shouldn’t be tainted by favoritism. Their interactions with others should show them to be impartial. Such behavior is worthy of the “*Lord Jesus Christ*,”¹ who James also describes as “*the Lord of glory*.”

Jesus is the One deserving of all glory. Why? Because He is God the Son, God in the flesh, the God-Man. James knew that God clearly says, “*my glory I give to no other*” (Isa. 42:8), yet James has no trouble referring

to Jesus as “*the Lord of glory*” because he recognized His divinity.² We should too. And our lives, therefore, should be about honoring Him above all others. Hold that thought, because the illustration that James gives us in a moment is all about how we dishonor Christ when we are so preoccupied with divvying out honor to certain people (and not others). James is going to remind us “that there is only one individual who deserves special honor—and it is not the rich visitor to their assembly!”³ I’ll come back to that in a moment, but first let’s consider James’ language in verse 1 a bit more.

The word translated “*partiality*”, in verse 1, “literally means to receive someone according to their face.”⁴ In other words, it’s describing the act of making judgments about people based on their outward appearances. The Bible routinely condemns such behavior. A few examples should suffice. In Leviticus, the Israelites were instructed,

“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.” (Leviticus 19:15; cf. Deuteronomy 1:17)

Related to this, the prophet Malachi indicted the people with these words:

“But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” says the Lord Almighty. ⁹ “So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law.” (Malachi 2:8-9, NIV)

One of the most famous visions in the New Testament left the Apostle Peter saying,

“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality...” (Acts 10:34)

There’s our word again. The Lord doesn’t receive based on faces. He doesn’t judge based on appearances. And why would He, when, as Proverbs tells us,

“Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.” (Proverbs 22:2, NIV; cf. 17:5; Job 34:19)

Therefore, I’m not sure it could be stated more succinctly than it is in Proverbs 28...

“To show partiality is not good...” (Proverbs 28:21)

In a sense, no one would deny this because no one likes it when they are the object of such judgments. Nevertheless, we all have a tendency, even unconsciously, to issue them in an instant when we encounter new people. We’re quick to size people up. We’re quick to categorize people and deal with them accordingly. And we struggle with favoritism because we are driven by certain impulses. Even that verse in Proverbs 28 shows this when the second half of the verse is included. It says, *“To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong.”* It’s one thing to acknowledge that some behavior is sinful. It’s quite another to probe into *why* we are so prone to that behavior. Favoritism is a problem. But it’s a theological problem. And it reveals something of the condition of our hearts. As Robert Plummer explains,

“Partiality fails to treat all persons as equally made in the image of God. Instead, it takes a glance at someone’s face (or status, or wealth, or ancestry, etc.) before deciding how to act. Favoritism is thus an expression either of fear (desiring to avoid retribution) or, more often, of greed or lust (toadying favor). Partiality sinfully discriminates against persons from whom one neither fears retribution nor seeks favors—or simply against persons whom one dislikes.”⁵

That's helpful insight. We don't often think about what our partialities say about us. But they generally are the consequences of our fears and inordinate desires. So what does it say about the condition of humanity that we are so prone to play favorites and judge people based on their appearance? It says we can be pretty ungodly, since, after all, the Bible tells us that *"the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"* (1 Sam. 16:7). We have to learn to see what God sees and look for what God looks for, which is precisely what Jesus was getting at when He told us to *"not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment"* (John 7:24).

Unfortunately, while God's people should know better, these wicked tendencies can often rear their ugly heads within the church as well. There are plenty historical examples of churches seeking to curry favor with the "social register" of the day or allowing those fashionable in society to gain an inordinate influence and rank within the local church. Unfortunately, the more things change, the more things stay the same. This is just as prevalent today as seen, for example, when the poor or uneducated are not welcomed with the same degree of enthusiasm as the rich and famous.⁶ And this is precisely what James describes in verses 2 through 4...

The Illustration of Favoritism (2:2-4)

Look at verses 2 through 4 again...

"For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,' ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:2-4)

There is some debate as to the setting of this illustration.⁷ Verse 2 describes it as the "assembly," and the word used is just a general word for a gathering place. But in a technical sense and in a Jewish context, this is the word used for a Jewish synagogue, the place where Jews gathered for worship when they could not get to the Temple. In fact, the Greek term is actually where we get the English word "synagogue" (συναγωγή). This is not the typical word in the New Testament for the place where Christians gather, but we do know that the first Christians did gather in first-century synagogues. Why wouldn't they? They were generally Jewish, but Jews who recognized that Jesus was the promised Christ. But as time went on and mainstream Judaism started getting hostile toward the Christ-followers, they were forced out. They had to find new places to gather. People's houses were the obvious choice. I mention this background to say that James' word choice here is sometimes cited as evidence that this epistle was penned very early, before Christians were universally excluded from local synagogues. That's debated. But even if he doesn't mean this word in a technical sense, there still is good reasons to believe that this letter is one of the earliest, if not (as I believe) the earliest, document we have in the New Testament.

Regardless of whether the scene is taking place at some general assembly, or legal gathering, or (more likely) a religious gathering with other Christians, the outcome is largely the same. It's an example of what "James forbids in verse 1: favoring the rich and discriminating against the poor."⁸ And one could easily imagine this sort of thing playing out in various venues.

There are a lot of details James doesn't give us. He doesn't tell us, for instance, if the two people who come are believers or non-believers. He doesn't tell us why they chose to come to the gathering. He doesn't tell us if the individuals were known to the community at large. He doesn't tell us if this was their first time to show up, though presumably it was since they don't seem to know where to sit. The stress of the illustration falls on the appearance of each individual and the different ways they were treated.

The first man that James mentions “has all the outward trappings of wealth”.⁹ These “visual accoutrements” include things like his fancy (literally, “bright” or “shiny”) clothing and his hands are decked out in expensive bling (he’s, literally, “gold-fingered,” a word that James may have coined).¹⁰ He would have really stood out in a Christian worship setting because most of the Christians in James’ day were quite poor. But note that the description is all about his externals. And so is the description of the “*poor man*,” whose destitution is inferred by his “*shabby*” (or “dirty”) attire. Perhaps we are to imagine that this is his only set of clothes, in which case they probably assault the senses in more ways than one.

One man is given a seat of honor and the other the least coveted seat in the assembly. And what was the basis of that decision? Their appearances: “the one looks important, the other negligible.”¹¹ So James asks the rhetorical question, “*have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*” (2:4). Greek is a unique language in that it allows you to ask certain questions in a way that show whether the author is expecting a “yes” or “no” answer. In this case, he is expecting a “yes” answer—yes, they have engaged in “sinful discrimination” and, yes, “they are behaving like judges (a place reserved for God, who alone sees the heart; cf. 4:12).”¹² They are playing God and failing miserably in the process because, as James points out, they’re not just acting like judges, they’re acting like wicked judges, “*judges with evil thoughts*” (2:4).

Don’t miss that. What they’re doing is evil.

“...favouritism is profoundly un-Christian. It says, in effect, that someone who is worth more to the world is worth more to the church, and, correspondingly, that someone who is worth less to the world is worth less to the church. Favouritism ends up judging one person’s soul as being of greater value than another’s, and it does all this on the basis of superficial, worldly criteria.”¹³

This is detestable. Even if it is commonplace, it’s still the outcome of “*evil thoughts*”. It runs exactly counter to the marks of right religion we considered the last few weeks from the last chapter, doesn’t it? Remember what James said? Of course you do...

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (James 1:26-27)

We considered three marks there. Let’s take them in reverse order. James teaches that right religion is one that labors “*to keep oneself unstained from the world*” and, therefore, is marked by “countercultural morals” (i.e., Mark #3). But the kind of deplorable partiality that James describes is worldly to its core. “It continues the world’s inclination to prefer the rich over the poor.”¹⁴

Similarly, the scenario James sketches for us is the opposite of looking after the marginalized in society. The way they handled the poor man is a picture of what it looks like to be marginalized. Therefore, they are not marked by the “cared for margins” that James describes in 1:17 (i.e., Mark #2). This would be such a tragedy in general, but it is all the more shameful if it happens among us. As Daniel Doriani explains...

“...if there is one community in this world where all should get equal treatment, it is the church. As the saying goes, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. And everyone who is seated with Christ has a prime seat. Rich and poor, young and old, male and female: all come as sinners in need of Christ and his grace. Whoever we are by the world’s standards, we are orphaned by sin and adopted into God’s family by grace. In God’s sight we are one, therefore the church should treat everyone the same way. When we play favorites, we deny the gospel.”¹⁵

That’s absolutely correct, and I will show you why in a moment. But first, let’s also notice that the way these Christians interacted with these two individuals, in all likelihood, showed up in their words. They weren’t being quick to listen (1:19). They were quick to judge. And quick to use their words to convey those judgements,

another violation of right religion, controlled mouths (i.e., Mark #1). When we are acting out our favoritism, we generally will hurt people with our words. “It may be unintentional, but verbal snubs can wound.”¹⁶ So everything that James calls us to embody at the end of chapter 1 is contradicted by showing partiality.

But James doesn’t just look backwards, the rhetorical questions in verses 5 through 7 also show how illogical favoritism is. So if verses 2 through 4 show us the illustration of favoritism, the next few verses show us...

The Illogic of Favoritism (2:5-7)

In other words, favoritism just doesn’t make sense for the Christian. It’s illogical for many reasons, but James highlights two of them. First of all...

It’s Illogical Based on Spiritual Experience: God’s Choice of the Poor

Look again at the rhetorical question in verse 5. “*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?*” Once more, this is a question that expects an affirmative answer—yes, He has chosen the poor to be rich in faith. “God is choosing to bless the very people James’s readers (then and now) tend to shun.”¹⁷ But this can be misunderstood, so let me clarify a few things.

First of all, it’s important for us to remember that the original audience was, most likely, predominately, if not exclusively, materially poor. They were not the high rollers of society. So when James talks here about God’s election/choice of the poor (and, yes, that is the verb for election), they would not have taken James to be referring to some other people they pass by on the street or in the market from time to time (like some of you are thinking). His audience would have been thinking that James was talking about them. They were poor and yet God chose them to be included in His people and made heirs of His kingdom. That was their spiritual experience.

And in truth it is the experience of every Christian—regardless of economic status—because even if we happen to be rich (which is most of us, by comparison), we still have to recognize our utter spiritual poverty before we ever come to the place of faith, turning to Christ to save us. It is “the poor in spirit,” the spiritually bankrupt, that Jesus says are members of God’s kingdom. And only them. So we too, if we have believed in Jesus, turning from sin and self-reliance to trust in Christ to save, have been made “*rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him*” (2:5). Nevertheless, in the first-century most Christians were also economically poor and looked down upon in the world. The Apostle Paul acknowledges this when writing to the believers of Corinth.

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Does that mean that God loves the poor more? Does this mean that liberation theology is right to speak of God’s “preferential treatment of the poor”? No. Even James will cite approvingly Abraham and Job later in this epistle and they were among the richest of their day (James 2:21-23; 5:11).¹⁸ The Bible doesn’t teach that the poor are guaranteed a spot among the redeemed because of their poverty or oppression or that the rich are excluded

because of their riches. Even here James describes the poor in question as “*those who love [God].*” Therefore, “in proverbial fashion, James affirms the Lord’s care and provision for the economically disadvantaged—a theme found throughout the Bible (e.g., Ex. 23:11; Ps. 12:5; Prov. 14:31; 19:17; Luke 4:18; 1 Cor. 1:26–27; Gal. 2:10).”¹⁹

And, as we’ve seen in recent weeks, the Lord expects us to care for these people as well in His name. So being impartial and avoiding favoritism does not mean that we dedicate equal time to every person necessarily. Some people will require more of our attention and sacrifice. As Mariam Kamell explains, God wants us to strive for people to have equal access and opportunity at least a measure of His good gifts and resources (though He doesn’t call us to ensure an equal outcome). Therefore,

“If one tire on a car is low in air pressure, we give extra attention to that tire until it is as inflated as the rest. To redress prolonged and systemic discrimination may require a temporary imbalance in the opposite direction, but if such “bias” likewise lingers too long, we have merely replaced one prejudice with another.”²⁰

As you can imagine, these are not simple things to sort out. But the church has a role to play and a Gospel that alone can address them rightly.

Praise God though that the spiritually rich will include people who were among the materially rich and poor, even if those numbers may slant more in the direction of poor (as was the case in Paul’s day and likely our own). Why? Does God love the poor more than the rich? No. But the poor often have something of a spiritual advantage because they lack the distraction of riches. They are more prone to acknowledge their desperate need for the Lord and His intervention in their lives. Nothing in their lives makes them feel sufficient in themselves, whereas the rich can often feel that way. Indeed, as one author puts it, “worldly poverty serves to throw into relief the glory of our riches in Christ, and worldly wealth pales before what we gain when we are joined to him.”²¹

But regardless of where we fall on the fiscal spectrum, every one of us comes to the offer of salvation emptyhanded.

Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All could never sin erase,
Thou must save, and save by grace.

Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.²²

This is the experience of every Christian. All of us had nothing to bring to earn or purchase salvation and mercy and forgiveness and grace. We were sinners worthy of death. But God in Christ stooped as low as the cross so that we could be lifted up and made “*heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (Rom. 8:17). And if that is the case, then it would be illogical (and even hypocritical) to not be mindful and gracious to the poor among us. The treatment of the poor man in the story is about as unchristian as it gets.

In short, it's illogical for Christians to be marked by favoritism in light of our spiritual experience. But James takes things a step further by showing, second...

*It's Illogical Based on Sociological Experience:
The Conduct of the Rich*

James' next questions points out the irony of their favoritism. Look at verse 7. "*Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*" Again the answer to both of these questions is "yes."

James is not denying that we should love our enemies as Jesus taught, he's just pointing out that the ones they are seeking to impress and cater toward are the very ones who have been oppressing them and blaspheming their God. And the ones they are dishonoring were the very ones who suffered with them under that mistreatment. That makes the scene that James describes all the more jarring.

Of course, once again, James is speaking in general terms. He's not saying that all the rich oppress the poor. They do not as a rule. But some of them certainly do, in James' day and our own. And yet we too sometimes fawn over those who mistreat us and blaspheme our God. Perhaps a modern parallel would be the way many church leaders seem to swoon over some major political figure who happens to come among them. Of course, we should show honor where honor is due. Such authorities have been established by God (Rom. 13:1ff). But I throw up a little in my mouth each time I see some clip from a church service that looks and sounds like a political rally.

But that's the power of celebrity in America. It can lead people to compromise pretty quickly because we love to be in the "in" crowd and connected to the high and mighty. We could easily imagine a famous actor or athlete coming into a church in Tyler and getting the red-carpet treatment and sucking up all the attention and affection from the room. At a worship service! And, again, James would not have us treat someone like that poorly. He would just have us not play favorites. We should be excited to see any soul that comes into a Christian church seeking the Lord because that soul matters to the Him, even if no one in the world knows their name.

How ironic though that some of these same celebrities that we would drool all over if we ran into them and struggle to get attention and acceptance from are routinely people who blaspheme our God before the eyes of a watching world. Once again, the more things change, the more things stay the same. James' audience was susceptible to the same infatuations that can lead us to discriminate against or neglect the poor and forgotten. Why? Maybe it is because, if we're not careful, we can be like the people John describes as loving "*the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God*" (John 12:43). We shouldn't be so preoccupied with trying to curry favor with the distinguished people in this world that we forget the favor that we have been freely given in Christ and forget to love the people that God Himself loves. Jesus said,

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Interestingly that is exactly where James directs our attention next. Not only does he want us to understand that playing favorites is silly in light of the Lord's choice of the poor and the conduct of the rich, but it's also incompatible with the call of love. He addresses that in verse 8 and following. And so that's where we will turn our attention next week.

But before I pray, let me just remind you that these verses have implications for our church too. So if you are here and you are poor, know this, we are glad you're here. And if you are here and you're pretty well off, we're glad you're here too. This is a place for all of us. In Christ, we all stand together. Those the world divides, the

cross unites. You all have a place here. And there is no insignificant place in the family of God. We are all trophies of the same grace of God. Amen? Then, let's make sure everyone who comes among us knows it and experiences it, as far as it depends on us. God help us.

Let's pray...

¹ “James 2:1 is the second of only two places in the letter explicitly mentioning the name ‘Jesus’ (cf. 1:1). Skeptical commentators have taken this infrequency as evidence that James is merely a lightly edited collection of early Jewish moral exhortation. Such skepticism fails to take into account the many parallels with Jesus’ teaching throughout the letter, as well as James’ new covenant modifiers (e.g., ‘law of liberty’; 2:12) that regularly qualify traditional Jewish expressions.” Robert Plummer, “James” in *Hebrews-Revelation* (ESVEC; Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 243. Similarly, Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell write, “It is interesting to note that this is the second and last mention of Jesus Christ in this entire epistle, which has led to speculation that these references (1:1; 2:1) were added later in an effort to make an otherwise entirely Jewish epistle somewhat ‘Christian.’ As we have observed, however, James was well versed in Jesus’ teachings; indeed, the entire epistle is heavily dependent on them, so such theories fail to convince (see pp. 33–34).” Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 106.

² “Christ’s glory (Jas 2:1), whether taken as an attribute or a title, reflects a key characteristic of Yahweh himself, which he does not give to another (Isa 42:8).” Ibid., 121.

³ Plummer, 243.

⁴ Blomberg and Kamell, 106. Plummer points out that “the Greek word is plural, possibly pointing to various discrete acts of favoritism”. Plummer, 243.

⁵ Plummer, 243.

⁶ R. Kent Hughes. *James: Faith That Works* (PW; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 90.

⁷ See Plummer, 244; Blomberg and Kamell, 107, 110-111.

⁸ Plummer, 244.

⁹ J. A. Motyer. *The Message of James* (BST; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 81.

¹⁰ Plummer, 244. Daniel Doriani points notes: “Today, a gold ring indicates marital status more than economic status, and costly clothes may not prove a thing. If everyone wears blue jeans, clothes lose their capacity to mark status, but we still have ways of identifying social rank. Carriage, speech patterns, conversation topics, circles of friends, and leisure activities—did you vacation with relatives or in Tuscany last summer?—all offer the clues of social rank. Of course, today’s ushers have been trained. They would never put a poor person on the floor. But we still find ways to favor people who look and act like us.” Daniel M. Doriani, *James* (REC; Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing, 2007), 62-63.

¹¹ Motyer, 81.

¹² Plummer, 244-245.

¹³ Sam Allberry, *James for You* (The Good Book Company, 2015), 59.

¹⁴ Doriani, 63-64.

¹⁵ Ibid., 63. Similarly, Allberry writes: “True and acceptable religion is actually inclined toward the needy, not away from them. Favouritism of the sort James has been describing is the opposite of not being polluted by the world: it is letting the world determine how much spiritual worth someone has based on their economic standing (or any other measure). It is a way of thinking that Christians can slip into all too easily. Churches need to take great care not to think of a wealthy unbeliever as being more important or worthy of ministry than a poor unbeliever, or to make a great fuss over someone important and powerful that we would never make over someone who is marginal, or to be far more excited about a celebrity coming into church one day than a homeless person.” Allberry, 59-60.

¹⁶ Doriani, 64.

¹⁷ Allberry, 61.

¹⁸ “If it is only the poor who are privileged to receive the divine choice, then the rich brother of 1:10 is a considerable embarrassment! So also are Abraham and Job, whom James quotes with approval (2:21–23; 5:11) and who were exceedingly wealthy men (Gn. 13:2; Jb. 1:3; 42:12). Furthermore, of course, the evidence of the rest of the Bible is by no means as unqualified as James’ words, taken at face value, seem. The wealthy Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57), the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7–12), Levi the tax-collector (Lk. 5:27) and his colleague Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:2) are sufficient to prove that the Lord has no animus against the rich as such. At the same time, since we have to search out such men among the many we meet in the pages of the New Testament, surely Paul gets the balance right when he says that ‘not many ... powerful, not many ... of noble birth’ were chosen by God (1 Cor. 1:26). We see, then, from this evidence inside James and more widely in the Bible, that James has learnt a teaching technique from the Lord Jesus himself. In some situations there are indeed two sides to the truth, but one so far outclasses the other that it merits stating as if it alone were the truth. This is what Jesus did when he affirmed that a real love for himself demanded hating our parents (Lk. 14:26). Does he really call us to hate our parents? Of course not! Yet in saying that the two loves are mutually exclusive he does no violence to the practical truth that our devotion to him, when it is real, is of necessity in a class by itself.” Motyer, 87-88.

¹⁹ Plummer, 245. He continues, “At the same time, poverty may be the result of blameworthy laziness (Prov. 20:13). Persons in desperate economic situations, however, are usually not suffering because of sloth, and when they call out to God in their distress, they show themselves to be “rich in faith” (James 2:5). They are people who “love” God and look to his promises; they long for his “kingdom” (v. 5). To such trust, the Lord responds with favor and ultimate deliverance (Hab. 2:4). In contrast, “riches do not profit in the day of wrath” (Prov. 11:4). Sadly, unlike God, who honors the poor, the Christians who discriminate against the poor dishonor them (James 2:6a).” Ibid.

²⁰ Blomberg and Kamell, 122.

²¹ Motyer, 91.

²² From the hymn, “Rock of Ages,” by Augustus Montague Toplady (1784-1872).