



TEST NO.4: THE PREJUDICE TEST

Everyone wants to feel they belong, that they fit. Problem is: when we finally feel like we do, we can start to exclude anyone who might be a threat to that belonging. The focus can vary depending on the group. It might be:

- You don't belong to us because your skin is different.
- You don't belong to us because your voice is different.
- You don't belong to us because your culture is different.
- You don't belong to us because your clothes are different.
- You don't belong to us because your interests are different.
- You don't belong to us because your abilities are different.
- You don't belong to us because your opinions are different.
- You don't belong to us because your behaviour is different.
- You don't belong to us because your education is different.
- You don't belong to us because your income is different.
- You don't belong to us because your gender is different.
- You don't belong to us because your age is different.

What we're really saying is: "You don't belong to us, because you are of no value to us." Favouritism, clique-ness, discrimination, prejudice.

Whatever you call it, it just happens to be James' 4th test of true faith. Let's turn to:

James 2:1-13

The other day I was listening to the 2016 version of the Black Eyed Peas' song *Where Is The Love*, a song about prejudice that's sadly just as relevant today as it was when it was first released, back in 2003.

But prejudice has been around a lot longer than that – hence James's words here. He refers to it as favouritism (*proso-polempsiais*, 'to accept according to the face'), tells us not to do it, and then gives us 4 things to remember:

1) Remember How God Sees Family (vs1-4). James kicks things off with "My brothers" (by which he means 'sisters', too), and goes on to paint a scenario for us, an example of favouritism involving a rich man and a poor man and their experience at a Christian gathering (interestingly, the word *synagogue* in Greek). And then James says, "This is evil." Because we are all children of the King, no matter who we are; we are of equal value in His sight; and with God, it's not about what *we* bring to the table, it's about what *He* brings to the table. God may have people who are more willing to say yes, people who want to get closer to Him (think Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25). But He doesn't have favourites.

2) Remember How God Sees Glory (vs5-7). James' second point is a biblical principle: poverty = wealth; weakness = strength; humility = nobility. Why? Because lowly people are more likely to recognise their need of God than those who 'have it all.' That's why Psalm 138:6 says, "Though the LORD is on high, He looks upon the lowly, but the proud He knows from afar." And why psychologist Carl Jung said, "Modern people don't see God because they don't look low enough." Think about it this way: Jesus is the ultimate definition of glory, yes? That's what James says (vs1). He's the King of the whole universe! And yet, He made Himself a servant. If this is how God sees glory, we need to make sure we see it that way, too.

3) Remember How God See Duty (vs8-11). James' third point is that we have a duty to perform. Duty to what? To God's law, God's commandments, His *Torah*. And those commandments tell us we've got to love our neighbour as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18) – the second greatest commandment of all (the first being to love God with all our heart, soul and strength, Deuteronomy 6:4-5). When we discriminate against someone based on our prejudices – when we cut them out, exclude them, make them feel as though we don't want them around – we've failed to love them. More than that: we've murdered them in our hearts (James' words, not mine!). It's no different to lying, stealing, or committing adultery – it's all sin.

4) Remember How God Sees Mercy (vs12-13). James wraps things up by reminding his readers that we are all recipients of God's mercy – but the measure of that is whether we can be merciful to others. I.e. if you are truly a recipient of God's mercy, it will show. Because none of us is here because of how special or important *we* are; we're here because of Jesus. And Jesus, the King of King and Lord of Lords, accepted you as you are – and if that's

the way He treated you, that's the way you should treat others. At the end of the day, we all stand equal at the foot of the cross, and we're all citizens of a Kingdom where there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female" (Galatians 3). So, don't forget.

Where Is The Love?

So, what's the cure for prejudice or favouritism? These 4 things: remember how God sees family, how God sees glory, how God sees duty, and how God sees mercy.

Now you might be thinking, "Steve, I'm not prejudiced." And that might be true, but prejudice can manifest itself in different ways: who we have coffee with, who we invite to dinner, who we hang out with at church – and who we seek to avoid. As a society we are obsessed with image and status and wealth, and those attitudes can, sadly, find their way into churches, too. It might not look like James' example here, but whatever it looks like, it's still sinful.

Now the Bible can be easily misunderstood, so we need to clarify some things. James here is *not* saying:

- We should never be closer to some than others (hey, you should definitely be closer to your own spouse!).
- Material wealth is inherently bad (this is not a judgement of wealth, but of the value we place on it).
- We should approve of every belief or lifestyle choice (loving people and approving are not the same thing).

But he *is* saying:

- We should place the same value on people as Jesus does (how much is that? Enough to die for us all).

So, Jesus isn't interested in what you look like, where you come from, or how much money you earn. He's only interested in your heart – in your love for Him, and others. That's what matters to Jesus. And that's what should matter to us.

Which brings us to these questions:

- Have you ever felt excluded? Or done the excluding?
- Is there ever a good reason to 'cut somebody out'?
- What can you do to help someone feel valued today?