

Sermon Series: Front-page Faith—Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Westfield, IN—2/10/2002

Title: “The Royal Law of Love” (Racism & Prejudice)

Text: James 2: 1-13

Introduction: *Ills.: Special Interest Christianity*

Theme: Preferential or discriminatory treatment of others has no place among the family of Christ when we understand God’s grace to us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Prejudice Trap

- The *folly in “pre-judging”* another by exterior circumstances (**PRINT AND READ VSS. 1-3**)
 1. We show ourselves to be “*evil*” by making assumptions and judgements about another (**PRINT/READ VS. 4**)
 2. None of us can determine another’s *VALUE/MOTIVE* by skin, clothes, or possessions (**PRINT/READ VS. 5**)
 3. **ILLS.: PREJUDGING AN UNDERCOVER POLICY OFFICER**
- The *dangers in showing “favoritism”*
 1. Those discriminated-against may some day become the discriminator
 - a. **Ills.: Dead snakes can bite**
 - b. James not only brings out the danger of favoring others who may hurt in return (**PRINT AND READ VSS. 6,7**)
 - c. But he also shows us what is really in the heart of all of us (“*Jesus, however, was wary of these believers. He understood people and didn’t need anyone to tell him about human nature. He knew what people were really like.*” John 2:24-25)
 2. Your behavior betrays what you truly believe (*is your Christianity the sum total of how you treat others?*)
 - a. “*As Scripture says, “God’s name is cursed among the nations because of you.” Romans 2:24*
 3. We put ourselves in jeopardy with God, the righteous judge, who shows no favoritism even to believers (“*Whoever sins without having laws from God will still be condemned to destruction. And whoever has laws from God and sins will still be judged by them. People who merely listen to laws from God don’t have God’s approval. Rather, people who do what those laws demand will have God’s approval.*” Rom2:12-13)

Biblical Principles for removing racism/prejudice for your words and actions

- Adopting the attitude that sin is sin even when it is prejudice and racism (**PRINT AND READ VERSES 9-11**)
 1. **ILLS.: SERVED OR BEING SERVED**
 2. When we diminish another’s worth (overtly or covertly) we sin against them and God (creature/Creator)
 3. Sin is not graded (least/worst) in God’s mind who shows no partiality; that is why we all needed the same Savior
 - a. “*For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.*” Deut. 10:17 (not even prejudice cloaked in religiosity)
 - b. “*Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.” Acts 10:34-36*
 4. **ILLS.: THE BACKGROUND OF AMAZING GRACE**
- Live by the law of love in Christ (**PRINT AND READ VERSES 8, 12**)
 1. The royal law of love says, “*Love your neighbor as your self—or else.*”
 2. The law of liberty says, “*We love because he first loved us.*”
 3. “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.” Galatians 6:2-5*

4. **Ills.: Duke Ellington on Offenses**

- Desire to live under mercy and with mercy (**PRINT AND READ VERSES 5 & 13**)
 1. Because you and I remember *where we came from* and *what we were* and *who we are* and *whose we are*
 2. Because we can only live by grace and will die by the letter of the law
 3. *"Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return." Luke 6:38*
 4. Because the "**OTHER**" no matter how different they are from us, was "**ONE**" for whom "**JESUS DIED**"
 5. **ILLS.: THE ACT THAT SAVED JACKIE ROBINSON**

Special Interest Christianity

"... and on Thursday morning at eleven, our Women Against Evolution, Day Care Centers, Beards, Guitars, and Humorous Messages on the Pastor's Answering Machine will hold their weekly Bible study."

Dead Snakes Can Bite

Dead snakes can bite. Dead snakes bit five of thirty-five snakebite victims admitted to Good Samaritan Hospital [in Phoenix, Arizona,] from June 1997 to April 1998, toxicologists said. Justin Cluff, for example, age 21, was bitten by the decapitated head of a rattler. He lost part of his right index finger.

Serving vs. Being Served

I was ministering in Fourth Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. We had a Thursday morning father-son breakfast, six-thirty. It was to be over by quarter of eight. There were many people from the military, quite a few people from various government offices, some craftsmen, laborers of various kind--really quite a mix. After I had finished speaking and the meeting was dismissed, I looked over to my right, and there was Senator Mark Hatfield, stacking chairs and picking up napkins that had fallen on the floor. Ladies and gentlemen, if you are impressed that you are a United States senator, you don't stack chairs and pick up napkins. If you are impressed that you are God's gift to the body of Christ as the great preacher of this age, you don't stoop to serve. If you are impressed that, really, you are the greatest thing that ever happened to your local church, you do not serve. You live to be served. *Citation: Howard Hendricks, "The Problem of Discrimination,"*

The Background of "Amazing Grace"

"Amazing Grace"--Americans' favorite hymn according to the Gallup Poll--was written by the former captain of a slave ship. That "wretch," John Newton, eventually became an Anglican minister and worked to abolish the slave trade.

Duke Ellington on Offenses

The Ken Burns PBS series on jazz music has a terrific quote by jazz great Duke Ellington. Duke was asked about his feelings at not being able, as a black man, to stay in the guest rooms of the hotels he and his band performed in because of segregation. He said, "I took the energy it takes to pout and wrote some blues."

The Act that saved Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. While breaking baseball's "color barrier," he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

James 2:1-13

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. ²For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," ⁴have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? ⁵Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? ⁸If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. ⁹But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.[NASB]