

Season 2, Episode 4: James: Grace that shapes who we love (2:1-13)

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Sarah: Welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK. And this is my sister Felicity and she lives in the US.

Felicity: Hello, everyone. How are you today, Sarah?

Sarah: I'm well, thank you. And I've got an exciting biscuit because I've gone back to something we had last series, but a step up the last series for those who weren't listening along. I just seem to always manage to choose the really bad, cheap ones, including the Jammy Dodger from Aldi, which was not to be repeated. I've gone back to the Jammy Dodger in hope of redemption from a different retailer, from the Jamie Dodger retailer.

Felicity: Okay, and how does it match up? I mean, what do you think?

Sarah: Well, not as great as I actually remembered it when we were kids, which is a bit disappointing. And it's still not got the cream in it. I feel like I'm still searching for the cream inside the biscuit.

Felicity: Is that a true thing, that Jammy Dodgers ever had cream in it? I don't know. Is your nostalgia maybe, mixing up custard creams and Jammy Dodgers?

Sarah: Oh, I think I need to go on a search.

Felicity: I've gone for a trusty chocolate digestive, one of the last in the biscuit tin. And then a classic afternoon Earl Grey, which is funny because it's really hot outside. It's like an English summer's day. And it only turns out the English who would keep drinking a hot cup of tea on a hot day, you offer that to an American and they think you're a little bit mad. So that's where I'm at. The one drinking a hot drink, whatever now is drinking their iced coffee and iced tea and all that kind of stuff.

Sarah: All right, so people just don't eat off your cup of tea.

Felicity: Generally. You don't get offered a cup of tea very often anyway, because that's just not the drink of choice over here. I just keep offering. People still kind of look at me a little weirdly, but keep offering. Okay, but I was thinking, well, while we were chatting, all such things we've been saying all the way through this Two Sisters in a cup of Tea podcast that we love to drive the word to the heart. And I was thinking, how do we actually do that? Because I would think that we're all pretty good at reading. We're able to read the Bible and understand, if not all of it, some of what's being said, how do you then take it from reading it, understanding it, and then what does it mean to actually drive it to the heart? And I was thinking that I think you're good at this, Sarah. Are you able just to give us some pointers as to how you might do that?

Sarah: I don't know if I'm going to do this or not, but I find it generally very challenging each time I read it. I think James does quite a lot of the work for us because it feels like he applies it very readily to our example. We'll talk about this as we get into the passage, but one question that I quite often have to think through things is to say, what does it look like not to listen here? So James has been talking about not just listening, but doing, what does that look like? If I wasn't to do this, was it like not to listen to what's being asked of me as a follower of Jesus right now and kind of work out the negatives? I find that quite helpful. It shows up my heart. It shows me where I don't want to obey or I don't want to follow it. Where does it grace against me? That kind of question. I don't know.

Felicity: I think that's right. I think probably the first step is actually just giving it some time to think on this kind of actual, deliberate I'm going to sit down. I'm quite a fan of the spider diagram, so I kind of tend to be like, what do I think this means in different aspects of my

life? And then exactly that question, actually is always a hurtful, like, what do I not want to believe about this? What do I not like about it? And that kind of thing. And then actually the positives as well, what does it mean if I was to really listen, really do this, what would it change? Like, would it change anything about the way and not just what we do, but also what I'm thinking and what I'm feeling and then what I'm doing? And often I think that what I'm thinking and what I'm feeling are actually the harder ones to kind of come by and dwell on, because by nature, I don't know about you, but I'm quite quick. I do know about you, actually. I think we're both quite quick to want to do stuff and fix things and just kind of get on with it. So stopping and thinking and, okay, how is my mindset changing? How is my heart changing? Those kind of things.

Sarah: That's the spiritual work, isn't it? So actually, we kind of talk about this, but actually we're praying through it as we're thinking through it. We're asking the Lord to help us, to give us the wisdom that we need. Anyway, let's come to that as we think about today's passage, because this is a really challenging as ever, but a good passage. Why don't you read today's passage for us today? So we're going to be doing chapter two versus one till 13 today.

Felicity: Okay, here we go. My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring in fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 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. Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 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 loved him? But you have dishonored the poor, is it not? The rich are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong? If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. If you show favoritism, use sin and are convicted by the law as law breakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbled at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said you shall not commit adultery also said, you shall not murder. If you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you've become a law breaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law. That gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not yet been who has not been merciful mercy triumphs over judgment.

Sarah: I'm struck again just twice. He's saying, My brothers and sisters, my dear brothers and sisters. It's just a reminder he loves them, he's concerned for them, and just a reminder that the context is that he's concerned that they're being doubleminded and that they've got kind of a foot in both camps, so to speak, and they're not wholly living out their faith. I just think it's really important to remember that each point, isn't it, that actually this is a pastoral letter written to people that he cares about and wants to see striving to live out of faith.

Felicity: Really helpful to always have that, because then you get to something like verse eight and he says things like, if you show favoriteism, you sin. It's so straight up, isn't it? To the heart.

Sarah: To the heart.

Felicity: I just think the thing that really stands out from these first few verses is in a letter that surprisingly doesn't really mention Jesus very much by name. This is one of those times. So believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. And actually, I was thinking that in the ESV, another translation. So we're in the NIV in the ESV, they almost give it a bit more kind of weight because they say you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. And I really love that because I think what he's saying here, glorious Lord Jesus, like King Jesus, this is where the glory is in God's perspective, God's economy, Jesus is glorious. But in the world's eyes, that's not how it looks. But as Christians, we're to look at Jesus and see that he is glorious. And as we see that, as we see as God's king, then as we look at what's going on around us, as we conduct ourselves within our church setting, within the society as a whole, then actually we begin to think in God's way, God's perspective, and we see glory in a different sense to how the world might be seeing it.

Sarah: That's really helpful. And if you go down to verse five, that is essentially what he's saying, isn't it? Has not got chosen, those who are poor in the eyes of the world, to be rich in faith. And it's a topsyturvic kingdom, isn't it? Right there and then we're seeing it completely the world completely turned upside down. And as you say, the glorious Lord Jesus never looked glorious on this earth. He always looked poor in the eyes of the world. And he took his very end, wasn't he?

Felicity: And yet he is the king of that kingdom, which as those who are rich in faith, we inherit. And that is a circumstance. Well, it's not circumstances, it's a thing which is not affected by circumstance. So our status in Christ, our riches in Christ are not affected by circumstances. So it doesn't matter whether we're poor or rich and therefore how we look at the world, we shouldn't be categorizing in terms of poor or rich. That's not how Jesus did it. So that's not how we did it. I think that's the context here that James is talking about that in verse two. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes. It seems that in their church, then they seem to be categorizing, like, oh, you're a rich person, you come and sit in the best place. Poor person you could probably just see over there, we don't really want to see. There's that kind of scene going on, isn't it? So James is speaking directly into this notion of favoritism and challenging it big time.

Sarah: Yeah, and good on him. Why wouldn't you challenge that? But also in one sense, you can totally understand why they would do that. Why wouldn't you? In the world eye, that is naturally what happens, isn't it? But also, he's also pointing out to them that the rich, that they are kind of exalting and kind of giving glory to are actually the ones who are exploiting them. So in verse six and seven, he says these are the ones who are exploiting you. The ones who are dragging you into court, the ones who are blessed in the noble name of Him to whom you belong, like there's no regard for the Lord Jesus in any kind of way, and yet they are still seeking to exalt them. So he's calling them out really straight down the line, isn't he? There's no messing around here with his language. He is straight onto it. You must not show favoritism. And the motivation is, as you say, back in verse one, because you are believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, like you are his. And so these categories do not matter. They don't match up to your belonging to Him.

Felicity: I think verse five kind of pushes it even further. And as we show favoritism, as the people who are just as guilty of it show favoritism, actually, there's a denial of the gospel there, isn't it? Because God has not chosen according to these ways. So if we do, then we're kind of denying that God has the best way, that this is the best kind of way of the world working. I think it's quite heavy, isn't it? Actually, favoritism is no light thing. If we're going to be harsh in who we show our favor to, then actually that's not the way of Christ. And I think verse eight really helps there in this kind of thing of love your neighbor. That's the command, love your neighbor. And neighbor is a universal term. There are no categories within neighbor, are there, in this kind of sense?

Sarah: And he's just kind of been pointing out that even further, isn't he, that saying, well, actually, you might think that you're buying some part of loving your neighbor, but not the other. But he takes just an example of the law and says, well, you can't say you're a law keeper just because you keep one but not the other. Yeah. And that's the same with favoritism. That's the same with loving our neighbors. I can show in my actions that I might be loving everyone on the outside, but actually, if I'm doing something really begrudgingly towards someone in my church family, or if I'm just generally, if I'm just not doing it with the right attitude in my heart, then I'm not loving my neighbor there. I'm not doing it with purity of heart that the law requires. And so I'm still sinning and therefore I'm convicted in that. I'm sorry.

Felicity: Isn't then verse 13 really wonderful? Because mercy triumphs over judgment. Like, we have been shown mercy, we are continually showing mercy. And that's where classic James kind of passed, isn't it? We read this and we're like, that's me, I see myself in this. And then he reminds us not only of the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, but also of the mercy that we have through him.

Sarah: Yeah, that's the only place that we can go to. And this isn't it, because actually you read this slowly and as you say, you start to think, right, how does this actually impact my heart? And you think, well, wow, I should favoritism the whole time and this is awful, and I'm denying the gospel in the ways that I do that. And actually I can only lean back on

God's mercy at that point and go back to the gospel which we have at the beginning and the end of the passage, don't we? But, yeah, I was kind of thinking through what does this look like for us on the ground? I think just simple things like how do we see people? Like, do we see them as neighbors to be loved? Do we see them as people made in God's image, worthy of Christ all encompassing love? Or do I see people as an obstacle or a means to an end, maybe, or a threat or just different and therefore just not worthy of my love? Like, how am I viewing people in my church family or people who come into our church family or, I don't know, just generally, like at the school gate or whatever it is. What judgment am I making that I'm thinking you're not worthy of my time and my energy and my resources to love at this point?

Felicity: Yeah, and that's really helpful. Sarah so the diagnostic questions to show us where we're guilty of this and I think then the kind of outworking of that, so what does it look like for me to show favoritism where it might not be? I wouldn't be probably the person who's directing people to different seats in church, but I might be allocating my time or my prayers or my just thought, even thoughts and care and consideration and all those things. And you were talking earlier a bit about the coming out of covert and what that might then just explain that all of what you were thinking.

Sarah: Yeah, I just think this is a really crucial time, particularly with as restrictions ease in England, in the UK, and just realizing that the simple thing of a sunny day, you're like, I want to make the most of this sunny day. I want to see people. But actually, am I tempted to restrict who I'm seeing, like the people I really want to see because I've not caught up with them in a person for a year type thing? Or am I extending my welcome in my hospitality to anyone and everyone in my church family as well as those outside? What barriers am I putting in the way that dissuade me from loving everyone equally? Does that make sense?

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right, isn't it? How easily we can begin to just form our own little groups. Maybe there's a bit of an in crowd and out crowd and you wouldn't think that you're a kind of qualifier for deciding who's in and who's out, but actually within our world, who we decide to text, to ring, to invite to all these kind of things, the people we're not deciding to invite, that's the thing. And it's not to say we have to invite everyone. That's not a thing. Every time you have someone over, you have to invite the whole church family.

Sarah: That's not that's legal. Not legal right now. Don't do that.

Felicity: Good point, but it's not to say that, isn't it? I think it's more of a heart attitude in where are we choosing to show our love? Are we being partial in who we love and how we love people? And I think that is really challenging to how what we do with our time and what we do with our energy. Energy is kind of a precious commodity, isn't it? So who are you going to give your energy to in the sense that you're going to entertain or you're going to talk to or you're going to inquire after? They might not be the easiest, but loving them like Jesus loves them.

Sarah: Yeah, I've read a really great book recently, caroline Lacey's book on extraordinary hospitality for ordinary people is fantastic. And she talks a lot about welcome and hospitality and showing their favoritism in that. And I just think it's goldbuster really thinking through as we come out of clay, they'd and what does it look like to kind of live this out? But most importantly, what it looks like to live this out is coming back to the gospel, isn't it? And been motivated by the glorious Lord Jesus and his love into enable us and spur us on in how we then do that.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right. Kind of remembering who we are because of what Jesus did, because of his mercy. We are therefore rich in God's eyes. And as people who are that secure in a heavenly sense, then we don't need to show favorites and we don't need to hedge our bets. We don't need to be double minded in this. We can just seek to love like Jesus loves, show mercy like he does, and therefore not show favor in the ways that it's being described here.

Sarah: I think the challenge I don't know just to finish up on this, but I think just the challenge is that each time I read this, I see my doublemindedness and my temptation is to go, well, I just can't do it. I can't do what this is asking to do. And that is exactly where we get to, isn't it? And so each time we need God's help, we need to fall back on the mercy of Christ and we need to say, Lord, today, show me how not to show favoritism. Show me

how to love without restriction. Show me how to love as you love and ask Him for his help in that.

Felicity: Yeah. Shall I do that? Shall I pray for us?

Sarah: Let's pray. Yes, please.

Felicity: Feel like prayer is the best place to be. Father, we prayed you so much for the glorious Lord Jesus Christ thank you that you showed us mercy, no favoritism, no partiality. But because you love us so, we have riches in Christ and Father, we pray that as we know that, as we dwell on that, would you help us to be those who don't show favoritism? Would we be those who truly do love our neighbor? Not with categories or anything, but just as Jesus loves and we know that we just feel so convicted on this and we don't get it right. And so we pray that as we see, that would be full. Back again on your grace, on Jesus. Would he be the means by which we might be able to be more and more like him in this? Amen.

Sarah: Amen.

Felicity: Another one where you feel a little like being through the ringer, but in a good way, a grace ringer as well as a challenge to the heart kind of way.

Sarah: Yeah, it's good, isn't it? But it is really hard. But it's valuable hard stuff going on, isn't it?

Felicity: Wondering about with people using it. Because our show notes have got questions, haven't they, to help people have these conversations. This one would be a really good one to have a conversation with someone in your church family, wouldn't it? So that this might change the way we do. Welcome.

Sarah: Absolutely. I think that's all there is, isn't there? We need to go. So lovely to see you. Thanks for listening in, and we'll see you next week.

Felicity: All right.

Sarah: Bye bye bye.

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