"FAITH WITH BOOTS ON"
BIG IDEA . . . Part 5: Don't Play Favorites (Jam. 2:1-13)

INTRO: Prejudice, racism, favoritism seem to be growing. This is a wakeup call to a serious, yet not new problem of prejudice (partiality, favoritism). Something we all struggle with. James writes to scattered, poverty-stricken, and persecuted believers. He instructs them in skills they needed to develop to mature in their new faith and survive in their world. James' next practical skill is being impartial to people no matter our differences. Don't discriminate! How do you treat those who are not like you?

I. A PRINCIPLE IS *STATED* (2:1)

A. PRINCIPLE stated as a command for believers to "Stop showing favoritism." Favoritism is a sin, so stop it. The early church . . .

B. WORD "*favoritism*" combines two ideas and means to "judge someone by their face (appearance, externals). Found only four times and three related to God's impartiality (Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9).

C. *WAYS* we tend to judge: looks, age, achievement, wealth, sex, religion, race, etc. Judge by their heart (1 Sam. 16:7). Martin Luther King, Jr. . . .

D. *JESUS* did not play favorites – had no prejudice (Matt. 22:16). He endured prejudice (Isa. 53:2-3). Discrimination is inconsistent with our faith in Christ. Aren't we glad God doesn't love or save by playing favorites? (Acts 10:34). Our common faith in Christ must be greater than all that could divide us.

II. THE PRINCIPLE IS *ILLUSTRATED* (vv. 2-4) – Using disparity between a rich and poor man, James illustrates principle.

A. (v. 2) *APPEARANCE of TWO MEN* – both strangers to the church

1. (2a) rich "gold fingered" – Mr. Has-Everything (looks important)
2. (2b) poor and dirty – Mr. Has-Nothing

B. (v. 3) *ACTIONS of an USHER* – treated differently, indulged the rich and indifferent to poor – clear discrimination.

C. (v. 4) *APPRAISAL of the LORD* is "you play favorites." You are making evaluations on evil motives. All are precious to God. Everybody is somebody when Jesus is Lord. James isn't saying do less for the rich; just don't discriminate against the poor.

III. THE PRINCIPLE IS *DEFENDED* (vv. 5-11) – James explains three reasons favoritism is folly - Playing favorites is wrong:

A. (v. 5) *DISREGARDS KINGDOM PRINCIPLES* – By God's grace, poor are:

1. Chosen by God – God loves common and poor people. He does most of His work with ordinary people (1 Cor. 1:26-31). This gets Him glory.
2. Rich in Faith – Rich people tend to trust in their stuff. Poor folks seem to have a built-in propensity for faith.
3. Heirs of Kingdom – Poor Christians here are spiritual millionaires there – inherit the earth! Be careful how treat poor and ordinary here, could be somebody there.

B. (vv. 6-7) *DISHONORS THE POOR* – Prosperous people are usually the ones persecuting the poor. Wealthy aristocrats sit in places of judgment. Common people took to Gospel quickly but the rich largely rejected it. The rich in persecuting the needy were blaspheming God. God can't be separated from His people (Acts 9:4; Matt. 25:40). Everybody (poor or rich, etc.) is somebody because they are in Christ. It's crazy to smooze those who persecute you.

C. (vv. 8-11*) DENIES THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE* – Playing favorites violates the precepts of the *royal* law to love everyone. It is *royal* because it is king of all the laws. It is a *law* to be obeyed. It is based upon *love* which prevents favoritism. Note, prejudice listed with adultery and murder! Partiality is a bad sin because we don't see it as all that bad. Smoozers are users not lovers. Gary Vandaret writes . . .

IV. THE PRINCIPLE IS *APPLIED* (vv. 12-13) – Judgment is coming at the Bema for a believer's words and works (criteria for rewards). Knowing that prejudice is a sin and I'll be judged, how can I apply this principle and avoid playing favorites?

A. (v. 12) *LET SCRIPTURE BE MY STANDARD*, not looks, money, status, etc. Love everyone and not be impartial (Jn. 13:35).

B. (v. 13) *LET MERCY BE MY MESSAGE*, not favoritism. Don't judge those who are different – be merciful and loving to all. (Matt. 5:7).

CONC: Playing favorites is a sin – *never* justifiable for a child of God. *God has assigned equal value of inestimable worth to every human being!* He did for ALL. When we play favorites, we deny the faith, have evil motives, insult who God honors, join exploiters, side with oppressors, stand with blasphemers, break the law of love, ignore surety of judgment. Favoritism is sin. James says to develop important skill of practicing impartiality – don't play favorites. To do so is to deny the faith! Everybody is somebody in God's family! Everyone who belongs to Jesus belongs to us.

ILLUS: Pic of "Greatest Showman" cast . . .