

Faith That Shows Up

James 2

Opening: What We've Just Stepped Into as a Church

Before we open the Word today, I want to pause and celebrate what God has done **this week** in our house—because this is not small, and it's not ordinary.

This week we launched our **Mentoring Men** and **Ladies Mentoring** and **Life Groups**. And I don't want that to just be another announcement that fades into the background.

We've seen **over 100 men** step into mentoring.

We've seen **over 200 ladies** step into mentoring.

And across our Life Groups, we have **over 150 people** that will be actively building community.

That is significant. This is not about numbers but a testimony of God connecting people to one another.

It's **God allowing us to be the church of Jesus—to be the church to those that we are caring for.**

John 13:34–35

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**”

And that's the essence of what I want to speak about today.

The world is trained to focus on itself—my comfort, my circle, my preferences, my image. But Jesus is forming a different kind of people. He is forming a church that does not revolve around itself, but turns outward—toward those who are hurting, overlooked, outcast, and pushed aside.

And as you know we have started a series on the book of James and So today isn't theory. It isn't a lecture.

James as a writer communicates very directly but the book is not written to shame us. —it's written to **shepherd us**. And that is my heart that I hope all of us here today will experience.

Historically the setting is that James is speaking to believers, people who already know Jesus.

This chapter moves in a clear progression.

First, James confronts **favouritism**—how we treat people based on status, appearance, or usefulness.

Then he addresses **judgment**—how quickly we condemn others while forgetting the mercy we ourselves depend on.

And finally, he calls us to **action**—a faith that doesn't stop at words, but moves toward love, mercy, and obedience.

But James is writing to a church that believed the right things, and yet something wasn't lining up. There was a growing gap between what people **said** they believed and the way they were **actually living**. Their conduct.

So he doesn't begin with abstract theology. He begins with everyday life—with normal environments, real people, real bias, real need.

And he poses a real question to us here at Oakhill. So I will do my best to be Mr James today....and ask **So What does real faith look like when it walks into ordinary room like this today.**

1) So how this looks is that Faith Shows Up in How We Treat People.

James begins with a command, not a suggestion. He says,

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism.” (James 2:1)

Notice how he frames favouritism. He doesn't say, “Try not to.” He says, “You must not.” Because favouritism isn't merely **a social issue—it's a faith issue**. Favouritism is a contradiction of the gospel we claim to live by.

Then he paints a scene so ordinary it could happen in any church on any Sunday: (James 2:2-3) **“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and 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?”**

This scripture takes us to the moment of decision—where value gets assigned without words. Today the setting looks a bit different than in biblical times, but it is all the same.

James is not merely confronting manners. He's confronting the heart. He's saying: when you rank people, you reveal what rules you. He is exposing who our true master is. He is saying listen here Oakhill. There are two kingdoms actively engaging for your attention. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. You choose which ones rules you play by.

Illustration: The Playground, the Pecking Order, and the Mirror

Think of a school playground.

No one ever sits you down and explains the social order—you just feel it. Some kids are chosen first. Some are tolerated. Some are invisible.

And if I'm honest, I was often the kid who got picked last.

I couldn't hit the ball. I couldn't throw the ball. And just to be clear—I still can't hit a ball. But that's not the main point. The point is this: the world presents itself as having this pecking order, and people quickly learn how to measure worth according to this worldly standard—by performance, popularity, appearance, confidence, achievement, usefulness.

From playgrounds... to boardrooms... to neighbourhoods... to churches... those instincts can follow us everywhere.

And James looks at the church and says to us that: if that system is operating here, something is deeply wrong. Because this is the one place on earth that is meant to reflect a different kingdom—where worth isn't earned and value isn't negotiated.

James 2 functions like a mirror. It shows us what's happening inside us. It exposes favouritism. It exposes the way we instinctively pull toward some people and pull away from others. It shows us how easily we become, as James says, **“judges with evil thoughts.”** (James 2:4)

But here's what is important in our conversation about this book of James.

A mirror can show you what needs changing, but a mirror cannot wash you clean.

It is possible to see what's wrong and remain unchanged. It's possible to notice favouritism and still practice it. It's possible to recognise the pattern and never surrender it.

James won't let us stop at insight. He pushes us toward obedience—because only when we respond to what God exposes do we move into the space where Jesus cleanses and reforms us.

So here's the line that must land today:

You cannot claim faith in Jesus while dishonouring people Jesus welcomes.

Faith shows up in how we treat people—who we notice, who we honour, who we include, who we make room for, who we dignify.

And how should we do this?

2) The Royal Law: Love as the Unbroken Chain

(James 2:8) **“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself,’ you are doing right.”**

He now moves from exposing favouritism to explaining **why loving people matters so deeply.**

He calls this command the **royal law** because it reflects the heart of Jesus. This isn't one rule among many—it's the ruling principle that holds the life of faith together.

(James 2:10) “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

And I thought to myself how on earth am I going to explain this one..... he basically says obedience to the law cannot be treated like a long checklist. **Obedience is a connection with Jesus, we are saved by grace.**

A few months ago I had the privilege to go sailing one Saturday morning and we slept over on the Friday evening on the boat. The boat owner warned all of us that we will hear a strange noise during the night that would sound like metal clicking on metal and that we should not be alarmed. And that it is the metal chains anchoring the moorings to the anchors at the bottom of the harbour. And during the night you constantly heard the chains clicking, but here is the point if those chains don't stay in tact the boats and the moorings and everything will drift away. And I had this insight.

We say and understand that Jesus is the **anchor** at the bottom of the sea. And what James is trying to convey here is that our obedience is the **chain** connecting the anchor to the boat or the mooring. As long as the chain stays in place the anchor that is Jesus stays in place.

If **the chain** breaks, the anchor doesn't gradually lose power—it becomes **useless** immediately.

And then sometimes when we look at our lives and we start to drift away we need to realize that the anchor hasn't failed. Jesus hasn't failed. But the connection has been broken. The anchor drops to the ocean floor, and the ship begins to drift.

That's what happens when we claim faith, but break obedience to the royal law of love—when we say we love God, but practice favouritism; when we say we believe, but withhold mercy.

We can proclaim with our words until we are blue in the face that we believe in Christ, but if we break one of the chain links, the anchor loses its power to keep us grounded and connected in God.

That's why James brings it down to everyday language:

(James 2:12) "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom."

Live like people who intend to stay anchored.

And then James tells us what preserves the chain:

"Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13)

Mercy is not weakness. Mercy is what keeps the chain intact. Mercy is what makes the church look like the King.

Why does judgement break the chain, Because judgment trains your heart away from mercy. It makes you sharp, suspicious, superior, unforgiving. It feels powerful for a moment, but it damages the soul.

James is saying: if we live with an unmerciful spirit toward others, we should not be surprised when we stand exposed by the same standard. We in other words can be burning the bridge that links us to our pathway to eternity one day.

But he doesn't leave us in fear.

He ends with hope.

He says “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13) it should become a war cry here today. I was praying and speaking to someone this week that explained a terrible financial situation that someone was in. And a cloud of fear just hangs over the person and the family and the situation. And in the discussion the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said now proclaim the following:

Mercy can win in that home.

Mercy can win in your relationships.

Mercy can win in your small group.

Mercy can win in this church.

And when mercy wins, people find Jesus—because mercy is Jesus to situations that looks desperate.

4) Faith That Never Acts Is Not Alive (James 2:14–17)

Lastly James moves from **favouritism and judgment to action**. And he asks a question that is blunt and pastoral at the same time:

(James 2:14) **“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?”**

Notice the word **“claims.”** James is not attacking genuine faith. He’s confronting a faith that exists only in words.

Then he gives a practical example:

“Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:15–16)

Grant don’t be a hypocrite, don’t spiritualise avoidance. Don’t use Christian language to cover a lack of love. Don’t speak blessings where God is calling for action.

And then he lands the conclusion:

“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:17)

This is not about earning salvation. It’s about evidence. Living faith produces movement. Living faith produces compassion. Living faith produces action.

My hope here today is to stir our faith here today to ask God how can I reach out to someone here in this auditorium today or in my family or at my work.

We have a food fund that we started in Covid. Loads of families have been helped by this. This was someone in leadership that just felt we needed to do something. We cannot just see that people lose their jobs and not be helped in some physical way. And here is the facts since 2021 until now 966 people have received food through a food voucher system.

And, this is also why mentoring men and ladies matters. This is why Life Groups matter. This is why serving matters in the Youth, children’s church, worship team Av team, Sunday volunteers

It’s not because we’re building **a busy** church.

It’s because we have decided as a church that faith doesn’t remain theoretical.

Faith shows up.

And James here today goes one step further with a line meant to unsettle us.

James 2:18–19) **“But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”** (James 2:19)

Why does James mention demons? Because he’s exposing the difference between **agreement** and **surrender**.

We live in a world where we have access to information via AI. There is nothing in this world that we do not have information about anymore. The information is instantaneous. That is the world we are living in. And because we have information we feel empowered. But here is what James is saying. Agreement to information alone is not the point Demons have the right information. They know God is real. They know His authority. They even respond emotionally—James says they “shudder.” (James 2:19)

But their belief does not lead to obedience. It does not lead to love. It does not lead to surrender.

And James lands the whole chapter with one final line:

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:26)

And this is exactly why we need to remind ourselves today of the final work that Jesus did on the cross for us.