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| Topic | Christian and the Poor |
| Reference | James 2: 1-23 |
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| Speaker | Dr Peter Ng |

The first area to visit the orphans and the widows and the practical area in church. If you come to church,

James 2:1-4

**1** My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

**2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,

**3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,”

[**4**](http://biblehub.com/james/2-4.htm) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

It is a fact that rich people do not mix with poor people. We do not eat in the same shops, we do not live in the same neighborhoods, and we all have different places.

Steve Wynn is one of the richest men in America. On CNBC some days ago he made this audacious claim which we all probably residing in our hearts but we never dare say publically and he said these things, *"Rich people only like being around rich people," Nobody likes being around poor people, especially poor people."*

This is actually ironic even the poor people do not want to be around poor people. Poor people wanted to be around rich people and if you are a poor person the way people talk to you is different from a rich person.

In 2009 there was an experiment in University of Princeton, Professor Susan Fiske and her colleague from Dukes University put 119 postgraduate students from Princeton in an MRI machine and this MRI machine looked at the blood flow to the medial prefrontal cortex which is the area which lights up when you think about another person, whether the person has needs or is hungry or is warm, whether you are going to have fellowship. This area does not light up when you look at a chair or a table or an inanimate object and out of all the 119 postgraduate students from Princeton most of them when they saw pictures of poor people, this area did not light up at all. It was like looking at a bottle of water, which is really shocking, because if you look in your hearts, if you are really honest the problem is rich people do not like poor people, poor people also do not like to be around poor people. It is inside our bodies.

Poor people are regarded as not human, especially the homeless, drug addicts, immigrant workers and if we actually ask ourselves honestly we do not really want to mix with them. They are not the kind of person we want to take to afternoon tea. Susan Fiske concluded, “*It’s the most negative prejudice people report, greater even than racism*” and this is also in the church.

If we look at ourselves, how are our friends, we will find most time these are people within your own social economic group. Deep inside how we look at people we cannot escape that. There is an idea that is drummed in our heads right from young that if you study hard, work well, smart and dedicated we will be a success. So, therefore we want to be with successful people because we can learn from them, we can grow of them, we could benefit from them. If we are poor some way along the line we have not done our school homework, when others were busy studying we were playing football and then we end up collecting garbage. If you study hard you will become a lawyer, you will become an engineer. So the perception of poor is that they have no value, they are useless, they are lazy, they are like trash. Your medial frontal cortex does not light up when you look at them or they are drain on society, but that is not really true.

Out of the blue you could be very successful, very rich, you could be very capable but one day if something happens to you, you will be in poverty and it may not be your fault at all. So the perception is totally wrong.

James 1:25

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The key to changing our internal DNA, so when we look like a poor person the prefrontal cortex will light up, the key to that is looking into scripture. The word looking in the scripture is Greek word ‘Look’ is the same word which John uses for Peter when he looks inside the tomb and he finds an empty tomb. So Peter sits there, he just does not look and go home, he looks, he investigates, he theorizes, why is there an empty tomb where my savior use to be. If it is empty why it is empty but with the graves clothes left there, which means why would they unwrap Jesus, leave all the spices and take his naked body away. So when we look at scripture today we need to think about the scripture, we need to think what it means, so that it will percolate into our system.

So we look into the law, it will transform you. We do not just have to look but also have to persevere.

Why is it wrong to have partiality?

1. **Discrimination against the poor is evil**

James 2:4

Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts

So here the picture is paved of an Old Testament judge,

Leviticus 19:15

“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor”

Which means to judge, justice has got to be blind. No matter who you look like a judge is supposed to dispense justice. So therefore when you judge with evil thoughts, you are basically two face, you are facing both ways, one way towards Christ and facing the other way towards snobbery. So this discrimination is evil.

Discrimination insults the poor

6 but you have **dishonored** the poor man

Being blind to the honor of the poor is basically an insult.

1. **God has chosen the poor:**

James 2:5

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him

There are over 300 verses in Bible are about the poor. What God does is the ones who are most affected by the ravages of sin are not rich, it is the poor and God is partial that he chooses them and so far as he is not really discriminating there is a rich. What he is saying is that, it is the poor who are actually going to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, the poor, and the ones who are going to respond to the gospel.

1 Cor. 1:26- 29

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

In this passage he tells you about the economy of God’s kingdom. The economy of God’s kingdom is not like our economy.

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| We look at the outward | God looks at the inward |
| We are people who value popularity | God values character |
| We look at intelligence | God look at the heart |
| We honor those with money | God honor those with integrity |
| We talk about what we own | God ask you about you have given away |
| We boost about whom we know | God notices whom we serve |
| Many of us we list our accomplishments | God looks for contrite heart |
| We value education | God values wisdom |
| We love size | God loves quality |
| We live for fame | God look such as for humility |
| Our view is shallow | God’s view is deep |
| Our view is temporary | God’s view is eternal |

The fact is among the Christian church even today, the preponderance of people who believe they are Christians is actually poor people.

If poor people get sick, to them this is a normal thing. They always get sick. If a rich man gets sick, he starts to question why this thing has happened. He has taken every precautions in all fields, so why they are sick. Rich people have an unrealistic view. The poor on the other hand have a very realistic view about life. If things happen to them they understand about poverty, they understand that bad things happen to good people. They understand about being struck by lightning, so therefore they are less attune to blaming. They have got exaggerated sense of their own importance. When we preach the gospel to the poor they embrace it with wholeheartedness. When we preach the gospel to the rich, they think we are scolding them and they grab their wallet tighter. So that is why the poor more readily respond wholeheartedly to the gospel compared to rich and that is why in that sense God has chosen the poor.

Even a rich person can be poor. If we look at King Jehoshaphat, he was faced with a huge invasion from the Amorites, they are more on less on him and this is what he prayed, “*For we are powerless against this great horde that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you”.* When we wake up in the morning, where are our eyes? Are they on our wallets or our eyes on Him? It is the poor person who eyes are on the Lord. When you are driven to a corner, when you are blessed as it were.

Jonathan Edwards says, *“We too should deliberately choose the poor and not wait for poor to come to us It insults them”*

So we often wait until the poor guy is starving or stand outside the church and he looks kind of emaciated and weak and then we says, “Brother, can I do something for you”. We should actually go to them and if they are in trouble we come alongside them and we provide them relief.

1. **It is illogical to honor the very people who usually do you harm?**

James 2:6-7

**6** But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?

**7** Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called

Donald Trump has sued so many people including his own wife.

Uri Geller was famous was bending spoon with his eyes. He recently sued Nintendo because they had a cartoon called Kadabra, which means “Un-Geller”, and he says it is bare striking resemblance to him.

They are all rich people. Rich people will sue at the drop of a hat.

1. **Discrimination against the poor breaks the heart of God’s law**

James 2:8-9

**8** If you really fulfill the **royal law** according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

**9** But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors

What he is saying here is that the royal law (you have to love your neighbor as yourself) and if you actually discriminate the poor and have exhibited cold indifference to their plight then what you are doing is actually you are actually breaking the law.

Corinthians 8:13-14

**13** For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness

**14** your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.

He applies this based on the royal law; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. He is not asking you to make the poor rich, so that you become poor. Jesus is saying there is some equality. We break the royal law by indifference.

1. **We cannot pick and choose which laws to obey**

James 2:10-11

**10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

**11** For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

So therefore the law is indivisible. All parts of equal to the whole. We break one, like a chain the whole chain falls apart. So therefore you cannot have one side where we operate on the hierarchy of laws, we do not like adultery but it is okay to be indifferent to the poor, it is okay to be chain to money in greed. So there are certain sins which we consider not so bad. We want to be a good sinner. A good sinner is the one who do stuffy that people cannot see. A bad sinner is the one who do stuff that people can see. So we cannot have a hierarchy of laws. The law is indivisible, breaking of one breaks all.

1. **How we treat the poor is a life and death matter**

James 2:12-13

**12** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

**13** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

It is a bit cryptic here. What it means that we are to be judged under the law. We have to live lives according to mercy.

For example, how we live our lives today is reflected of what we have in our DNA, what we believe. China has the second largest number of billionaires in the world today, but in terms of giving to philanthropy China ranks 128. How they live actually reflects their values.

Fan Jianchuan is dedicated to philanthropy but his philanthropy is gained from real estate. He spends all his money building museums all over a town called Anjen and he has built 20 museums. How he lives and spends his money is a reflection of his believes and reflective of what to happen in the afterlife. He says, “*People die twice. Once physically, and a second time when they die from people’s memories”.* So he is creating museums to be remembered by the people, he can put his name there, Fan Jianchuan Museum. How people spend their money will be dependent on what they think of the afterlife.

Jonathan Edwards said, “*It is not a just a small duty, but a great duty — and even heaven and hell lie in the balance with how we respond to the poor*”

It is actually an indicative of whether we are spiritually alive or dead.

Matthew 25 indicates that when Jesus will come again he will separate sheep and goats.

Matthew 25:41-43

**41** “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

**42** For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

**43** I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me

Jesus will never ask whether we are Calvinist, Armenian or Baptist, what he asked was the bottom-line because merciless judgment on those without mercy. If we have no mercy then we will be judged without mercy. People produce fruit but fruit is evidence of a life lived but does not give life itself; we do not do good words in order to gain eternal life. The fruit is just indicative of the life that you have inside.

It is actually a reflection of what kind of person we are. If you are transformed by the blood of Jesus Christ, you are liberated by His grace then you will live like that. You will take your money and your money will reflect where you are in life. If you think you will live in people’s memory then you build museums. If you think you will live forever in houses then you buy more houses. So fruit is evidence of life but it does not give life itself.

1. **How we treat the poor is a function of our faith**

James 2:14-17

**14** What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

**15** If a brother or sister is **poorly clothed and lacking in daily food**,

**16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

**17** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

How we respond to the poor is indicative of our faith.

Patrick Rooney, associate dean at the Indiana University School of Philanthropy, he writes, “*wealthy people who live in socio-economically diverse neighborhoods (e.g., in downtown areas and cities) are more generous than comparably wealthy individuals who live in homogeneous wealthy areas”*

So basically if you live among the poor or different people it actually makes the changes your lifestyle. So that is why James says in

James 1:27

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world

Susan Fiske says, “*The good news is that this brain region comes back online with what I consider the soup-kitchen manipulation: when you ask people to imagine what vegetables the homeless guy might eat”*

Imagine what a poor fellow will have for dinner tonight. The moment we start imagining what he have for dinner tonight we begin to show empathy and that area of the brain starts to light up. We just need to be in contact with the poor, it will change your life.

Bill Gates visited a TB hospital in Africa. He saw the way appallingly horrible way in which they live and he said these words, *“Being in a TB hospital is equivalent to a death sentence”* and from that day onwards because he went down to the poor it changed him inside and he dedicated most of his wealth to Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation where they actually give lots of money to change because of his own outlook.

We are all equal in God’s eye and in that way the poor have the same dignity as a rich. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We are rich and faith and heirs of kingdom together. We need to learn to treat each other with dignity, compassion and honor because in that way we love each other as our neighbor.