

The Perils of Prejudice

by Steve Mays

The sermon emphasizes the importance of overcoming prejudice and treating people equally, as this reflects the character of God and allows us to share the love of Christ with everyone.

Duration: 31:42

Scripture: Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11, Romans 3:23, Galatians 2:6, James 2:1, James 2:4-5

Topics: "Prejudice"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Steve Mays discusses the perils of prejudice and the importance of looking past cultural differences and seeing people as valuable treasures. He emphasizes that as Christians, we are called to love and accept all people, regardless of their appearance or background. Pastor Mays shares a story about Mahatma Gandhi's experience with prejudice in a church, highlighting the missed opportunity for the church to share the love of Christ. He then turns to the book of James, where James encourages believers to treat all people equally and not show favoritism based on outward appearances. The sermon concludes with a reminder that as Christians, we are called to build, share, and be witnesses of the love of Christ, and that prejudice has no place in the church.

Transcript

It's the 2012 Summer of Sermons with Steve Mays. Today, on Light of the Word, Pastor Steve Mays talks about the perils of prejudice. You're called to build, and you're called to share, and you're called to be a witness of the love of Christ.

And if you are prejudiced, if you don't like color, if you don't like sizes, if you don't like the way people look or dress, then you need to reevaluate Christianity. In the church, it's not culture, it's Christ. Light of the Word, Light of the Word, Hope shines in darkness, so follow the Light of the Word.

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his days as a student, he read the Gospels and considered converting to Christianity. So one Sunday, he decided to attend a service at a nearby church, and maybe chat with the minister about becoming a Christian. But when he entered the church, the usher refused to give him a seat, suggesting that he go worship with his own people.

Wow, opportunity lost. Today, on Light of the Word, Pastor Steve Mays takes us to the book of James, where we're encouraged to look past culture, color, and class, and see people the way God sees them, as valuable treasures. It's good insight from Pastor Steve's series on Practical Christianity.

Let's get into Pastor Steve's lesson called, The Perils of Prejudice. Shall we turn in our Bibles to James chapter 2, James chapter 2. James is the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ. During his life, he lived and watched everything that Christ did, but never really believed.

It wasn't until after the resurrection that James came to a saving faith in Christ. And the very one that he had as a half-brother was the Savior of the world. So when you look at the book of James, it's kind of interesting to me that it really has to deal more with ethics than with anything else.

He understands the importance of character, but he wants conduct. He sees the importance of belief, but he's looking for behavior. So James now comes before us this morning, and he is basically saying, let me show you how you can prove that you're born again spirit-filled by the way you treat people.

And if you are prejudiced, if you don't like color, if you don't like sizes, if you don't like the way people look or dress, then you need to re-evaluate Christianity. Because true Christianity is a Christianity that Christ died, that all cultures would be able to get to. Christ never came and dealt with culture.

He came to bring the cross and Christ. I think it's more important that we learn to bring Christ into our heart, and then we go back to the culture that we're part of, and we begin to share Christ. And every culture is a mess, and every culture has its problems.

And the reason why? We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So when we come together, especially in the house of God, and people begin to look and kind of evaluate and kind of look around, James is saying, be careful. And so we pick up the very thought in verses 1 through 5, and then I want to focus in on one thought this morning, the Lord of Glory.

He says in chapter 2, verse 1, My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, underline that, the Lord of Glory, with respect of persons, kind of interesting, one or the other. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, and there come in also a poor man in vile or humble clothing, and you have respect to him that weareth a happy clothing, say unto him, Set thou here in a good place. And say to the poor, Stand thou there, or set here under my footstool.

Listen to verse 4 very carefully. Are ye not then partial in yourself, and are become judges of evil thoughts? In other words, we can't really discern what goes on in the heart. Hearken, my brethren.

And here's the key, I believe. Has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to them that love him? The key, I believe, is that God chooses people. And when God chooses people, the worst thing that the church could ever do is begin to say, No, we don't accept you.

So as long as they are people, then I need to have a heart of a shepherd. And so God is going to send people into my life. There are going to be moments, we read in the Bible, that some have even entertained angels unaware.

You're going to be driving down the street and see that person, and you're going to think, Oh man, do they need to lose weight? You're going to go down and see somebody and think, Oh boy, boy, I'm glad I don't look like them. And the problem I have with that thinking is that it could be you. And it probably is you.

Because on the outside, they might have this problem. But inside, they might be singing their heart for God. On the outside, you might be really thin.

But inside, you might have a big ugly heart. So who am I to begin to point or to judge or to take advantage? And I find it interesting that when you look at the world in which we live, how many things have been destroyed? Mark Twain said it pretty well, Prejudice is the ink with which all history is written. It has destroyed more nations.

It has shaped more personalities. It has robbed more friendships. And it has divided more churches.

Because I really can't trust you. Why? Because you're white, or I'm black, or you're Chinese, or you know, you're Chinese, I'll drive. And all of a sudden, well wait, a time out.

Why are you saying that? And the moment you do that, you're in trouble. Is that saying that my culture doesn't get in wrecks? Or does that say that your culture is blameless? There are certain things about all of us. And I know this one thing.

All of us have come short of the glory of God. So when you begin to look at people, or evaluate people, or size people up, I believe at that time, your ministry begins to unwind. And God begins to look for someone else that doesn't see color, or shape, or anything else.

It was Peter, you remember vividly, that was used in the council there in Acts chapter 15, along with James. And he went back, and he began to eat with the Gentiles, and probably having hot dogs, who knows. Having a wonderful time.

But when he saw these men coming from Jerusalem, he jumped over to another table. It was a table filled with Jews. And Paul picked up on it.

And Paul said, Peter, come here. I rebuke you in the name of the Lord. Because what you've done, is you are destroying the very thing you made a stand for.

You made a stand in front of the church that you were going to love people because of Jesus Christ. Now you are eating with the Gentiles, and all of a sudden, because of who you are, you think you don't want to have a problem, so you're going to violate your conviction, move away from what God's told you to do, and you're going to try to please men. And I believe, it's kind of interesting, that Paul now picks up Peter's ministry.

And I wonder how many times someone is taken out because they're no longer to love other people. They're beginning to feel that their success or their commitment is far above the Lord Jesus Christ. I read an interesting letter, just imagine a letter, that could have been written if Jesus had chosen the first disciples the way we do today.

How we love to test and retest people to determine their leadership qualification. And imagine if Jesus wrote this letter, let's say to Jordan Management Consultant Board. I would like your input on 12 men I'm about ready to hire or employ for the Woodcrafters Carpenter Shop, signed Jesus of Nazareth.

A month later, the response comes back from the management board. Dear Jesus, thank you for submitting the resume of the 12 men you have picked for key leadership positions in your new organization. All of them have now been taken through a battery of tests, and we have even run them through our computers.

It is the staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in many different areas. They lack educational skills, leadership ability, for the type of enterprise you are about ready to take over. They do not have a team concept.

We would suggest that you continue in your search, hoping to find what you need. Simon Peter is emotional, unstable, and given to fits of anger. Andrew is no leadership skills, and he never talks.

The two brothers, James and John, place personal interest above the company's loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that causes an insurrection and undermines a team spirit. We feel that it is our duty to inform you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau for being a tax collector.

James, the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus, leans heavily towards racial and social disobedience. One and one only of your candidates show great potential. He is a man of ability, resourcefulness, who meets the people well, has keen business mind, he has contacts in high places, and is highly motivated.

He's ambitious and he's responsible. We recommend that you would keep Judas Iscariot. You see, God goes after the heart.

And there were moments when the Lord saw you. And there were times in your life that no one ever wanted to do anything with you. But God looks on the heart.

David was now about ready to be king. Samuel was going to have to find this young man. And on his way, and as he was looking, God spoke to him, 1 Samuel 16 verse 7, But the Lord said to Samuel, Look not on his countenance, because I have refused him, for the Lord seeth not his man.

God looks on the inward, not the outward. And then you remember in Matthew 22 verse 16, And they sent out unto him their disciples from the Herodians, saying, Master of Jesus, we know that thou art true and a teacher of God's ways. Neither care thou for any man.

Listen what the world is saying about Jesus. And we know that you don't care about any man. For thou regardeth not the person of men.

So the world knew that he was willing to eat with the publicans. He was willing to look at Zacchaeus and bring him down a tree. He was willing to take Matthew out of this horrible situation.

He was able to take Peter and do a work in his life and make him a rock down the road. Peter later on when he was preaching, he said in Acts chapter 10 verse 34, Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of person. And then Paul picks up the very same thought in Romans 2.11, For there is no respecter of person with God.

And I like what Paul said in Galatians 2.6, But of these whom seem to be somewhat. I like that. You guys think you're somewhat.

Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter. God accepts no person. So the first thing I understand about the God that I serve is that we all are in the same boat.

The possibility of God reaching me. And you have to remember, I was one of those in 1970 with my hair down to my waist, earrings, a goatee, and I weighed 130 pounds. I hadn't taken a bath in two months.

I was sleeping in the gutter, had a bullet through my leg, and I was empty and lonely. And the night before, I remember saying, God, if you are real, I need help. And I went to bed between a curb and between the car.

And the next morning, this couple, Henry and Shirley, they came out, and they were on their way to go to Costa Mesa. And they walked up to get in their car, and guess what? There I was. I was a mess.

Hadn't taken a bath in two months. Hadn't brushed my teeth in two months. I was a mess.

Plus, I had my biking boots on. I was mean, angry, nasty. But they said, would you like to come in? And I thought, yes.

Would you like to take a shower? Yes. Do you want some food? Yes. Would you like to go to... I'll go anywhere with you.

I'll go anywhere. Does it make a difference? And so they took me to Costa Mesa. And I remember walking down the carpet with my bare feet and sitting right on the carpet looking at Pastor Chuck.

And he had a big old smile. And it was the day that Christ came into my heart. Here I am now.

Ministry. God's blessing. Someone comes.

Oh, keep an eye on that guy. We don't like him. I believe that God would take me out.

I believe that God would find somebody that doesn't see color. Doesn't see what people go through. They would see opportunity.

They would be faithful to the call of God upon their life. And I find it so impressive that the Lord is not impressed with the things that we think He's impressed with. He was not impressed with Peter trying to counsel Jesus from not going to the cross.

But He was impressed with the brokenness of Peter's heart. So on the day of the resurrection, Jesus said, where's Peter? I've got to find Peter. And Jesus was not impressed with the scribes and Pharisees with their giving.

But He was impressed with the widow that gave her two mites because she gave it from her heart. And He wasn't impressed with so many things. But He was impressed with total humility.

And sometimes we forget the calling of God upon our life. We are to be willing to go anywhere, do anything, and minister to anything in our life. And the word favoritism comes from two Greek words.

One, it means to face. And the second one, it means to hold out. So in other words, you're looking at the face.

You're evaluating the face. You're trying to see that this person is going to be perfect. And so you go after CEOs that are six foot.

So if you're under six foot, you better own the company. We have a standard in this world that you have to be good looking and you have to be able to articulate and do all these things to be successful. Well, I want to share with you that's not true in God's kingdom.

He chooses the foolish things of the world. The other night, I was able to go with Dr. Park and speak at Azusa Pacific along with Dr. Chung. And all these people there, 38 of them, scholars, scholars, they had no idea that I was a hippie.

And I'm thinking, why am I here in this room? But then the Lord brought me back to this one verse, but God chose you. And so when I stood there, I didn't have to try to entertain them or try to win them. I just had to share Jesus Christ.

And this is what I don't like about culture. This is what I don't like about, well, I'm black and you're white and you're Hispanic, and all of a sudden, well, we don't want to really get involved here. Is this your home? Yes.

Then you need to get involved. In other words, nothing should govern your life except Jesus Christ. So when you look at somebody, well, I don't trust you because you're black.

Well, I don't trust you because you're white. Well, I don't trust you because you're Chinese. That is from the pit of hell.

You shouldn't trust anybody because they're all sinners saved by grace. And I like what Vernon McGee said, everyone has a wicked heart until proven otherwise. And the Bible says in your best day, you're not going to please God.

But the thing that you need to look at is the transformation of a person. And when a person says, no, I don't want that type here, that's a problem. Because you're called to build.

And you're called to share. And you're called to be a witness of the love of Christ. Kind of an interesting thing I read the other day and it just was so fascinating.

It was about a man named Raymond Edmund. He was the president of Wheaton College. And he jotted this down, but very powerful.

In 1923, there were a group of financial people that came together. Listen to me very carefully. There was a president of a steel company, a president of the utility company, a president of a wheat company, a president of the New York Exchange, a president of a bank internationally, and a president of Wall Street.

The most powerful men. And we would covet to be there. But let me tell you something.

Later on, let me tell you what happened to these men. Charles Squab went broke. He had to borrow money to live the rest of his life.

It says of Arthur Cuttlet, who was a wheat man, went broke. Richard Whitney in the New York Stocks, he went to jail. Albert Fall, the president of the cabinet, he went to jail.

Leonard Fresner, the bank international, he committed suicide. And Ivan Crager, the Wall Street man, he committed suicide. So out of all these men, either they died in prison, or they died broke, or they committed suicide.

So what does it tell me? It tells me I didn't do my job. I was impressed with what they were. I had an opportunity to share Christ with them.

But I was overwhelmed at the power of these men. And I want to challenge you. It doesn't make a difference who you are, what's happened in your life.

If God has given the Word, you speak it. Holding forth the Word of Life that we have not run in vain. And notice what he says in the key.

I wanted to share this here in verse 1. My brethren, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, you never treat people that way. And that's it. The Lord of Glory.

Deuteronomy 10, verse 17. For the Lord your God is a God of gods, the Lord of hosts, a great God, a mighty and terrible, which regardeth not the person of men. So let's talk about this before I let you go.

Who is the most powerful man that you know? Jesus Christ. Who is the most powerful God that you have ever come to see? Jesus Christ. How did He live His life? He humbled Himself.

He yielded His life. He walked among the broken, hung out at Mary and Martha and Lazarus' house. He walked down the road with these two discouraged disciples on that dusty road, which tells me a whole bunch about my God.

He went after a man named Peter who had just cursed Him and denied Him. But He believed in Peter with all of His heart. He went after John who wanted to call down fire from heaven.

And you know the incredible thing? When they said, Jesus, don't go into Samaria, there are half-breeds, guess where Jesus was? Right there. And a woman that would not even be talked to, He was right there because He had an answer for her. And when the disciples came back, Jesus said, I have meat that you don't know of.

And I think that's the church. I think when you walk into a mall, you don't look around at who's here or who's not here. You ask God to help you run into somebody and share Christ.

You all of a sudden walk in and someone helps you, you don't look at their color. You ask God to show the heart and maybe God needs to minister to their heart. If I'm seeing color and I'm seeing culture, I need to really evaluate this Christianity.

Because Jesus Christ bridges everyone. There is no Greek or bond-free, Scythian. It's all gone.

And so we have these kind of little clicks. Gone. We have this little power plate.

Gone. The One that I need to come to is the Lord of glory. And here's my counsel.

When I don't see Him as the Lord of glory, I have to have a click. And when I don't see Him as the Lord of glory, I have to see color. Because I'm back in my culture and back hoping people do things for me and I want to politically do everything right.

But when He becomes the glory of my life and I know that He took me out of the gutter and put my feet upon the rock, then I want to be a message and a messenger. I want to run and it doesn't make a difference. I was asked to teach over at Ron Hills.

All black church. And all of a sudden they just go for it. But I grew up in that kind of a church.

And then all of a sudden I ended up in a Hispanic church and it was all Hispanic. And I figured, okay, now do I need to look Spanish? No. And I think that when you try to look Spanish or look black, it reminds me of when I was in Nigeria.

I was asked to go to Nigerian. I had no business going to Nigeria a week after 9-11. But I kept my commitment.

We landed in Lagos. Went way too far up north. Way up north.

We're in a Muslim hotel. We're in a Muslim city. And you know the story? The guide got lost.

We're going down this street. I'm praying, Jesus, tint these windows, God. You know? There's only two white people among 1.2 million blacks and I'm one of them right now.

And we got stuck at this dead end. And for the first time of my life, I understood what was the plight of a black man and black woman. They looked at me and I felt just fear.

And this is what I prayed before God. God, make me black in Jesus' name now. Make me black.

And so I got done praying. Oh God, you can do it. You made that happen.

Make me black. Well, he didn't want to make me black. He wanted me to understand that God hasn't given me what? The spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

So I had to teach that night out in public. I'm saying, oh Jesus, if the Nigerian Gideons won't go out and you want me to go out, I'll go. But is this a good idea? The only time in my ministry I ever questioned.

And so I said, God, send the angels. Please send angels. And I knew that I was afraid.

I wasn't going to lie because I wasn't black. And I wanted to be black. And I was white and I was afraid.

So here I am, teaching and doing the best I can and looking around and the Lord just spoke to me and said, Stephen, what's all this fear? I don't want to die. Stephen, did I send you? I know you sent me here to die. Stephen, yes.

Right in the middle of my Bible study. And it was like, do you trust me? Yes, I do trust you. And this is what God said.

I didn't bring you over here to help them. I brought you over here to show you what's in your heart. You're afraid.

And at that moment, I looked up and I saw these guns coming in. There are six of them, M16s. And right in front of those guns was the deputy general of Nigeria.

And he hopped up on stage. Right behind me. And he nodded.

Keep teaching. And I thought, well, these are angels with M16s. This is fine.

This is okay. I like these. I have angels.

But then the next day, I went out in church in the street and just taught. It was going. And the great lesson I learned is that we always are going to have to deal with this issue.

It's part of the way we were brought up. It's part of the stigma of being a human being. But it divides friendships.

It destroys churches. It ruins personalities. It ruins children.

And so, in the church, it's not culture. It's Christ. And Jesus came.

And He died there in Isaiah 53. And He was broken. But His message, you remember in Luke chapter 4, was to the brokenhearted.

And then, He looks for broken people. And He says, But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.

And the base things of the world and the things which are despised has God chosen, yea, the things which are not to bring to naught the things that are. Why would God do that? For one reason and one reason only. That no flesh would take credit.

When God picked me up and put me here, I cannot take any credit. When I walk into a place, or you walk into a place, what James is trying to tell you, you want to understand Christianity? Oh man, I love God. I worship.

Listen. And you walk into a congregation, you look around. I don't want to sit next to that person.

You better really check if you have the right Jesus. Because the right Jesus would put their arm around that person. Oh, they might have AIDS.

Well so, is God not big enough that you can love? Is God not wise enough to put two people together? So as a church, whatever culture you are, rise. And take over. In the name of the Lord.

And the question is, if God chooses failures, and He chose me, how dare I look into my God's eyes, the God of glory, and judge Him? At that moment, I'm done. And He'll find somebody who loves people. That's Pastor Steve Mays talking about the perils of prejudice today on Light of the Word.

Good insight from one of Pastor Steve's most requested messages. And it's originally part of a series that's been a tremendous blessing to a lot of folks in our listening audience. In the set called Practical Christianity, Steve paints a portrait of a mature Christian.

By examining God's Word, he reveals that our everyday actions ought to show the world just what a Christian is. Some of the other titles include the marks of maturity, the tongue, the war inside. How important is it that Christ shows forth in our daily routines? Let Practical Christianity teach you important reasons for Christian maturity, along with some steps that you can take to help this process along.

Today's lesson is just part of the helpful insight you'll find in the series called Practical Christianity. Get all the details on this ten-part set when you dial 1-800-339-WISE. That's 800-339-WISE.

It's also there at our website, lightoftheword.org. That's lightoftheword.org. And when you go to that site, find out how you can get the daily podcast of Light of the Word. You're really going to enjoy it. Well, that's a wrap on SOS 2012.

We hope it's been a real blessing in your life. God bless. Light of the Word Light of the Word Hope shines in darkness So follow the light of the Word

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