



# OVERCOMING ELITISM

*"1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. 2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; 3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: 4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? 5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? 6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? 7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? 8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: 9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. 10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."*

- James 2:1-13

# Overcoming Elitism

I want you to follow me as I read James 2:1-13, “My brethren do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring dressed in fine clothes and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes and say you sit here in a good place and you say to the poor man you stand over there or sit down by my footstool. Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brethren. Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him, but you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you've been called? If however you are fulfilling the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing well. But if you show partiality you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whosoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles in one point he is guilty of all. For he who said do not commit adultery also said do not commit murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder you become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to the one who shows no mercy.”

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Mahatma Gandhi of India tells in his autobiography about an incident that occurred in his life. He became enamored as a college student concerning the teachings of Jesus Christ. He lived in a society with a caste system. If you were born in the upper class you got to stay there. If you were born in the lower class you were locked in there. He was born into a system that separated people and locked them in to their status. But when he heard of the teachings of Jesus he thought that maybe this Christianity is the answer to India's caste system. So he became desirous to know more about being a Christian.

So, for the first time he made his way to a Christian church to hear more about the teachings of Jesus. When he walked into the door of the church, he was met by an usher. The usher said to him, excuse me, sir, but you can't worship here. You need to go worship with your own kind. Mahatma Gandhi turned around and walked out and he never dawned the door of a Christian church ever again. And his rationale was real simple.

He said if there is a caste system in the church and if there is a caste system in Christianity, then I might as well stay a Hindu. And that became the basis of his movement as a Hindu not pursuing Christianity. He ran into the wrong church, and he came in contact with the wrong usher.

It is a mindset that uses illegitimate criteria by which to judge people. It judges people based on false conclusions and ungodly perspectives making some superior treating others inferior. Elitism comes in a lot of different shapes, sizes, and forms.

There is racial elitism. Hitler had the master race creating in the minds of German people, we are the superior people and because he lifted them up in their thinking and the superiority that he felt belonged to the nation of Germany, he could feel comfortable in the Third Reich to slaughter six million Jews because they were the scum of the earth. They were inferior because we were so superior.

We were the elite. We all know we've seen it in America. In American slavery and what came to be known as manifest destiny that one group of people were recognized by God to be superior and therefore it became legitimate to hold another group of people hostage in illegitimate slavery and to do it based on skin color and to do it based on race.

In fact, laws would be passed that those folks brought from Africa would not be even recognized as fully human in many southern states so that equality would not even have to be addressed man to man, human to human. It's a biblical issue. The Jews called the Samaritan dogs. They were beneath our feet because we were the chosen people. It happened in Numbers chapter 12. When Moses married an Ethiopian woman, he married a black woman.

It was an interracial marriage and Miriam, his sister, and Aaron, his brother, went off in condemnation. How can you marry her? Don't you know who we are? We're here. She's there.

It happened with Peter in Galatians chapter 2. When he disassociated with the Gentiles so as not to upset his Jewish brethren who had shown up who viewed the Gentiles as less than their

philosophy words, we need to live with them in heaven, but that don't mean we need to eat with them on earth. Elitism produces segregation and inequity. There is cultural elitism.

I was raised on this side of town and you were raised on that side of town. I was raised prim and proper. You were raised sort of in the underclass and so because of how I was raised and how you were not raised, I'm better than you. My community, my culture, it's better than you because we're sophisticated. You're not. There is educational elitism.

I've got a BA, an MA, a PhD. You've got a high school diploma. We're not equal. I'm superior to you. Look at the degree I have on my wall. Where are your degrees? I'm superior.

You're inferior. There's legalistic elitism. In other words, I have preferences, and you have other preferences, and my preferences are better than your preferences.

So, I must be better than you because I got my list, and your list is shorter than my list. So, I must be more committed than you because I have more rules to follow than you're willing to follow. Even though God said don't judge one another based on preferences, we do.

And then there is the elitism he discusses here in James 2. Class elitism. This is elitism that's based on dollars and cents. It's financial elitism. I have money, you don't. I'm rich, you're poor. So, because my bank account is better than your bank account, I'm better than you.

So, he paints a picture in James 2 of two men who decide to go to church. It says one man in verse 2 is rich. The word rich in the Bible means to have an abundance, more than enough to meet needs.

Now riches can occur at various levels, but it means to have an abundance. So one man comes into the church, verse 2 says, and he's got some money, honey. And it's clear the man has got some money without even looking at his bank account.

You're just looking at his wardrobe. It's clear this guy shops at Neiman Marcus. It's clear that this guy knows where the upscale clothes are, and his jewelry is not fake.

Because James says my boy came in with a gold ring. It is clear if we can get this guy to join church, our offerings are going to go up. And so, because first impressions imply that this man can do something for you, has some clout in the community, recognition because he has money because he's rich. You give him a great seat. You seat him up front. You put him in a special place where the rich folks sit.

He says, but now a second man comes to church. And it is clear from looking at him, he's struggling. This man is poor, not able to meet his needs. We're not talking about a lazy person. We're not talking about sluggishness. He just says the man is poor. His clothes, his clothes have come from goodwill. His clothes let you know this guy doesn't have much going for him. He, he can't help us.

When the offering plate is passed, we're fortunate if he puts anything in it because it is clear this man can benefit this ministry. And he says when the ushers met them at the door, they immediately made a value judgment. Please notice, the discussion is not about the rich man or the poor man.

The discussion is about the church members who seated him. In the Bible, there is no condemnation for being rich in and of itself. None.

In fact, the Bible says if you've earned it properly, ethically, and you use it rightly and righteously, then the Bible even tells you in first Timothy chapter six verses 17 to 19, you are free to enjoy it. As long as you are enjoying it, you do good works with it. You, you, you use the abundance that God has given you to enjoy and to be a blessing to others.

In fact, the Bible says in Deuteronomy 8, 18, it is God who gives you the power to make wealth. So, if you're wealthy, you know, and it's legitimate and your spiritual priorities are intact, you don't have to apologize. You don't have to be ashamed of that.

On the other side, everybody's not rich and some are poor. Some people live their lives trying to make ends meet. Now, I know that can be done through irresponsibility, but it also can be done by good people doing the best they can, and they can never rise above a certain income level due to circumstances, sickness, or changes in the economy.

Can be any number of factors, but the reality is he's poor. Please notice, both the rich man and the poor man come to the same church. They come to the same church. The church will let both in, they just won't seat them in the same section. The rich man is escorted to his place of honor. The poor man is told to stand over against the wall or sit on the floor because your external economic status will control how the church treats you.

That is elitism. That is making some superior by an external illegitimate standard and some inferior because they don't meet that proposed standard because they don't have the same economic base. The pharisees were some of the most elitist people in Jesus's day.

In Matthew 23, verses 1 to 12, he talks about and condemns the pharisees who love to sit in the place of honor. Who when they walk in, wants to know where are you going to put me? Where are you going to put me? You don't put me in the back even though I came in an hour late. You don't sit me in the back. No, no. The poor man may have come in early, but I come in late. But do you know who I am?

James is an in-your-face apostle, and he wants to deal with classism, culturalism, racism, and all the other isms that create a elite mentality. Now before we go on, because this is getting ready to get deeper, God is not against the rich and he certainly is not against the poor.

He's defending the poor here. He's not against you being productive, but he's against the spirit operating in his church where people are made to illegitimately feel bigger, better and badder than other folk for illegitimate criteria. He says, how do you hold, verse 1, your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ with personal favoritism? I love the Lord, but I'm going to make illegitimate distinctions among his children, whether based on race or class or culture.

Now that leads him to discuss the miscalculation that an elitist person has or that people who are treating people as elitist have. Now the Bible does say, give honor to whom honor is due. So, the Bible does talk about respecting leaders, respecting authorities, respecting, you know, officials.

The Bible does say to give honor, but to give honor is not the same as being elite because elite raises up and uses that to push down. So, he says, you've been making illegitimate judges, verse 4, and then he says, listen, pay attention. My beloved brethren, so these are

Christians doing this, did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him? He says, to be an elitist is stupid, stupid.

He says, you don't get it. Did not God choose the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom? So, you just discriminated against somebody who God has a special relationship with. First Corinthians chapter 1, verses 26 and 27, Paul told the Corinthians, look out there among you, not many wise, not many mighty, God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the wise and the mighty.

Okay, so let me explain something. He says, you have discriminated against somebody who God has made, number one, rich in faith. When you have money, you don't feel the need naturally for faith, because you can pay cash.

You got an expense allowance, you got, you're rolling, you got it in the bank, you got a credit card limit, and you don't have to trust God because you can pay for it, even though you may only be one check away from change of status. Right now, you are right. And so, I had to trust God for my food, I got a freezer.

I had to trust God for my wardrobe, I got a couple of closets. I have to trust God for my transportation. I got two cars, three cars.

I don't have to have faith in that kind of stuff because I can pay for it. However, there will be times in your life when you will face issues you can't buy your way out of. There will be times in your life when you will face problems where your clout, popularity, folk you know, influence won't be able to resolve it for you.

You will face times in your life where if God doesn't intervene in this situation, you are done. You're going to need the supernatural.

But the problem will be that because you've never learned to live by faith, you've never learned how to access heaven when earth has fallen apart for you. But God says there's a group of folks who not only have faith, but have a bank account full of it. He calls it being rich in faith.

How do you get rich in faith? You get rich in faith by having to use it so much that your bank account gets full of it. And see, the poor who love the Lord, he says, have to exercise faith all the time. They got to trust God for their daily bread, not their yearly bread.

They got to pray and ask God to help this car not to break down on my way to work. I just get me that I'm just trusting you. They've got to believe God just to make it another day because if God doesn't come through for them, they don't know how they're going to eat, how they're going to take care of their kids, how they're going to make it.

And so, by practice, because of life circumstances, they become faith pros. Now here it is. When you're rich in something, you have an abundance.

Remember, the rich man has an abundance. He has an abundance of money. The poor person does not have an abundance of money, but they have something you can borrow.

See, if you're rich and I need something and you're willing to share it, then I can come to borrow some money from you. But when you face something money can't fix, you better know somebody who's got some faith you can borrow. He says the poor are rich in faith, which means you can borrow, but if you don't know any and you don't want to associate with any, because you sediti, you up here and their down there, when you reach your crisis, you will have no one to borrow from who can get to God in ways you can't get to God, because you've never had to get to God at that level.

You better find some poor folk who love God and who learn how to trust God every day, ongoing, day in and day out. You better know them and you better welcome them. That's why the Bible says associate with the lowly. Why? Because God has endowed them with an ability to trust him that a lot of people who have an abundance don't possess. And one of the reasons many people who are not seeing the hand of God in their lives is they're rich in money and poor in faith. They're faith paupers.

But not only that, he says the reason why you should not be an elitist and discriminatory with personal favoritism and partiality is because the poor are heirs of the kingdom. These are the



poor who are rich in faith and who love God. So, it's not just economics. They have a spiritual wealth to them. He says they are heirs to the kingdom. Okay, now pay attention here.

There are many poor who love God who God will never let out of poverty. They will spend all of their lives eking out a living. Many of your grandmothers and grandfathers died not having seen this world's wealth. Maybe it was due to segregation. Maybe it was due to inferior education. Maybe it was due to lack of opportunity. They went to church. They loved God, but they didn't have a lot to leave you in the will. Not because they wouldn't have. If they had it, they just couldn't. I mean, we're doing much better than our grandparents because they opened doors for us that many of us have taken advantage of. But many of them, in spite of going to church, never had much of this world's good.

See, unless you understand God, all you'll see is unfair. Not so. He says, let me tell you about the poor.

The poor who are rich in faith and who love me, I have made heirs to the kingdom. Which means I have decided to hold back on what I'm going to give them in time and give it all to them in eternity. When they enter the kingdom, I have decided for those poor who are rich in faith to hold on.

I'm not going to let you get so far. You're never going to become wealthy. You're never going to be okay. But I got something. When you come to meet me and I read my will to you and you see that in the kingdom you're going to be mega millionaires, okay? So, watch this. You better watch how you treat that poor brother or sister driving a raggedy car, living in a shanty, who doesn't have much to say.

Because when you enter the kingdom, tables will be turned. God's going to flip that thing over. You may be living in Highland Park now. You may be living in Bentree now. They may be living in West Dallas or South Dallas now. But if they love God and are rich in faith, God, when they enter the kingdom, is going to flip that roll.

They're going to be like the Jeffersons moving up to the east side. And many of you will be moving down because of your elitism, your lack of faith, your lack of love for God, and he's going to flip the script. He's going to change that thing.

And one of the things he's going to use to change it is how you relate it to people who the world says are less than you. What is killing the church of Jesus Christ today is elitism. Where people are illegitimately separated, segmented, based on race, culture, class, education, or whatever form of elitism that makes some higher and others lower based on illegitimate criteria.

I'm not talking about legitimate criteria, like a man who won't work, or legitimate criteria, a person whose character is suspect, but legitimate because they're rich in faith. They love the Lord. These are legitimate poor.

So, when you look at the past and you see where God didn't deliver your grandmother or your grandfather, you have to understand there is the rest of the story. And that is heirs in the kingdom. So, if you're here today and you feel like you're losing out on life, but you're rich in faith and you love the Lord, He's letting you eat by, but He's never given you this surplus, this abundance that rich have, that you got, this is not the whole story.

There is another part of that story. But I want to say to those of you who are making it, those of us who are doing well, I want you to understand this. You better hook up with somebody who can believe God when all hell breaks loose in your life.

And the doctor says you have cancer and there's nothing else that they can do, or there's a big collapse in your world. You better hook up with somebody who can get God when you can't. And that won't necessarily be the person with the degree. They won't necessarily be the person living on the hill. They won't necessarily be the person with the new car. They won't necessarily be the person who's the power broker in the society.

That's somebody who knows what it's like for God to come through at the last minute so that they can have a meal on the table. Oh, but it gets deeper. He says, you've miscalculated. You've let personal success block you seeing spiritual success. He says, it's the non-Christian elite that's dragging you into court.

That's what he says. He says, it's the non-Christian elite who dishonor you, who oppress you, verse 6. Look, folks, the poor people aren't the one taking you to court to stop talking about Jesus. It's the people that's graduated from college.

It's the folk with money. It's the lawyers. It's the philosophy professors. It's the college folk who are denying God. You ain't going to go to South Dallas and just run up on a whole bunch of atheists. You got to go to college to become an atheist. You got to be educated in the atheism. You ain't going to find that. The rich were dragging the Christians to court.

It's the unrighteous elite that are trying to get prayer out of school. They aren't poor folk trying to get prayer out of school and prayer before football games cut off. It's not the poor doing that.

He says, it's the rich that are causing your faith to be compromised. And you giving them all the attention and the credit. He says, you miscalculated this thing.

Reminds me of the story of the Pope. The Pope had to speak to the United Nations. The Pope had to speak to the United Nations.

And when the Pope landed his plane to go to the United Nations, he was picked up in a limousine. The limousine driver opened the door for the Pope. The Pope got in the back.

The limousine driver began to drive the Pope to the UN to speak to the United Nations. But the limousine driver was going the speed limit and traffic was backed up. And the Pope was getting nervous because he wasn't sure he was going to make it on time.

And that's a strict schedule. And so the Pope asked the limousine driver, can't you hurry up? Can't you drive fast? He says, well, I'm going as fast as I can and the traffic and all of this. And I don't want to get a ticket to delay us further.

The Pope is now getting frustrated because he's running late. He's got to speak to the UN. He tells the driver, pull over the car, pull over the car, pull over the car.

The guy obeyed. He pulled over the car. He said, you get out and get in the back.

The man got out, got in the back. Pope got behind the wheel. Pope started driving like a wild man, turning corners on two wheels.

I mean, Pope is just going crazy. Because he got to get there. He got to speak to the UN.

Pope's just going crazy. He's just going fast and running red lights and all that kind of stuff. He's finally getting close to the UN when a police car sees this wild car driving.

The police car turns the lights on and pulls the car over. One of the policemen get out of the car and walk over, knock on the window, telling the driver to wind the window down. He winds the window down and the policeman looks into the car and he just turns around and walks away.

He gets in his police car with the other policeman. Other policeman said, well, did you give him a ticket? He said, no. Said, you didn't give the driver a ticket? He said, uh-uh.

He said, why didn't you give the driver a ticket? He said, you don't understand. You don't understand who's in that car. He said, well, is it the mayor? No.

Is it the governor? No. Is it the president? No. Well, who's in the car that you couldn't give a ticket to? Policeman said, I don't know who was in the car, but I know the Pope was his chauffeur.

The reason you better not treat the poor man bad is Jesus is his chauffeur. Jesus is his chauffeur. But he goes even deeper.

He says, verse seven, you blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called. It's blasphemy to be an elitist. Blasphemy, that's the worst kind of sin. You have spoken against God. When you have raised yourself up at a level God doesn't even recognize and putting others down in the process. He says, if, however, you are fulfilling the royal law of Scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

You're doing well. Wasn't that, isn't that second, loving your neighbor? But notice what he called it, the royal law. Not the law, the royal law. In other words, this is not a regular law. This is a royal law. Why? Because it came directly from the king.

God and Jesus both, both, both gave this law. And it's royal because it rules all the other laws. It's the king over all the other laws. In other words, if you fulfill this law, you will have taken care of all the other laws. Because when you love your neighbor as you wish to be loved in return, your labor is going to be treated right. Because you want to treat you right, and you want to be treated right.

So, he said, it's the royal law. Even if you don't remember all the rules of God, you remember this one and you'll catch everything else. But he says, if you don't remember this one, look at what it means.

Because he says, when you show partiality, you are committing a sin and convicted by the law as a transgressor. So, elitism, discrimination, racism, culturalism, classism is a sin. It's not a social problem.

It's a sin. Now stay with me. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point is guilty of all.

He who said do not commit adultery also said do not commit murder. Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you become a transgressor of the law. Okay, you're in court.

You killed somebody. You can't then say, but I haven't slept with anybody. Duh.

What has that got to do with the price of tomatoes? If you killed somebody, then you have broken the law. And the fact that you didn't do this doesn't cancel that you did do that. Now watch this.

He places elitism, discrimination, racism, partiality, favoritism, culturalism on the very same level of murder and adultery. And guess what? Both of those were capital punishment crimes. So he says it's worthy of capital punishment. You can't say because I didn't do these two, but

I'm an elitist, bless me for not doing these two and skip my elitism. He said no, it's like cracking a windshield. When you crack the windshield, you don't replace the crack.

You have to change the whole windshield because you've damaged the whole thing. In other words, he's saying the law of God is interconnected. So, you don't pick and choose. You don't say, well, at least I kept six out of the 10 commandments. They are interrelated. And so when you break one, the whole thing collapses. So, don't put this as a side issue compared to the big sins. So let me get a little messy here for a moment. I'll get a little messy.

Okay, many corporate churches have a healthy divide Republicans and Democrats. The Republicans say, I can never vote for a Democrat because abortion, gay marriage, you know, the governments too big. I can't, you know, I can never, I can never. The moral stand of the Democratic Party is disgusting. I could never vote for them. Then we got the Democrats.

And they say, I can never vote for a Republican. I'll never vote for a Republican because they're not sensitive to justice issues. They're not sensitive to social issues. The Democratic Party is more sensitive. Yeah, I agree with all that moral stuff, but the Democratic Party is more sensitive to the plight of minorities. And so, I could never do that.

And what that statement did was just divide the church along political lines. Because you have to understand, he says, the same God who gave you the statement about adultery and the statement about murder is the same God who gave the statement about elitism and discrimination. He says, it's the same person who you can't split.

Therefore, the same God who says marriage is between a man and a woman, the same God who says there's life in the womb and you don't abort is the same God that says you have to be equitable in how you treat people. And you've got to be just in the laws and society. But because we've let the wall into the church, we've let the wall split up Democratic Christians from Republican Christians when God doesn't ride the backs of donkeys or elephants.

The Bible says from the throne of God is righteousness and justice, Psalm 89 verse 14. He says both will come. So, all you can be is a Democrat-lite or Republican-lite, L-I-T-E, so that after you voted and you come out of the booth, you only going to live for the kingdom of God because the same God deals with both.

And that's why politics should never divide the kingdom of God. Our commitment to God must outweigh our political alliances. And if you're too Republican to reject your Democratic brother or too Democratic and you reject your Republican brother, you've allowed the world to divide the kingdom, and God can't move in that mess.

He's after something bigger. He is, in fact, the consummate independent. He only votes for himself. And he covers both sides. And the problem is neither side is giving you the whole deal. That's why, that's why you don't know who to vote for because you're going back and forth.

You, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you dancing back and forth because you see something good over here, you see something good over there because we can't find enough people who will be God straight down the line on both sides. Oh, but he isn't finished. He's not finished because look at what he says.

He's going to make two concluding points that are a beast. Verse, verse 12, so speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. You ought to have just heard a conundrum. He says the law of liberty. So, it's a law. A law always gives you a restriction because the law is a rule you have to abide by. That means you can't break the law. So, there's a restriction in the law, but he says it's a law of liberty. Liberty means freedom.

So, I got a rule that restricts me that sets me free. I got a law that's going to limit me because it's a rule, but it's a rule that's going to release me. Well, what kind of rule is this that's going to restrict me in order to release me? Well, of course, the law he's talking about is the law he just mentioned, that you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

That's the law from Scripture. He says if you get this thing right by not being an elitist, you will actually be keeping a law that God will use to set you free. If you do this, God will do that.

If you're held hostage by something, the way to get released is to release somebody else from the abuse that illegitimately they are going through, and when God sees you releasing them, he'll be glad to release you. So, the law to your neighbor is a release for yourself. It becomes

a liberating law in your experience because you're liberating somebody else from the abuse of illegitimate treatment, discrimination, partisanism, favoritism, and elitism.

So, the way to get free is to be a freedom fighter. The way to get free is to be a deliverer, and when you are delivering somebody else from abuse and mistreatment that's illegitimate, God takes notice of that and says, well, I'm going to release you from whatever is holding you hostage. So, the law sets you free.

And then he gives, he gives the bomb. The bomb is verse 13. For judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Mercy is being given, not being given what you deserve. Okay, go to court with me. A man is found guilty of a crime in court.

It's time for sentencing. What the lawyer will often do when the man has been found guilty is say, your honor, we plead, and we throw ourselves on the mercy of the court. You know what the lawyer is asking on behalf of his client? Don't give the client what the law demands. Don't give him what the law says he deserves. And then you know what they do? They bring in a whole trail of character witnesses. These are people who speak highly about this man in other facets of his life where he's been good, he's helped people, he's helped the community.

You know what they're trying to do? They're trying to soften the heart of the judge. Not to give him what the law demands that he has. And so they try to get as many witnesses as the court will allow to make this guy not look as bad as the crime he committed says he is.

Throw himself on the mercy of the court. And often the judge will lighten the sentence based on the trail of people who come in as character witnesses. There are very few people in this house today who have not, are not, or will not need mercy.

There are very few people in this house today who don't have failures you are ashamed of, mistakes you have made, or skeletons in your closet that you hope never open up. There are very few people here today who don't have things where you hope you don't get what you will get if you got what you deserve. And you are hoping God shows you mercy in the here and now, and most certainly at the Bema, the judgment seat of Christ.



When he opens up your whole record, shows you your whole Christian life, opens up every closet, reveals every skeleton, not only of things you did, but the Bible says on that day he will reveal things you thought. So, he will reveal the things you wish you did or would have done if you got around to doing it that you didn't do. He says all of that, the thoughts and the intents of the heart will be exposed that day.

Or it can be exposed today. And what you will need today, and you most certainly will need on that day, is mercy. He is not giving us what we deserve.

On that day, God will allow for you to have character witnesses. He will allow to be paraded before him people on whom you have shown mercy. The people who other people rejected, the people who other people despised illegitimately, the people who other people ignored.

He will let you call in your character witnesses in order for him to hear, he will already know, but in order for him to hear the mercy you showed. Because he says on that day, if you showed mercy, you would receive it. But if you stand up before him having been merciless while requesting mercy, he says mercy will not be given to the one who showed no mercy.

So, if I were you, I'd go looking for folk to show mercy to. I'd go hunting down folk to demonstrate kindness to so that I build up my character witnesses.

There are many here who are missing the grade. You've missed the grade of commitment. You've missed the grade of following Christ. You've missed the grades of being consistent. You've missed the grade of being sensitive. You've missed the grade. You may be failing. But the good news here is God gives extra credit. He gives extra credit to men and women who are willing to touch those who would be ignored by others.

Who are willing to touch those who would reach out to the disenfranchised. I hope everybody in this church maximizes their potential. I hope everybody here becomes all you can be within the bounds of your spiritual priorities. I hope you don't settle to get by. I hope everybody, as John says, he says, I hope that you all prosper. I hope that you all maximize it.

But let's make one thing clear, no matter how high you go, we will not be an elitist church where people who are not where you are still not welcome to all that makes us what God has called the church to be. We want to be a prosperous church, but not an elitist church. The door is open to all who come in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.