

Faith that Works // Mercy Triumphs over Judgment

James 2:1-13

Today we are going to talk about how throughout history, the Church has been tempted to be judge or jury when Jesus is calling us to a whole new vision for mercy.

If you missed the past couple weeks we have been working our way through the book of James. This short letter was written in a time of when the Church was being spread by persecution. James writes at a crucial time, when the Church may have been tempted to make alliances with the powerful, or to cozy up to the rich, but James speaks to this impulse and gives a stern warning and clear direction.

James 2:1, "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."

"No partiality," in Greek, is literally "without respect to face." Don't judge someone, or show favoritism, with respect to "facial," or external, characteristics.

Prosōpolēmpsiai, without "favoritism," is not found anywhere else in the Bible or in Greek literature. What that means is that this was a unique and radically Christian concept, virtually unknown in the ancient world. (Warren Weirsbe, Bible Commentary)

James goes on in verse 2 to give us an example of how we are to treat one another within the body of Christ.

James 2:2-7, "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, 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,' have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?"

Notice how in verse 4 he indicates "have you not become Judges with evil thoughts?"

We live in a polarized society where we tend to judge people and ideas quickly. We quickly stereotype them into categories without even thinking about it. This is normal, and its human nature to try to simplify things in a complicated world. Although this is normal, it also can quickly become evil. The warning that James is giving us here is that partiality breeds the spirit of condemnation and an attitude of judgment in the Church.

A quick word here about Judgment. *There is a difference between having good judgment or discernment, which we must have as Christians, and the judgment we are talking about here where our hearts intention is sinful condemnation.*

Sometimes people say that all Christians do is judge. *But what they mean is “don’t judge me,” or they may even mean that you must agree with them, or you are judging them. **Disagreement is not judgment.** We can disagree and not be judgmental. There are going to be times when as a Christian you need to say something that is hard to hear. Just because something is hard to hear doesn’t mean that you are being “judgmental.” But when we disagree, we must do it in love. We must do it without condemnation in our hearts. We are not meant to live as judges.*

The key is that when we speak, we are to speak the truth, in love.

So, sometimes we, in the Church, may think to ourselves - I am not the Judge, but maybe my job is to be the Jury. We can be tempted to try to be the Jury, and to gather our peers and make judgments about others. We live in a world where everyone feels the need to have an opinion on everything. Church, we are not the JURY. Think for a moment about all the ways we are tempted to become the Jury in the church. Here are some examples that I found.

- Some of you, just like James says, have a tendency to look down on people of meager means. You might assume that in this country, the only way you could end up poor is by being lazy. So obviously this person doesn’t have what it takes.
- Others of you are prejudiced against the rich. “Look at them with their posh lifestyle. I bet they have never worked a day in their life. They don’t know what real life is like. They’re so entitled, and I don’t want to be around them.”
- Some of you look down on people who are overweight or out of shape. “Clearly they have no self-control or self-respect.” Some of you look down upon people who are healthy. Clearly, they are image-obsessed and superficial.

- Some of you don't like passionate worshippers because you assume they are attention-seeking show-offs. Others of you don't like subdued worshippers because you assume they are unspiritual.
- Some of you look down on divorced people because clearly, they don't know how to make a commitment; others of you don't like people with happy homes because you assume they're fakes.
- Some of you look with suspicion at working moms--obviously they put their careers above their families; others of you judge stay at home moms because you assume they are pampered and unambitious.
- Some of you are suspicious of those who send their kids to public schools. They don't really care about their kids; others of you don't like homeschool parents because clearly they parent from fear and are setting up their kids to fail when they encounter the "real world."
- Some of you assume anyone who leans left politically doesn't really care about godliness and has no backbone. Others of you assume that those who lean right don't care about justice and only about preserving a status quo that only benefits them.
- Some of you make assumptions based on age. People love to talk about how "kids these days; those dang millennials (who are not kids anymore) or them Gen Z lunatics..." Young people love to talk about how old and out of touch Boomers are.
- Some of you might make assumptions based on heritage. In some parts of the world this is everything. What family are you from? What caste do you belong to? There was a day, not too long ago in this country, when black people either couldn't come into white churches or, if they did, they had to sit in the balcony. That was not only a horrible sin, it is, as James says, a betrayal of the very gospel that we preach. (This list is from a sermon by JD Greer)

How do we deal with this? How do we live with grace when we live in a world that is always judging? Condemning? Enticing us to polar extremes?

God is calling us to a higher law.

James 2:8-9, "If you really fulfill 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."

One night, my friend and I went downtown. And as the night was wrapping up, we were driving home, and he asked me what I wanted to do with my life. Filled with ambition, and way too much ego I said that I wanted to change the world. To which, he looked at me confused and said, "but Jesus already did that."

And that statement haunted me for years. The Gospel led me into the inner city, his love opened my eyes to see people that were hurting, but the Holy Spirit has never stopped working on changing my heart - that's the deeper work we must let him do.

This was just the beginning of God humbling me on so many things. God has been working since that day on my judgmental attitudes, my overly ambitious ego, and my arrogant pride. You see, the closer you draw to Jesus the more you see that your heart doesn't need just a new paint job, it needs a total renovation. This gets to the heart of the matter. We can have generous, kind thoughts towards others, but it is the deeper places in our hearts that must bow to a whole new King, a whole new law. The law of liberty.

So, what can we do to defend against Judging one another in the Church?

- Hear people's stories.
- Hold onto our quick judgements.
- Humble ourselves before Gods mercy.

God does not ask us to be the Judge. He is not asking the Church to be his Jury. Then who exactly are we in the courtroom today?

James 2:10-13, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 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 speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Have you fallen at any point of the law? Then who are we in the courtroom? If we are not the Judge, if we are not the Jury, who are we? We are all found guilty. We are sinners. Sinners saved by grace or sinners awaiting our judgment. We are the one

standing in handcuffs, wearing the orange jump suit, pronounced guilty before God's holy throne. Christ stands as our defender and God has, through his word, pronounced us guilty, but Jesus offers himself in our place. Justice is served only when Jesus freely gave his life in our place. That's Jesus- that's how mercy triumphs over judgment!

Romans 2:1-1, "Therefore, you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality."

Today, where do you find yourself?

Maybe you need a fresh start with God- to turn in a new direction- come and pray. Maybe you need to have someone pray for you about something private - they are not here to judge you but they are here to join you and asking God for healing, direction, and power- come and pray. If you realized today that you are sinner in need of his grace and you have never fully given your life to Him - today is your day of salvation.

There is no room for partiality in the family of God. Mercy Triumphs over Judgment!