

Christ Community Covenant Church
Street Level Christianity – Street Level Love
Pastor Dave Scherrer - October 18, 2015

As we have said before, it seems like James has a hard time keeping his train of thought. He seems to kind of skip all around all over the place. Kind of like me preaching I think. But to our mutual defense, I think James has a train of thought that he is following and I try to as well.

Two weeks ago we noted that James launches off in his little letter (chapter 1 second verse for goodness sake!) all about suffering. Then he goes off on a discussion about the Word. I think these are connected. I believe that the Word (and for James that was the Old Testament) is what puts the suffering into context. At that time in human history in Jerusalem Christians, especially the fathers of families, were being chased out of town, their property confiscated. There was a reason that they shared food together and held ~~%~~all things in common+as the book of Acts mentions of the early church. It was a difficult and dangerous time to be a follower of Christ. James found that there was comfort in the scriptures. Reading about Job at the very least reminded those who suffered so much for Christ that God has never said he would protect us from hardships. If we do not know the word, if the truth of Scripture is not in us we will not be able to hear what God is telling us about Himself and we will fall victim to bad thinking about these hardships that we find as so ever common in our lives. Now it seems that this week he is off to a new topic yet. But let's take a look at our passage and let me see if I can connect some dots for us:

James 2:1-12

My brothers, show no **partiality** as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ²For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ~~%~~ou sit here in a good place,+while you say to the poor man, ~~%~~ou stand over there,+or, ~~%~~sit down at my feet,+ ⁴have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become **judges** with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, 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? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? ⁸If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ~~%~~ou shall love your neighbor as yourself,+you are doing well. ⁹But if you show **partiality**, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹For he who said, ~~%~~o not commit adultery,+also said, ~~%~~o not murder.+If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹²So speak and so act as those who are to be **judged** under the law of liberty. ¹³For **judgment** is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over **judgment**.

I highlighted some words in your bulletin notes. They become a theme in James's writing . the words having to deal with judgement and partiality. One good way of studying Scripture is to notice the recurring words or similar words in a section of Scripture and note then how the author is developing these various themes. In this paragraph we read the themes of judging and of showing partiality. Let's talk for a minute about judging. We have a problem with judging . . .

The problem with judging

There are two great stumbling blocks for seekers regarding Christianity in the 21st century. As I just noted, the first we talked about two weeks ago is suffering and pain. The second is the sense that the church is filled with judging and hypocrisy. Have you heard that complaint? *“Church people are so hypocritical, they judge others and then turn right around and do the same thing.”* And indeed it seems as though these were issues in the 1st century. James writes about both in the first 4 paragraphs of his letter. Jesus says it is an issue too. Turn with me to the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 7:

Matthew 7:1-5

“Judge not, that you be not **judged**.² For with the **judgment** you pronounce you will be **judged**, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, **Let me take the speck out of your eye,** when there is the log in your own eye?⁵ You **hypocrite**, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

And then the Apostle Paul kicks in too . . .

Romans 2:1-3

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?

Let's zoom in a bit because there is great confusion regarding judging and participating in judgement. The Greek word that is being used here by James, *krino*, is the act of condemning a person, finding fault and then perhaps endorsing a verdict, it has a legal or judicial implication (I know you can't use a root of the word to define the word!). It is helpful to note *what is not judgement in the Bible . . .*

Judging is not:

- 1. Holding firm to a truth or ideal**
- 2. Discerning in the Holy Spirit that there is an abiding sin in another**

Holding fast to an idea or opinion or value that someone else does not hold is not necessarily judging them. It might be depending on my attitude, but it also could be that I simply disagree with them. The critical attitude of being condemning is a matter of the heart. It is an easy trap for us to fall in. If I believe that school teachers should focus solely on reading, writing and arithmetic - the art teacher or drama teacher or PE teacher may feel judged.

No in fact as Christians we are told to hold fast to our faith and to be able at a moment's notice to make a defense of our faith.

Hebrews 10:23

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

When hearing that I hold fast to the reality that Jesus says **No one comes to the Father but by me+** another might say **you are so judgmental!** They may indeed not like us. Jesus said **if you love me they will hate you just as they hated me.** The reality is that you and I disagree but the world feels judged.

Regarding confronting unholiness in the faith there is call in scripture to be discerning and to recognize behaviors that are unhealthy and unrighteous, even to call another to obedience over such matters:

John 7:24

Do not **judge** by appearances, but **judge** with right **judgment**.

1 Corinthians 2:15

The spiritual person **judges** all things, but is himself to be **judged** by no one.

Let's do a 'for instance' in our text. If you remember, James calls us to be discerning on what is worthless religion and what true religion is

Worthless religion and true religion

James 1:26

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Apparently, having out of control habits on what we say is dangerous and gives evidence that we are not yielding to the Holy Spirit. It is a theme for James . . .

James 3:8-9

But no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

We will come back to this theme in a couple of weeks but there is a different point I am making now. We can judge bad tongue behavior in ourselves and in others. I am not judging whether the person is saved or not, but I can ascertain that this kind of behavior is true religion or worthless religion. I know that because James goes on now to give us an example of true religion:

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.

The issue of concern here for James is a critical one. It is the idea of hypocrisy, showing favoritism or partiality. And James wants us to know that down in the trenches of street level Christianity, partiality or favoritism is unacceptable and dangerous and kills the church and insults God.

Partiality and street level love

First, partiality (v. 1) means that you base your treatment of someone or your attitude toward someone on something that should *not* be the basis of how you treat them. So here in the text, for example, the basis of how people get treated is riches and poverty. You see it in verses 2-3: *"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. . . ."* This is what James calls partiality. Riches and poverty should *not* be a reason for treating someone better than another.

This is a big deal. ***There are at least four reasons from this passage that tell us that partiality is bad for us:***

1. James admonishes us, "Don't mix faith with favoritism." The two don't belong together.

The fact that Jesus left his glory to be born among us, in a setting and among people who seemed pretty unimportant, should cause us to stop and consider how contrary partiality is to faith. The word for partiality or personal favoritism literally means *lifting the face*. The idea is that when we receive esteem and honor from others, it causes us to lift our heads and feel like we're someone special. But it's a problem when it is partial: some receive it, some don't. Most of us know what it feels like to be left out, to be put down, to be treated in a way that conveys unmistakably that we are counted less worthy than others. When we are on the losing side of favoritism, it's not a lifting of face, but a putting down of face. James tells us not to mix faith with favoritism. He was especially concerned that partiality not take root in the church.

2. James shows us, "Partiality happens so easily." One of the implications of the little case study he presents is that partiality can be subtle, and can creep in without our hardly noticing it. It comes naturally as we see small children pick their favorites in school but it is also passed on culturally and generationally, parent to child.

It had to be difficult in NT days to keep partiality out of the church: there, distinctions in society regarding slaves and masters, women and children all were culturally slotted in the culture. And the new church was full of these underclassmen. It would be hard to keep cultural favoritism from infiltrating the newly forming body of Christ.

On first glance, the example of favoritism James presents doesn't seem like that big of a deal. But let's stop to consider what is happening here. We notice that the responses to the two visitors are based on *appearance*. One *looks* like a rich, influential person, the other is a poor man, and his clothes are dirty. Two things are told to us about the rich man: he is *gold ringed*. At the time, the rich would wear many rings, more than one on a finger, to impress others with their wealth. Rings were often also seals, and so the rings conveyed an aura of not just wealth but also authority and influence. If you wanted to impress a group, you could rent rings for special occasions. The word for *fine clothes* was used in the Roman world of the toga candidates for political office wore. So, this man *looked* like a winner. The poor man *looked* like a loser. As a result, the rich man was given a good seat, a seat of honor. The poor man was told, *Stand over there or sit under my footstool*. This is the pecking order at work. It also might be conveying that the one person was *put on display* for all to admire while the other was obscured, out of sight as much as possible.

The example of partiality that James portrays has to do with wealth. But many other characteristics can become the basis for favoritism and discrimination. Before we castigate the ancient Jewish Christians for partiality, we need to admit how easily it happens today. It happens everywhere, and sadly it can happen in the church.

In a previous life I used to do quite a bit of speaking at conferences and camps and churches. For a year or so the ministry that the candidate from Minnesota for the Miss World contest had chosen my ministry of Worth Waiting For as her charity she would promote if crowned. She attended some of my functions and it didn't take long for me to disappear in a room as soon as Angelique came in. She was clearly preferred!

3. James warns us, "Evil motives lie behind discrimination." Jesus taught us that what is in the heart is what matters most. The reason that prejudice and partiality are so wrong is what's in the heart. James levels the charge in verse 4. *Have you not made distinctions among yourselves* could be translated, *Have you not discriminated or have you not valued some and devalued others?* Then he also says, *and become judges with evil motives*. James is telling us that favoritism is **passing judgment on another person**. It is acting out a verdict on their worth. It is this act of condemning or favoring that is so abhorrent to God.

4. James rebukes us, "Favoritism is sin." James leaves us in little doubt that partiality is wrong and an insult to God.

Favoritism misrepresents the mercy of God. Partiality is a travesty of God's goodness. The way we respond to others conveys something of God's response, especially as a church. People who don't know what God is like tend to judge him based on his people. When partiality is at work in the church, people think God is partial, too.

This is the kind of thing we like to excuse in ourselves. We almost always are convinced our prejudice, our partiality, our discrimination, our favoritism is justified, or at least excusable, and therefore, not that big a deal. The Jews of James's day saw the law as a series of disconnected injunctions. Keeping this or that law produced credit to your account; disobeying this or that law was a debit. But James says it all hangs together, so this is a serious sin.

James encourages us, *Let the royal law rule*. James not only says that favoritism is sin, but that it is part of the *royal law*, the *king of the laws*, the one law that really should rule in our lives. James tells us what the royal law is in verse 8: love your neighbor as yourself. James understood that favoritism was, at the root, a violation of the law to love. **Prejudice is a refusal to extend mercy while we have received the mercy of God.**

When James tells us to avoid partiality, it is so that the royal law can rule in our lives, in our church. Not a person enters our company who doesn't need to experience the love of God. It doesn't matter if they are a celebrity or on welfare. It doesn't matter what their hair looks like. It doesn't matter if they are gold-ringed or if they are wrinkled. We want to express the love of God, but we won't be able to do so if we value or devalue the person based on secondary things.

Finding time for the people who don't move 'my agenda' forward

1 Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

"Givers" and "Takers" – Which one are you mostly?

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**.

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