

Given at Trinity Covenant Church of Santa Cruz on July 29, 2007

Scripture Reading:

James 1:19 “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

2: 1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. 2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7 Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The Mercy of the Church

We come now to the second of our series of messages from the Book of James for young churches. The first message was “The Joy and Crown of the Church” where we learned that it is God’s gracious gifts of faith and wisdom that enable us to joyfully endure the trials and temptations of this life.

We learned that our flesh does not want to think about trials and tribulation, but that passing on them was not an option. If we face them without God’s gracious gift of faith, then we are like the wave tossed to and fro on the sea.

- Now James will challenge us to practice the Mercy of the Church
- Once again, he gives us some tall orders and some practical examples
- AND our flesh will object because we do not want a messy church!

We concluded last time with verse 18 where we learned that God of His own will “brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.”

- Mercy is one of the fruits that we must bear and that is what we will focus on this morning!

James will also give us a very simple illustration to show why that old hymn “trust and obey” is the heart of the Christian gospel.

- But the central message from James this morning is the sober reminder that we can ONLY stand before the judgment of God because of His mercy...since we stand in mercy we must walk showing mercy to others.

With that in mind, let’s dig into the text for today:

James 1:19-20: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

“So then” can be read as a “therefore” reminding us that that we learn this week flows from our first lesson: This is what we were brought forth for.

- **If we missed the point of resting and growing in faith – we will be overwhelmed by what James challenges us with today**

Swift to hear... Strange to our modern ears – We are swift to speak, begin swift to act is often commended... Even in the Church!

Geneva Bible notes from 1599: “Though the Christian community places high regard on the talent of eloquent speech, James places the accent on listening. It is the person who listens intently to the Word of truth who progresses in godliness”

- **Reminds us of the importance of REGULAR morning quiet time**
- **Importance of gathering on the Lord’s Day to HEAR what God has to say, and NOT looking for what it in it for us!**

Calvin also sees James giving a sober warning in his comments: “When God so freely and kindly presents himself to you, you also ought to render yourselves teachable, lest your slowness should cause him to desist from speaking.”

- **Note: Neither speech nor wrath are forbidden, just required to be under the control of the Word of truth**
- **In our age of a “peaceful” Jesus, we must remember that the wrath of God poured out on His Son that DID bring forth righteousness for us!**

Verses 21 & 22: “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

- **James tells us pretty plainly what to reject and what to accept!**

We must focus on getting rid of the filthiness and wickedness (ALL, not just overflow)

Contrasted with a simple command which should be the primary focus of all believers: trust (listen) and obey! Being good listeners, “swift to hear” is the key to having the right foundation for our Christian life: Just as Jesus taught at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 7: 24: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

- **Just as we saw with the lessons on the Joy & Crown of the Church, the circumstances here did not change: The only question is how does our house hold up when the storms come?**
- **Now James brings the first illustration: Which is stunning in its simplicity**

Verses 23-25: “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

- **James is saying it is simple to know what we look like and foolish to forget our appearance. [Who know what they look like? -- Give the spinach example]**
- **It is simple to be doers of the Word: Simply DO what it says and do not act as if you did not hear what was said!**
- **The DOERS will be blessed!**
- **Verse 18 said we are brought forth by the Word: Now James says that we walk in the Word. Just as Paul teaches. Colossians 2:6: “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”**

Verses 26-27: “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.”

- **Bridle the tongue: Being swift to HEAR not always speaking!**
- **And not just one who listens, but ready for action!**
A faithful Christian must be a doer of the word!

But then come the commands:

Keep ourselves unspotted and visit widows and orphans: Those who are truly in need: These are profound commands like what we see in Leviticus 11:45 “For I am the Lord who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” Our natural response is “how can I do that faithfully?” It is impossible!

- **If we live in faith, it is no tougher than knowing what I look like in a mirror.**
- **Our flesh says: “messy, messy” Just leave things as they are!**

Chapter 2 verse 1: “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”

[don't let chapter break divide this train of thought]

- **Notice that faith is still at the center**
- **We will discuss this more fully next time**

But James is now going to use a Lord's Day example to practically illustrate what he means by being unspotted and helping those in need:

Verses 2-7: “ For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world

to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7 Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?"

- **Here is a very simple example to contrast our natural response with what we see in the Word:**
- **Discuss Arnold and some poor person off the street showing up at a church service?**

Notice that those mentioned in these verses are REAL poor people: Not just poor in spirit which we all are!

Don't draw wrong conclusions: both rich and poor can love Jesus.

Proverbs 30:7-9: "Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches-- Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God."

- **Now James will drive home the point that we are to show Mercy as Christ's Body, but also shows the high standard to which we are held**

Verses 8-11: "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; 9 but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."

- **God's standard is a perfect standard and it cannot be violated:**
- **God must "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."**

- **Would we consider a judge to be a “just Judge” if he did not sentence every tenth criminal who was convicted in his courtroom?**
- **Or what if that same judge said, look here are one thousand laws the man kept, so I will not punish him for this one offense?**
- **If I strike this mirror or a fine crystal glass at just one point, the entire object is shattered.**

The Good News of the Gospel is that God has shown mercy: He has loved US while we were yet sinners

- **Since we have been shown mercy, we must be merciful or face the wrath of the just judge!**

Verses 12-13: “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment”

We have come to the bottom-line: We must show mercy

Calvin explains James this way: “Except you wish to undergo the rigor of the law, you must be less rigid towards your neighbors; for the law of liberty is the same as the mercy of God, which delivers us from the curse of the law...since we stand through God’s mercy alone, we ought to show that to those whom the Lord himself commends to us.”

Jesus Himself used a simple parable to make the same point, and it came with a VERY sober warning:

Matthew 18:21-35: “Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”

- **How does our picture of mercy stack up against that standard?**

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.”

- **One talent equals 6,000 denarii which was a day's wages: So with about 250 working days in a year it would take 24 years to pay off just one talent! 10,000 simply could NOT have been paid back**

“But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'”

- **This was an empty and hopeless claim, much like us telling God we can attain His righteous standard by trying REAL hard!**

“Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii”

- **This would take less than a year's work to pay it off, so we have the classic example of the man with a log in his eye focusing on the splinter in his neighbor's eye!**

“and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'”

- **This claim is at least plausible**

“And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

**James has told us this morning that we must be swift to hear:
Please hear that God wants us to be merciful!**

James has told us that we must not be like the foolish man who forgot what his own face looked like, but rather we are to be DOERS of the Word: We must BE merciful

- **Brethren, we will stand before God justified ONLY because of His abundant mercy, let us go forth this week and walk in mercy when dealing with our neighbors.**

Let us practice the mercy of Christ's Church!

Communion meditation:

John 13: "1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ...

12 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16 Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.