

Overcoming Prejudice Part 3

By Ty Blackburn

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Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the second chapter of James. We'll be looking at verses 12 and 13 this morning. We want to say thank you to Jess for preaching in my absence last week. Thank you, brother. It's wonderful to have another man who can handle the word as well as he does in the preaching of God's word and I have heard a number of you mention how blessed you were by last week's sermon. So praise God for the glory of his word and for the messengers that he gives us and I'm so grateful for Jess and Melissa in having them here now.

We want to resume a message, we were dealing with a title for the first 13 verses of chapter 2, the title of our messages has been "Overcoming Prejudice." So today the title is "Overcoming Prejudice Part 3," and you might add a subtitle, "Overcoming Prejudice Part 3: By Living in the Shadow of the Final Judgment." By living in the shadow of the final judgment. That's what James does here, he focuses our hearts on the reality that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through one man, the man Christ Jesus. We see this laid out throughout the entire Bible, at all points, all of history is aimed at that final day, the day of the Lord, when he will judge all men, including believers, and James turns to that theme in this passage because he wants to provide some additional motivation to us to put away prejudice. We've seen that a key word in the passage is "partiality or favoritism," that he was concerned about in the church the tendency of believers to neglect one another; to neglect the needy; to fail to honor all believers with appropriate honor. And he brings up the circumstance of the poor being neglected in the worship; the seating. We'll read the text again in a moment but I want you to see that today in verses 12 and 13, we're going to be looking at overcoming prejudice by living in the shadow of the judgment. He wants us to see the final judgment as imminent, almost as if something, you're waiting for someone and maybe you're looking down while you're waiting, you're just thinking, or you're looking at your phone like most people nowadays are, you know, you've got a minute, you're waiting on somebody to come and you're standing outside a restaurant and you see the shadow approaching you. You may see people walk by and you don't think anything about it, the shadow approaches you and stops and you know the person you're waiting on is there, or else someone else has come up to ask you a question or something. So the shadow precedes the person. He wants us to see the judgment as that close and what a motivating power that is.

So let's read James 2:1-13. We're going to focus on verses 12 and 13 but, remember, he's wrapping up a discussion and an urgent appeal to the people of God to put away prejudice and favoritism. That's his theme in these first 13 verses. Chapter 2, verse 1,

1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 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," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 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? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that you might now by your Spirit and by your word search our hearts. Do your work, Lord. Do your saving work for those who do not know you. Do your sanctifying work for those who do but in all things, may Christ have the preeminence. We pray in his name. Amen.

Overcoming prejudice by living in the shadow of the final judgment. When you think about his argument, it has essentially been this in verses 1 to 11: he's basically said, "Stop showing partiality." That's the first thing he says in verse 1, "Don't hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. Stop holding your faith with an attitude of personal favoritism. Stop being partial," is how we basically said the force of that present tense verb with the negative is. Stop doing this. So James, as often his pattern is, give an imperative, give a command and then supply the reasons. Paul a lot of times operates the opposite way. He gives you the reasons and then he gives you the command. Imperative comes after the indicative. In James, the imperative comes first and so he says, "Stop doing this," and then he gives reasons. This is essentially how our points unfolded. I may be giving them a little different titles than they were but essentially when you recognize that you have the problem, that's to stop doing it, he

basically said, "Look, showing favoritism, not loving one another equally, not caring about the poor among you or not caring about those who are different from you in the same way that you care about those who are like you, is inconsistent. The first thing, it's inconsistent with who God is and what God has done." That's what he's talking about in verse 5. "God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith, you're not even being like God in the way that you act. It's foolish. It's basically just downright dumb because the rich tend to be the ones who oppress you," he says. It's just logically inconsistent. That was the second reason and then it's exceedingly sinful in verses 9 to 11. That's all that stuff about transgressor, transgressor, convicted by the law. He's hammering home if you're allowing this to be there, it's inconsistent with the ways of God, the person of God, it's foolish, it's exceedingly sinful.

So that's what he said, why. He said, "I want you to stop showing favoritism," and he gives three reasons why and then he basically tells us how. He's already told us all this. In verse 8, the how was, "walk in obedience to the royal law. If you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture," what's the royal law? He summarizes it here with the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The second of Jesus' two great commandments. The first, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. The second like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." He summarized that so he says if you will love your neighbor as yourself, you will not be showing partiality and favoritism. So focus on loving your neighbor as yourself.

I bring all this up to say: really at the end of verse 11, I would expect James to move on. He's covered this thoroughly. Eleven verses on this issue of favoritism and partiality. And normally what he does, he lays out his argument, he gives you an imperative up front, and then he back loads all of the reasons and stuff and then moves on. But here he comes back to it with verses 12 and 13, two more imperatives: so speak and so act. Literally, speak in this way and act in this way. That's why the "so" could really be translated that way. It's a strong word. Speak in this way and act in this way. What? Speak in what way? Act in what way? Speak in this way and act in this way as those who are about to be judged by the law. So he back loads his teaching with this urgent appeal to be ready for judgment. He comes back to our need for motivation. He knows that we easily can allow ourselves to be aware of an area we need to work on and then to think about it and then forget it, and so he gives us a principle that we ought to be mindful of more and more and more the longer we follow Christ and that is that life is short and the judgment is coming.

That's what he does. He says to these believers to whom he writes: you need to live your life in such a way as you are thinking about the day when you will stand before your Lord. So I want us to think this idea of judgment is really the focus and so I want to try to unpack this with four points that are really four questions and the first is: who will be judged? I just want us to think about the judgment. This is an area, he's telling them the judgment is coming and you're going to be judged, but let's think about that a little bit because we need to put this in context of all of Scripture.

Who will be judged? Well, James is saying believers will be judged. He's talking to believers and he says, "You're going to be judged. Speak and act as those who are to be

judged." And the Bible really teaches clearly that all people will stand before God and give an account. Now, the judgment of believers is fundamentally different than the judgment of unbelievers. When you put all the teachings of Scripture together, this becomes clear. It's different in its character in a major way, but the reality of judgment is there for all people. The passage that we read earlier from Matthew 25 for the Scripture reading, it speaks of the end of time when Jesus gathers the nations; when the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne, all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them from one another. Everybody is gathered for the judgment. No exceptions. Everyone will stand before God. 2 Corinthians 5:10 tells us that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Now, when we put things together, we see that who will be judged? Believers. Now let's go ahead and move to the second point: what will be judged? Back to James 2:12. What will be judged? He says speak in such a way and act in such a way, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged." He says your words and your deeds are going to be judged. Your words and your deeds are going to be judged. Now, we see this in other places. The Scripture says, Jesus said that every idle word will have to be made account of for every person. Now really, there's a categorical difference: unbelievers will be giving an account for every single thing they've done, for us, our sins are covered in Christ and so he remembers our sins no more so there is a sense we're not going to go over our sins, ours is a judgment of our deeds though for rewards. The unbelievers are going to have to give an account of every action. The books are going to be opened, all that they've done, all that they've said, and what a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living and holy God on the basis of your works and your words apart from Christ.

But the believer will still stand before God and we saw even in the picture Jesus gives us of the final judgment in Matthew 25, he separates the sheep from the goats and what does he judge? How does he determine who is a sheep and who is a goat? It's how they treated others. He said the sheep, "You're the ones who saw me thirsty, hungry, naked, in prison, and you ministered to me." And they said, "When did we see you?" "I tell you when you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it also unto me." And then he'll say to the goats, "You are the ones who saw me this way and did not minister to me." And they will say to him, "When did we see you and not minister to you?" "I say in the way that you didn't do it to the least of these, my brothers, you did not do it unto me." So the standard is the works and the words of people toward particularly the body of Christ, believers. But the standard is our actions.

This is one of the paradoxes in the Scriptures. I want you to turn to Romans 2. Actually, let me read a verse from Revelation 20. Turn to Romans 2 and I'm going to read you a verse from Revelation 20:12. You can mark this down to look up. "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." Now Romans 2. In Romans we have Paul giving, as we saw this morning in Sunday morning Bible study that Jess is leading on biblical counseling, the introduction of the Gospel. Paul is basically delivering to us the Gospel in Romans, the good news, the way of salvation. And what is the good

news of the way of salvation? The way of salvation is that you and I can escape the judgment and the wrath of God over all of the terrible things that we have done, the terrible things that we have said, if we flee to Christ, repent of our sins, place our faith in Jesus, then his perfect record of righteousness is credited to us. We received his perfect record of righteousness for our own standing before God. And so at the final judgment, essentially his righteous record is there for us as far as determining whether we go to heaven or hell. That's the Gospel he's about to unpack and it's by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It's not by our merits, it's by grace alone. It's not by our works, it's by faith alone. It's not by anything in us, it's by Christ alone.

But it's interesting, you see these paradoxical statements in Scripture that sometimes trip up Christians. In Romans 2, I mentioned Romans is about laying forth the Gospel of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. All of Jesus. But look what he says in Romans 2:6, actually verse 5, "because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." That day is the day we read about in Matthew 25, in Revelation 20, it's the day of judgment, the day where God will judge all the men, all people, through his Son. This revelation of the righteous judgment of God "who will render to each according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation." He says the ones who are going to be saved, you will know them because they have persevered in doing good. You know them by their deeds. Those who are wicked are those who have not obeyed the truth, who have obeyed unrighteousness.

So you know them by their deeds. Isn't it interesting Paul says this in chapter 2 but then in chapter 3 he's going to explain justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. How does that fit together? People look at this and say, "This sounds like justification by works." Which is interesting, we're going to come into this in James 2:14 and following, because James is basically teaching what Paul is teaching in Romans 2 and Romans 3. James is kind of doing the same thing. Not contradicting. This isn't contradicting.

How do you make this fit together? Turn with me to Ephesians 2:8-9. Are you justified by works as Roman Catholics teach? They strictly speak and they teach you're justified by faith plus works. They just don't believe in faith alone. We believe in faith alone and why do we believe that? Look at Romans 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." How are you saved? If you know Christ today, if you have been born again, how have you been saved? Not by your works. You have been saved apart from your works fully on the basis of what Jesus Christ has accomplished and you have received that salvation by grace through faith.

But look at what he says next, verse 10. After he says in verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

unto good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." You are not saved by works, you are saved unto works. And if you're truly saved by grace, it will evidence itself in good works on the other side of salvation. So Paul, then, in Romans 2, back to Romans 2 is saying, "Look, the way you can recognize someone who has truly been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is look at their good works. Look at their profession and look at their good works. You know them by their fruits. A good tree brings forth good fruit."

So this is why the judgment will be related to works. This is why Jesus says in Matthew 7 when he says, "Depart from me," to those who professed to know him and said, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name?" And he will say, "Depart from me." He's going to say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." What does he say in the middle? "Depart from me, you who work lawlessness, I never knew you." The mark of the false professor of faith is the working of lawlessness. The mark of a true believer is growing holiness. It doesn't mean perfect holiness. No, but there is change.

So James is basically appealing to that in chapter 2 when he says, "Look, we must realize we're all going to stand before the judgment and part of that judgment is going to determine whether or not we're truly genuine or not." Because he's basically saying in verse 13 when he says, "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy," he's talking about the person who professes to know Christ but really doesn't. Judgment will be without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. When you look at their works and they've shown no mercy, that's evidence of the fact that they are not truly saved.

Now, what will be judged? Our words and our deeds. Who will be judged? Believers and, of course, the rest of the world. He's talking about here, though, believers, professing believers. What will be judged? Our deeds, our words. When? Back to James 2:12, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty." When? I mentioned earlier, live your life in the shadow of the final judgment, the wording here in the Greek when he says, "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged," "are to be judged" translates, I think it would be better to say it this way, a better translation would be, "So speak and so act as those who are about to be judged." It's basically a combination of two Greek verbs and the first verb means something that's impending and close at hand. It's imminent and so the judgment is right at hand, he's saying. Live as though the judgment is right at hand because you are about to be judged.

The present tense verb of that "about to be," has the force of making it...usually that verb is translated future, about to be, but here it's present. It's continually right at hand, is the force of his wording.

Now, the reality is, isn't that true? It's appointed unto a man once to die and after that comes the judgment. The moment that you die, nothing else can be done, the next thing is the judgment and yet how prone we are to put that to the back of our minds; to not think about the fact that the Savior who has called us, though he has saved us by grace, we still

are going to stand before him and if we are truly trusting in him, we will have our sins, will all be taken care of. But we will be judged on the basis of our works, all of our deeds that we have sought to bring honor to him will be judged. In 1 Corinthians 3:11-13 says they will be tested by fire. The love that we've tried to show people, the ministry that we've done to others and the things that are genuine will result in rewards. So believers will be judged on the basis of greater rewards. The more faithful we've been, the more pleased Christ will be with us and the more rewards we'll have.

Now, of course, as he says in 1 Corinthians 3:13, the one whose works are burned up, he still gets through as by fire so the real issue is: have you repented and placed your faith in Christ? Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? That is the watershed but the way you can tell if that's true, James is telling us, is look at your deeds. Look at your fruits.

Now, so we've looked at who, what and when and we want to spend the rest of our time looking at the question how. Who is to be judged? Believers. What is to be judged? Our deeds. When? It's coming. It's right at hand. How? There are really two points he brings up here for how, two subpoints. What's the standard? I mean, we're to be judged but what's the standard? How are we to be judged? There are two different ways he basically points at the same reality but there are two subpoints here.

The first is by the law of liberty; and the second is by the standard of mercy. We're to be judged by the law of liberty. He states that explicitly in verse 12 but verse 13 to make sense of that he shows that he's also asking us to examine ourselves by the standard of mercy which is really another way of saying the same thing.

What is the law of liberty? I think in context we can look back at the royal law in verse 8, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," but to be honest, to say, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," is to say that that's the distilled essence of the whole law as it relates to the horizontal realm. Remember we said all the Ten Commandments are summarized in two. The first four commandments deal with our relationship to God and they are summarized by, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength." Those are the first four commandments. The second six commandments starting with, "You shall honor your father and your mother, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery," all the way down to, "you shall not covet," those are summarized by, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So loving your neighbor as yourself looks like this: you don't commit adultery; you don't hurt your spouse; you don't hurt the person that you commit adultery with. You love your neighbor as yourself.

So loving your neighbor as yourself really says the law and what we're going to see, particularly as we look at faith and works later, is the believer's relationship to the law. The law still has a place in the life of the believer. We have, in a sense and this is interesting, you see this in the New Testament, Galatians 2:19, Paul says, "I died to the law," but in 1 Corinthians 9:21 he says, "I'm under the law of Christ. It's not as though I'm without the law of God," he says, "I'm under the law of Christ."

What does that mean? Before you come to be a believer, the law stands as a judge and a taskmaster and says, "Do this and you can live. Keep the law and you can live." When you come to Christ, you stop trying to be justified by law. You go to Christ for your salvation. His fulfillment of all of these commandments is credited to you. That's your gift of righteousness which comes from God. You're righteous forever but now as a believer, the law becomes no longer a taskmaster, it becomes your friend and your guide. The true believer should love God's law. There is a tendency in circles, there always has been, to despise the law, an Antinomian tendency, but James is encouraging us that if we're going to walk with God, we have to keep the law close at hand. That's what he was saying in chapter 1, verse 25, you look intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty. You look at the law, it's like a mirror. You look at it, you see what's wrong with yourself, you keep looking at it and you let it drive you to Christ and it shows you how, it shows us how we should live.

So when he says the standard is the law, the law of liberty, he's saying that, in a sense, that at judgment the law of liberty, the law will still be the standard by which our works are judged summarized in loving God, loving your neighbor. You know, the law doesn't become less real through Christ. I mean, it's a different character but the content is the same.

Think about this, this tendency to de-emphasize the place of the law in the life of the believer. When Jesus came, he didn't lessen the commandments of the law, he actually intensified them. Remember when he said, "You've heard it said, do not commit murder, but I say to you, don't even be angry with your brother and call him a fool. If you do, you've committed murder in your heart. You've heard it said, do not commit adultery, but I say to you, don't even lust after a woman. You've committed adultery in your heart. I didn't come to abolish the law but to fulfill it." He fulfilled it perfectly in himself, yes, and that's the perfect record of righteousness, but Romans 8:4 says that by the Spirit the righteous requirement of the law is now to be lived out in us.

So the law is our friend. It comes along and it says, "Look at me. Man, I'm really messing it up." Every command of God. Even like a command, "Love your wife as Christ loved the church," that's law. "Love your wife as Christ loved the church," that comes up to me and says, "Look at what a failure I am. Look how far I fall short." But what's the function of the law? Galatians 3, it's to be a tutor to lead us to Christ. It makes me run to Jesus. "Lord Jesus, thank you that you have perfectly fulfilled the requirement of the law. And thank you that because of you, I can now walk by your Spirit in victory." I can actually fulfill the requirement of the law in a way that was impossible before the gift of the Spirit on account of the work of Christ.

So we should be people who are living and walking out in more and more righteous lives. This is what James is saying. He's saying, "Don't tolerate sin. Don't wink at it and think since I've got my salvation settled, I don't need to live as if judgment is coming." He says, "Because, listen, if you're truly saved," and he's earnestly hoping that all those whom he writes are, "if you're truly saved, even as you appear before your Lord to just be judged

on the basis of rewards, do you want to see the works that you've done all be burned up?" To stand before so loving a Savior who though when John saw him in Revelation 1, remember what John, the beloved apostle who had leaned upon his Savior's breast so many times, his close dear friend, when John saw the risen Christ, he fell at his feet as dead because of the flames of fire in his eyes, the whiteness of his hair, the purity of his person. So when we stand before our precious Savior, yes, he is everything that we long for and yet he is also holy and so James says, "Live as those who are going to experience judgment." The Christian wants to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The Christian wants to please his Father. It's no longer the motivation of fear to escape judgment, no, we have that through Christ, but it's the desire to please him.

So the law is the standard. Now, that's the first standard he gives but he basically comes at this same idea, the law of love, through the second standard by the display or by the standard of mercy. How are we to be judged? I said first, two subpoints on number 4 on how are we to be judged? By the law of liberty and by the standard of mercy. This is what he does in verse 13, "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment." When we're gathered before Christ and he begins to examine those who profess to be his people, the proof will be in the pudding. What have their lives looked like? And particularly what do their lives look like in the way that they have treated one another? That's what he's saying here. Judgment will be merciless, without mercy. Judgment will be without mercy to the one who has literally done no mercy. To those who have not been merciful, judgment will be without mercy.

So when we have been sinned against and we don't forgive, when we in this context habitually look down upon others, when our lives are characterized by making distinctions, James says, "Be very careful." Now, we all struggle with sin and so these things can be in our lives to an extent but James is saying, "Pursue holiness." There should be movement toward righteousness. The believer should not stay in unforgiveness for extended periods of time. A person who professes to know the Lord Jesus Christ and will not forgive and will not forgive and will not forgive, James says, "Question the validity of their profession." It is inconsistent to have received mercy and not to dispense mercy. We want to look at other things to define what a Christian is but God has a way of cutting to the chase, "You will know them by their love. You will know them by their mercy."

This is so straightforward and it's interesting, again, like the paradoxes: you have in Jesus teaching the Lord's prayer, he says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Then right after that in Matthew, it says, "For if you do not forgive your brothers, God will not forgive you." How can that be? What does that mean? That means it sounds like at first glance you can be saved but you're not forgiving so God doesn't forgive you and you go to hell. No, that's not what it's saying. It's saying this: if you have the habit of not forgiving your brothers, it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have not been forgiven by Christ. You have not truly experienced the forgiveness of Christ because the thing that will mark the person who has truly experienced the forgiveness and mercy of Christ is a heart full of mercy and forgiveness. It doesn't mean it's easy. No. It's not easy. It's incredibly hard. Our sin nature, we still have this wicked man but the believer, there is

a ruling principle in his life that will not allow him and the Spirit of God which is in him is jealous for his soul, and he will discipline him until he is broken over his lack of forgiveness. And if that doesn't happen, the expectation of the professor of faith in Christ is they will be shown no mercy at the judgment seat of Christ.

He says mercy triumphs over judgment. This is a wonderful expression of hope. What he's saying is: if you're having trouble forgiving someone and there have been, I mean, sin is terrible, it's wicked, and our interpretations of it add to it. We make it worse in our own minds as we stew on it. If you're not willing to forgive someone and you're not willing to forgive someone, question your salvation. But listen to this, he says, "If you will look at Christ and look at how much he's done for you and you will meditate on that, then you will be given the grace to forgive your brother."

The parable that he tells in Matthew 18:21-35, remember right after Peter says, "Lord, how many times should we forgive somebody? Seven times?" I love how Peter is always jumping out there. I think he thought he was being very gracious. He was like, "Hey, let me show you guys. How many times should we forgive our brother? Seven times?" Jesus says, "Seventy times seven," in essence to say, "As many times as necessary." Then he tells them a parable. He says a king, a man had servants who were attending to his financial affairs and the one servant lost billions, basically a billion plus dollars when you work out the math on how many talents it was of gold. He lost a billion bucks and he has to get a reporting of the accounting and he comes before his master and his master is furious with him as he should be, I mean, how could you be so careless and irresponsible. But the man falls down on his knees and pleads with him and the master has mercy and forgives the debt. Then that man goes out, now he actually had said, "Give me more time and I'll repay you." That's the first hint there's a problem. There is no way that he could ever repay that debt, but the master out of the goodness of his heart forgives him. He goes out and finds someone who owes him basically \$5-6,000. Not a small amount. It's 50 denarii but that's 50 days' wages, a seventh of a year's salary. So \$6,7,8,10,000 he owes him and so he says, "I need you to pay me that money," because he's trying to pay back his master and the guy won't, "I don't have the money. Give me some time." He says exactly what he had said to his master and his statement was reasonable. "You give me time, I can repay you." But the man that had been forgiven, the wicked servant says, "No, I'm not going to give you time," and he throws him into debtor's prison. The master hears about that from his other servants, calls him in before him and reinstates the debt.

What's happening here, you have to understand a parable, it's not a perfect 1:1. It's not really saying the man was saved. What it's showing is he was never truly saved. The person who was asking forgiveness wasn't genuine in his receiving of forgiveness and therefore he went out and was merciless toward others. The one who had truly been forgiven a billion dollars would not hold a \$10,000 debt with such enmity. That's what that's saying. If you will not forgive your brother, neither will your Lord forgive you because if you have truly been forgiven by your Lord, you will, you must forgive your brother.

Now, listen, think about how hard it is to forgive sometimes. You may have had some experiences already in your Christian life where you had trouble forgiving for an extended period of time and then finally God gave you the grace and you expressed that forgiveness and you experienced reconciliation with a brother or sister at some level. Maybe they didn't fully respond perfectly but something happened in your heart.

I love this story. I told it before, I've got to tell it again. When Corrie Ten Boom met the German soldier that had been a guard at her prison, remember Corrie Ten Boom, the lady who "The Hiding Place" is about? She was a prisoner in Nazi Germany, in Holland, Nazi occupied Holland because she had tried to help Jews escape from the death camps and stuff and she had hidden them in her house. So she's put in prison, her sister dies in prison, her father dies even before he gets to the prison camp. Her sister dies in the prison camp and she had seen in the beginning of the story, they are made to take off all their clothes and to parade before some soldiers on the way, naked before soldiers on the way to the showers, and the man that she had emblazoned in her memory, a face of one man scowling and just arrogance, this Nazi, she's speaking four or five years after the end of the war in Germany and this man walks up to her after her Gospel presentation and she sees his face and he says, "I want you to know, I was a guard at the prison camp you mentioned." He doesn't remember her. He doesn't know that she remembers him. "I've come to Christ." The forgiveness is amazing in Jesus. "And I wanted to come and shake your hand." And he sticks out his hand to her. She could not lift her hand. She saw his face. She saw the uniform in her mind. The man that was in a brown suit was now clad in his Nazi attire. She could not lift her hand but she knew that God says, "You must forgive," and so she prayed, "Lord, help me." She said it seemed like an eternity, it was some seconds. It definitely was long enough for there to be more than a pregnant pause but she said, "I will put my hand there, Lord, but you have to help me." And so she put her hand in his hand and she said she felt the love of Christ flow through her to this man. When she obeyed, the love of Christ just flowed through her and she was able to genuinely forgive this man. What atrocities.

That, when that happens in your life, that experience of mercy flowing through you is proof of your salvation. That's assurance. That is mercy triumphing, boasting over judgment. Satan can come along and remind you again and again as he does, "Look at your sin. Look at your sin." This is what he does. "You're not really a Christian." And we look at our sins and we say, "Wow, I do wonder. How can I still be like this? I want to grow." And we should be making progress but there are areas where we struggle, but it's moments like this that when that happens, the Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit, "Yes, we are the children of the living God."

Mercy triumphs over judgment. James says, "Listen, we're going to be judged. It is real. It is coming. Every single person that has ever lived will stand before God. Our only hope is Christ. But live as though judgment is imminent and walk in love for your brother. Put off sins of partiality and grow in your expression of mercy as you reflect on the mercy of Christ."

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for so great a salvation, for so great a Savior, that he can destroy the enmity that is in us toward you in our fallen nature, our rebellion, our pride. Christ is able to break that down. He's able to remove your righteous wrath, your wrath in anger which is completely justified. He removes it by taking it in his own being on the cross, bearing your wrath for our sins, punished in our place, so that there is nothing left for the one who believes in Christ but grace and love and mercy. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus and then he destroys the dividing wall of hostility between one another, the separation that sin brings. The cross erases it, eradicates it, overwhelms it. Lord, make us in our experience more faithful testimony to the reality of what Jesus has done. Forgive us for our unforgiveness and help us to be merciful. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.