



James (Part 4) – Judgment / Mercy

Matt Chandler – March 1, 2015

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. James 1. We're going to do verses 26 and 27 as a summary of last week, and then we're going to dive in through the first 13 verses of chapter 2. So that's the plan. While you're turning there, let me just say this. I knew when we got into this book that we were going to have a stretch in which this book was going to bear a lot of weight on us and then create a lot of weight on me as a pastor.

What I mean by that, and when I say that, is simply this. Where we are in this book, God is saying that it is possible, in fact probable, that there are those of us who are in church, who can talk about Jesus, maybe even we raise our hands a couple of times when we sing (maybe we're down here; not all bold like that), we've learned how to talk like church folk, we've learned how to walk like church folk, but in reality we are not Christians.

Although we attend church and although we believe in Jesus, probably much more like you believe in Abraham Lincoln than you believe in a God you could serve and follow, that you might be in church and be deceived. So I knew we were going to get into that, and here's the razor's edge I have to walk as I let the Word of God bear its weight on us.

One, some of you are baby believers, immature believers, and the last thing I want to do is snuff out the wick. I don't want to hand you a 180-pound dumbbell as a baby and say, "Good luck." So I don't want to do that, while simultaneously I am *painfully* aware that there are many of you in this room who come to church on the weekend, consider yourself a moral person, and yet you are not a Christian. You're just not.

When you were a kid, you saw a scary sketch about hell or Mom and Dad had their identity built out and you getting baptized early, and so very early on you got the, "Do you want to come to heaven with us or do you want to burn in hell forever?" and you chose the heaven-with-Mom-and-Dad

route, and you have no love for the Lord, no desire to be obedient to him. In fact, already you're like, "Okay, just get this over with so I can get to lunch."

So I'm on this line where I'm going to have to try to encourage the immature to trust in progress not perfection while at the same time allowing the full weight of the Word of God to fall upon those who because they attend church and because they can say the name Jesus and because they feel morally superior to those around them feel like they're Christians. So I have to lovingly step in and go, "You're not! You're not."

I know where we are; I know where we live. I'm going to lean in because the text leans in, and then what you're going to feel is there are places you could go and sit and hear happier sermons, and there are. I would contend I'm trying to love you here and it would be cruel if this is true, if you could be deceived, if you could think you're a Christian and not be, it would be cruel for me out of my own comfort and out of a desire to keep butts in seats to not engage you over your eternal soul.

Now I feel far more compelled, concerned by being judged by God myself than by you staying or going, so I'm just going to present to you what God tells us in the book of James, and then I'll let the Holy Spirit sort us out, right?

Now here's an important note as we get started. If you lived in a home or grew up in a home or are leading out in a home where a father is good and gracious, his warnings are invitations. Are you tracking with me? So as a father, when I warn my children, I'm actually inviting them into something. So I'm warning them not to flex my power but to keep them safe.

So, "Don't do this." Why? "Because I want you to be safe." "Don't do this." Why? "Because I want you to walk in joy." "Don't do this." Why? "Because if you do this it will bring me displeasure, and you don't want me displeased." Right? We don't warn because we have power and we can flex it; we warn as loving fathers because we're inviting them into something better. That's what's happening here. So there's a lot of warning, but in that warning there's an invitation into something better.

Now what we see happening as a summary text from last week... Beau did such an exceptional job last week. Verse 26 of chapter 1 says this. If you have a Bible, grab it and look at it. If you don't, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. If you don't want to do that, then just stare at me awkwardly.

"If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless." Verse 27: "Religion..." And *religion* not meaning cold, dead orthodoxy but rather genuine faith. So when James uses the word *religion*, he's not talking about cold, dead orthodoxy. He's saying genuine faith. So when James says *religion*, he's saying genuine faith. Genuine faith. **"...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."**

Now what we're looking at here is what was called in chapter 1 the *law of love*, the law of liberty. This is what Jesus demands of his followers. All right, not *suggests*. This is what Jesus demands of his followers. Now we don't like to talk that way about Jesus, right? We want Jesus to have fairy wings and sprinkle dust on us and lead us. Jesus doesn't demand; he just suggests. Right? It's justification by faith alone, grace alone, and he just suggests stuff.

You could not out-preach or over-preach justification by faith alone and grace alone; however, King Jesus makes demands. This is a summary of those demands. Those demands being to love your neighbor, specifically those who are most poor and vulnerable, as yourselves and to love the Lord your God with all you heart, mind, and soul over and above by which you love the world. That's the royal command.

What James is writing, what's happening in this church he's writing to, what happens in *this* church I help pastor is that there are those in the congregation being deceived by whether or not they're a Christian are actually *not* fulfilling either one of these obligations. They are not serious about loving the Lord and they definitely aren't serious about loving their neighbor. So what has happened is in this space, the name of Christ is being soiled, the witness of the church is gone, and the gladness of heart of those present is being sucked dry.

Tim Keller weighs in on why this is such a big deal when you fail to lack the love for your neighbor, especially the poor and vulnerable. Tim Keller pastors a church in Manhattan, Redeemer Presbyterian. Here's what he said in his book *Gospel in Life*. "A merely religious person, who believes God will favor him because of his morality and respectability, will ordinarily have contempt for the outcast.

'I worked hard to get where I am, and so can anyone else!' That is the language of the moralist's heart. 'I am only where I am by the sheer and unmerited mercy of God. I am completely equal with all other people.' That is the language of the Christian's heart. A sensitive social conscience and a life

poured out in deeds of mercy to the needy is the inevitable sign of a person who has grasped the doctrine of God's grace."

So do you want to see who has grasped grace, who understands the mercy and salvation of God? Look to those who care for and are concerned about the needy around them. To be blind and unmoved and static towards the needy and broken is to be made visible in your heart a failure to understand what the gospel message actually is.

See, works do not save us. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but those of us who are saved see the world differently. We're not perfect, but we are making progress. Where there is no progress, there should be questions. Again, it would unloving for me to try to encourage you in your veneer lostness. So I'm just going to refuse to do that today.

So that takes us into applying this to partiality, which is the next part of the book of James. Now let's talk about what I'm going to do. We're going to read 13 verses here. Here's what I'm going to do. I want you to try to find it as we read it. I want to do the *what*, the *why*, and then the *better way*. That's my outline, all right? The what, the why, the better way. We're just going to read through these 13 verses. You should be able to see all three of those things as we read. So with that said, let's start there in James 2:1.

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

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. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for 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."

Okay, here we go. Here's the *what*. The *what* is easy. It's right there, first sentence. **"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 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...'"** We'll come back to what happens after that.

But here's the *what*. Don't show partiality. Now if you want to tease out partiality positively speaking, partiality is favoritism. You play favorites. According to this text, those favorites are predicated upon the outward appearance of a man or a woman. Now if we speak about it in the way this text is speaking about it, it's not so much favoritism as it is discrimination. So the *what* is this. Do not withhold or give glory, love, affection, hospitality, friendship, mercy, kindness, or service to people based upon their external appearance.

The way we as Christians treat others isn't determined by their economic class, their age, their clothing, their weight, their gender, their skin color, or even their attractiveness. Don't show partiality. Don't do it. That's the *what*, so that you and I must fight against the pull of our hearts to be around those like us.

Now look, if we're honest, don't we drift towards, don't we find there's a group of people that it's just easier to do life with? Then there are people that's it's harder. It takes more work. So the drift is towards those just like us. So if you're wealthy, then you tend to drift towards wealthy people. If you're not as wealthy, you tend to drift towards people who are in the same circles as you are. The Bible is saying this warning that's going to have an invitation attached to it is don't do that.

So when I say to my son, "Don't do that," I'm inviting him into something. Well, God is saying, "Don't do this," and he's inviting us into something, which leads me to the *why*. Now, the *why* is always

more complicated than the *what*, isn't it? How many of you have kids? Well, you know. The *what* is, "Take your muddy boots off. Don't walk through the house." "Why?" Well, your gut reaction is, "Because I said so." Do you want to know why you want to say, "Because I said so"? Because the *why* is always more complicated.

Because it's easier for me to tell Reid, "Because I said so," than it is, "You track mud in this house, and Mom is going to start to act like this. When Mom starts to act like this, Daddy starts to act like this. When Mommy acts like this and Daddy acts like this, this is what happens to you. Take your boots off outside." I don't want to do that every time, so my default is, "Because I said so." So the *why* is far more complex than the *what*, but the *what* is don't show partiality. Don't do it. It's a warning and an invitation. Now what's the *why*? Here's the *why*.

Let's pick it up after the comma. **"...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?"** Here's the *why*. The *what* is don't show partiality. Don't show favoritism. Don't discriminate based on outward appearance. Here's the *why*. You dishonor God and you reveal you don't understand the gospel when you do.

How many of you... This will really ferret out by age. When I was growing up, there were organized sports, but not like there are now. We just kind of made it happen in our neighborhoods. Anybody else? Like we put together a group of guys and we'd play kickball or baseball or tackle football. Did anybody grow up doing that? Our kids are like, "What? Tell us what to do. Give us a video game or something. We don't have those social skills anymore." So we'd just go outside and play, and you had to go outside and play.

Now what would end up happening is the two best athletes on the block would always be the captains. So I was never a captain. Then they would pick their teams, and so you would have to flip a coin or whatever, do that thing to see who would go first, and then you would start picking. You always picked the best athletes, which means it was the kid with two broken feet and me left there at the end, seeing which one of us was going to get picked last.

Then once the teams were together you would compete, but the goal of the captain was to pick a team that was going to be good enough to win. Now look at me. That's anti-gospel. That is not how

God has worked. In fact, if what God is after is the best, the smartest, most attractive, most talented, and wealthiest, we're not Christians. Look around the room, yo. That ain't us.

If you happen to be here and you're going, "Well, I hear you, but I'm looking around, pastor, and I'm saying I'm at least top 2 percent, yo." Okay, so let's talk about you, Mr. Two-Percenter. If that's you and if that's true, please show me your fruit. Show me all the men and women who have become Christians because of your awesomeness. Show me all the disciples who have been formed because you're so majestic.

See, the most loving thing I do as your pastor is on repeat tell you you are not awesome. Because it's in you *not* being awesome that God flexes in a way where it becomes all about him, and our hearts get happy in that.

When I was in college, I was on a flag football team. I won't tell you the name of that team for fear it might cost me my job, but I was on a flag football team in college. We had put together a pretty solid squad. Most of those guys were soccer players. I don't know if you've been around soccer players. They don't tend to get tired for some reason. They can just run and run and run and run and run. So a team full of athletes and me.

We were getting ready. We were on a pretty awesome run. We were just whipping teams, and all we had left to play was the rec staff. That sounds like it was awesome, but really there was one guy named Mitch Ables. I hope he ends up listening to this podcast. There was Mitch Ables and then there were the guys who would just sit around and just check people in. So we're going to dominate this team. They have one athlete, nobody else...and they destroyed us. Like, it wasn't even close.

There was one point where I think Mitch threw a 30-yard pass to himself. I still don't even know how it happened. Like we weren't even covering anybody else. We had like two people in a high zone over Mitch, two people man-on, and he was still throwing passes to himself. There was just nothing we could do to stop him. I have no memory of anyone else on that team. I just knew Mitch was a problem and we couldn't solve him.

Here's what I need you to hear me say. When God puts together his team, he puts together his team like Mitch Ables put together his team. See, what I remember is Mitch, where I'm going, "Do you know who's amazing?" I'm talking about Mitch. I'm not going, "Well, he had these two or three wide

receivers. He had this guy. We just couldn't cover them all." No, no, no. One guy. Couldn't stop it. Just unstoppable. That's how God chooses his team.

That's why I can tell you to quit gazing at you at your navel. Of course you stumble. Of course you fall. Of course you screw up. Get your eyes off of you. How defeating is that? The apostle Paul would say it like this. It's 1 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 26.

"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

When you show partiality, when you show favoritism, when you discriminate, you dishonor God because you step out from under his saving grace, and you become your own mini-god, judging others with evil intentions. You were not saved because of your awesomeness. So the demand that someone meet your criteria of awesomeness is anti-gospel. It's outside of how God saves. It's outside of how God works. It's outside of the mercy you've been shown.

So the level of hypocrisy in darkness that occurs when you are a racist or that you don't like to get around people who aren't in your socioeconomic status or when you show favoritism to people who you're more at ease around, you're actually working against the heart of God that says, "You've rebelled. You've sinned. You're this guy. I'm going to save you. I'm going to step into your mess, rescue you. I'm going to show you mercy. I'm going to honor you. I'm going to rescue you. I'm going to bring you into my kingdom."

See, you're anti-gospel when you show partiality. It dishonors God. When God talks about the poor, God is serious about how we should see them. Let me unpack that for you. There are two meanings of *poor* as found in the Scriptures. The first is found in the book of Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**" So there's a spiritual poverty one can walk in.

That spiritual poverty doesn't mean, "Oh, I'm in the desert. I can't find the Lord. Things are so dry and weary." Spiritual poverty is humility and meekness and a deep awareness of your need for God.

That's spiritual poverty. That's a good thing. In fact, Jesus said, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.**"

Now the opposite of this type of spiritual poverty is wickedness. So if we think about the other form of poverty, if we think about just sheer wealth, that wealth would be the antonym to physical poverty. So if you have zero money, the opposite of that is to have lots of money. If you have spiritual poverty, that's a good thing. The opposite of that is outright wickedness.

So Jesus uses these terms in both ways. In fact, in the gospel of Luke, he would say, "**Blessed are the poor...**" and in the gospel of Matthew, he says, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**" which means, "Blessed are the poor, those who have nothing. They will be dependent upon me for everything, and I will provide for them. They'll know I am good. They will know I am present. They will know I have come through for them. And blessed are the poor in spirit, those who are meek and those who are humble and those who know they need me."

Then from there, James really starts to lean in on them. So we're still on the *why*. The *what* is don't show partiality. The *why* is because we offend God. We're an affront against God, and then also, in this, we actually don't only just dishonor God, we also dishonor our brother. Look at what's next, starting in verse 6.

"But you have dishonored the poor man." Then he starts to ask questions, and the questions are poignant. They're difficult questions. Here's what he asks. "**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?**"

So here's James' accusation in the middle of this text against the church. He says, "You so want to be loved by the world, you so want to be accepted by them, so want to be applauded by them, you so want to be seen as normal that you dishonor your eternal brother and cozy up and cuddle up next to those who belittle the name of your God, who mock you, and who make life difficult on you."

See, there's a weird kind of psychological trauma that occurs in the abused. In fact, if you do any type of study or any type of counseling, you'll know this to be true. One of the saddest things we deal with as we counsel women at The Village who are living with abusive husbands, outside of handling their husbands in all the ways we can, oftentimes one of the most heartbreaking things

you see is an abused woman go back to her abuser. She snuggles back up to the one who abuses her. That's a good definition of slavery.

This church so wants to be seen as cool, so wants to be seen as in, so wants to be accepted that they sell out their brother and snuggle up to the world who belittles them, who mocks them, who attacks them, drags them into court. The incessant need we have to be seen as cool and relevant must die. That's not who we are.

The marginalization that occurs because we love Christ shouldn't be run from. We don't live for this life alone. In fact, we are the counterculture to this culture. You're never going to make Jesus so cool that everybody thinks he's cool. Once you do that, he's not Christ anymore. He's some figment of your imagination. I know you're like, "Man, is this ever going to get happy?" I don't think today it will, so just a spoiler alert.

Now I don't want you to misunderstand what he's saying here. Because I just imagine, say you're in here and you're wealthy. You're like hiding your BMW key right now. You're like, "Man, all right, I'll go somewhere else. All right, sit on that. Sorry, this is a new sweater, man. My girl got it for me." He's not saying, "Take your favoritism off of the rich and put it onto the poor, and instead of despising the poor, despise the rich."

Jesus teaches opposite of that in Matthew 7 when he talks about how we're to engage our enemies. We're to love our enemies, be patient with our enemies, be gracious towards our enemies. So he's not, "Take your favoritism and put it on the poor instead of putting it on the rich." That's not what he says. He says, "Show no partiality. Don't show any partiality. Love like I love," because *that's* easy.

Now the *what?* Don't show partiality. The *why?* It dishonors God. It dishonors your brother. Now the *better way*. Here's the *better way*. Look at verse 8. "**If you really fulfill the royal law...**" The *royal law* is the heart and the essence of what King Jesus demands us to do. "**...according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well.**"

So here's what he's saying. If you want to please the heart of God, do the Word. Do the Word. Do you want to please the heart of God? Do the Word. Here's his argument. Look, if you really want to fulfill the royal law, to love your neighbor as yourself, love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, don't walk in accordance with the world. Do the royal law.

This should sound familiar because that's what chapter 1 was about. Trust the Lord. Walk in step with the Lord. Do the Word. In fact, over and over and over again over the next four, five, six weeks, do the Word. Do the Word. Line yourself up with how God designed things to work. Remember the warning is an invitation.

God's not trying to flex; he's trying to invite you into something. "Don't show partiality. Line yourself up with the royal law of love and do the Word, because to not is to sin against me." He's going to just crash right into how we justify our sins. Look there in verse 9.

"But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for 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 here's what happens in this environment where we can come to church on the weekends and come to a church that's the size where we can kind of hide, so we can kind of feel good, kind of sit in. "Let's sing some songs. Yes, Jesus loves me. I'll even barely raise my hands there." Take some Communion. Even maybe pat my chest when something good happens. "Ah, that was good." Even regurgitate something we heard later on that week to somebody we know who's also a Christian. "Well, you know, #faithworks." You can just regurgitate what you've heard.

In the middle of all of this, the justification is this. We hear about partiality, we hear about favoritism, and the unregenerate heart says, "I didn't kill anybody. I didn't commit adultery. I haven't broken any major law." James' point is, "So what if you don't murder and commit adultery? If you're showing partiality, you've broken the law. You discriminate? You've broken the law. You're a racist accidentally or not? You've broken the law. You avoid the poor? You've broken the royal law of love. You have sinned against God."

So do you see what I'm saying? The Lord's just relentless here, chiseling away at what might be deceit around belief. Then from there he goes into verse 12. **"So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty."** Again, James takes the church right back to where he started in the letter. "Be doers." Those who speak and act not just hear in light of the Word of the law of liberty.

So we're not just *hearing* about the law of liberty, this command of Jesus; we're *doing* it. So we're not just hearers; we're doers. Where we hear and don't do, that's a red light. That's a problem. That's a siren. That's something we need to stop and look into. Now if you're a baby Christian, you're stumbling. I'm not trying to put a hundred-pound dumbbell on you. If you've got some conviction and you're feeling like you're falling short and you're pushing into Jesus, that's some objective evidence that you are a Christian.

But if you're in here today and you don't care about anything I'm saying, you don't care what this text says, you have no intention of applying any of this to your life, I'm trying to love you. You're not a Christian, and if you live under that false pretense, that there's no lordship of Christ, there's no demand for obedience on your life, there's no objective evidence of having a new heart, you have deceived yourself, and you're here today by the grace of God for me to lovingly tell you, "Define yourself correctly."

Now you can say, "I have no interest in this." Fine. Quit calling yourself a Christian because you believe in some historic figure. That's not what we're doing here. We're worshiping a Lord and Savior, not testifying to Theodore Roosevelt or something like that. That's not what we're doing.

So he's saying again, "Be doers of the Word," and then yet he's going to make it even more difficult, as though that wasn't difficult enough. James adds a nuance here for the first time in this letter. He's going to explain it more later on in chapter 2. Looking forward to that with you, but for now, I want it to sober us.

James says the church needs to be quick to hear and do what the Lord Jesus has said because there is coming a day when the Lord of glory, Jesus, who has been mentioned, will judge us based on whether or not we've obeyed him, and his judgment won't be shallow and evil like ours; his judgment will be righteous and holy. He will not judge us based on outward appearances; it will be based on the sincerity of our faith and obedience. God is a good Father who has brought us forth by his Word, and he expects, in fact, he demands, we obey him.

Now why? If we hear the Word of the Lord and do not do it, it reveals we might not have truly been saved. So if we can hear the Word and go, "I don't care," I'm telling you, you have to wrestle. Don't enter into rest that's not yours. Please don't hear me making demands for perfection. That would be asinine. We're not perfect. We're not going to be perfect. It's *progress* not perfection.

I'm saying, no desire for progress, no progress at all, label yourself correctly...unbeliever. Then we can wrestle. But as long as you think you're saved when all the objective evidence is saying you're not, you've enslaved yourself to a type of veneer, weak Christianity that has none of the Holy Spirit's power, none of the gladness of heart that comes in knowing Christ.

I don't know why you would want that. It's cold. It's dead. It's duty-laden morality. It sucks the life out of you. No, it's gladness of heart that infuses the believer's life. It's being filled with the Holy Spirit that comes from knowing him. We have to wrestle. Look at verse 13. **"For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy."** Now this is interesting because James just did the opposite of what Jesus did in the Beatitudes.

So Jesus in the Beatitudes said, **"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy,"** but James flips it. He says, "God will judge all of us, and if you don't show mercy, God won't show you mercy." So there was, where there is mercy you'll receive mercy, and now he's saying where there's no mercy you can't expect to have mercy. So James flips it and makes it more painful.

This is what Jesus says about those who judge others out of the wickedness of our hearts. This is Matthew 7:2. **"For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."** Now why? Okay, let me try to explain why. Because faith without mercy towards others isn't genuine faith. I'm going to say it again.

Faith without mercy towards others is not genuine faith. It's not really faith. So if you're saying, "I have faith. I trust in Jesus. I trust in his forgiveness. I trust in his mercy," and yet you refuse to extend that to anyone else, that reveals something is broken in your heart and you don't understand.

Now again, I just want to keep trying to walk this razor's edge. If you find in your heart a disdain for a group of people, if you find in your heart a disdain for the elderly or a disdain for African Americans or Hispanics or Asians, if you find a disdain against whites, if you find in yourself a disdain for those who are in lower socioeconomic brackets, if you find you have a disdain for those who don't know they should dress like this or go to these places or do this, if you find yourself a disdain...

We fight against that. It's not that we don't have those; it's we lay those before the Lord and we do the hard work of confessing, seeking help, asking the Lord to work on us. So I'm not saying you'd

better be perfect or there's no genuine faith; I'm saying you'd better be wrestling with these areas or there's no genuine faith. Are you tracking with me? So if you're hearing me say, "Oh, you have to be perfect," you're not listening.

I've said throughout you're not awesome, you're not going to be perfect. God's perfect. We lean into God's perfection. But whether or not that righteousness has been lavished upon us, imputed to us comes back to repentance and genuine faith, and genuine faith means there's progress. Not perfection...progress. Now look at how he ends. Love this sentence. Here's the invitation wrapped in this warning.

"Mercy triumphs over judgment." So James concludes, "Remember the triumph of God's mercy in your own life and be merciful. Put to death the sinful judgments of your hearts that you're making. Take off and put away the filthiness and wickedness of favoritism and discrimination, and in light of God's incredible mercy to you, let mercy reign among us."

So here's his command. Mercy triumphs over judgment. So remember the mercy that was shown to you. Remember where you were when Christ found you. Remember he rescued you, remember he ransomed you, and in your remembrance of God's forgiving grace and mercy, extend it to others.

Every January and every July, I get a phone call from down in Dallas. It's from a place called the *Tom Landry Center*. Not as cool as it sounds. The woman on the other line (it's always a woman) says, "Hey, we're going to need you to be here about an hour before your appointment so you can sit around in our waiting room for that hour and read magazines you don't care about. So if you could show up an hour early to wait an hour and a half that would be awesome." That would be them being honest. "Don't forget you need to bring your last three scans."

At that call, my fight with anxiety flares up. So then I go over to where we keep the scans, and I pull out the last three, and I set them up on the kitchen counter, and then I wait for seven days. Seven days later, I'll grab those scans. Lauren will get in the car with me, and we will drive straight down 35 down to Baylor downtown to the Tom Landry Center where I'll walk in and I'll wait for about an hour and a half out in a waiting room, and I will read magazines I don't care about.

I'll sometimes read articles that are on my phone. I'll sometimes bring something to work on, but I'm there. About an hour and a half later after I've filled out a form where I label my birth date and weight on every one of the 15 forms because of HIPAA laws. If you want to make a billion dollars,

figure out how to not break HIPAA laws and not have to write your weight like it changed...like after the first one. Like all of a sudden I lost a pound writing that! Whose metabolism works like that?

So I get all of that filled out, and then a sweet nurse will come out and grab me. They will lead me to the back, where I wait again. Then finally *another* nurse will come and grab me, and they will take a one-gauge needle, which if it sounds like a spear, that's what it is, and they will stick that into this poor vein right here, or sometimes this one right here, and then guess what I get to do? I get to wait again.

Then after awhile *another* tech will come grab me, and then they will take me into a cold room with weird noises with a giant steel door, and they will lie me down on a little bed, and they will anchor my head to the table, and they will slide me into an MRI machine, and for the next 40 minutes I get to listen to someone else's favorite songs, and I'm just waiting.

This is twice a year. This is every January. This is every July. Then after I get out of the MRI, I get to (guess what?) wait again. So for about three hours, Lauren and I just piddle. We're down in Dallas, so we like the idea of the city, so visiting the city is fun for us. So we'll go play around some, and then we'll head to my neurooncologist. Then guess what we get to do again? We get to wait again.

Then Karen will come in, and she throws up my scan. She doesn't piddle a lot. She will just immediately tell me results, which praise God for that. I'm not there to be buddies. I like Karen, but I'm not like, "Hey, how's life?" I'm like, "How's my brain?" She comes in and to this point, five years in, she goes, "Looks perfect. Looks great. It's all stable. It's what we want." Then we'll start a little discussion to make sure I have no degenerative affects from surgery and chemo.

I *hate* the scan. I hate it (look at me) and I love the scan. Now here's why. Maybe one day she'll throw that thing up and go, "Ah, look at that. We didn't want to see that, so we're going to have to start you on Temodar again." Then we're going to have to start realigning life. I'm probably going to have to resign from this, going to have to stop doing this. We'll have to pull in and figure out how to do life on chemo again.

I don't know the results of the scan. Every time I go in and lie on that table, I have no idea. But here's why I love the scan. I'm going to hear, "All clear. You're good for six months," or I'm going to hear, "Here's how we treat this." To not have the scan, to take that call and go, "Thank you, Tom

Landry Center, but I'm not coming," I couldn't do that. Who has that kind of phone anymore, right? It'd be like *slam*. Just forgot where I was for a second. The twenty-somethings were like, "What did he...? I don't understand what that was. Does he have a case, like an OtterBox on his iPhone? Is he trying to crush that?"

No, if I did that, here's what I'd do. I'd put myself in a situation where I don't know whether or not I'm healthy or sick, and so I can't celebrate health, and I can't get help if I'm sick. In the same way, when James bears its weight on us and says, "Hey, listen to me, if you have no desire to be obedient to the Word of God, you're not a Christian," we have this opportunity to go, "I desire. Praise God, I'm saved. I have that desire. I've made progress. I'm not what I once was. Praise his name. I'm an adopted son. I'm an adopted daughter. I'm loved by God. Praise his name."

Or we go, "Oh, God," and then let mercy triumph over justice, judgment. Let mercy triumph over judgment. See, if you're in here and you're just a total fake and veneer, there's good news for you, as good a news there is for you as there is for the prostitute and drug addict...that God forgives.

In fact, I am most often more astonished by those who profess Christ out of Sunday school classes and small groups than I am with the drug addict and prostitute, because no prostitute or drug addict goes, "This is what I dreamed of when I was a kid." They know their life is broken. They know they need help. But the self-righteous? The self-righteous are kind of inoculated to Jesus. They feel like they already have him despite all the objective evidence they don't.

In fact, do you know the first chairman of elders here at The Village Church came to know Christ when he was the deacon of a small Baptist church? How do you like that, walking down the aisle as chairman of the deacon board? Do you think he sat in his seat and wrestled for a bit? "What are they going to say? I mean, I'm the chairman of the deacons. It's going to get weird." Walking up, "Hey, I know I'm kind of your boss, but I'm lost. Can you pray with me?" That's a weird moment.

So what would be a terrible, terrible thing is for you to right now have the Word of God read your scan and go, "Ah, you're sick," and go, "Man, I can't say I'm sick. Everybody looks at me like I'm the picture of health." You die if you do that. Do you really think your projected godliness is more valuable than actual godliness?

Do you hear how crazy that is? "I want to look godly; don't want to be godly. People think I'm godly, so if I confessed I wasn't godly, what would happen to them?" Well, they might be encouraged

you're finally honest, and it'd probably make sense at why there's not a lot of fruit in your life. Let mercy triumph over judgment. This is the great invitation laid into this warning. Let me pray for us.

Father, I thank you for my brothers and sisters. For those who are really wrestling now, "Am I a Christian? Am I not?" Father, I pray you would grant them the courage and strength to let us wrestle with them, let us struggle with them that they would be quick to come and grab the hand of a man or a woman or head to Connection Central and grab the hand of a man or a woman and just say, "Hey, pray for me. Help me. I'm confused. I'm confused by what the pastor said. How am I to think? This is where I'm struggling. Help me get clarity here."

Father, I pray you would grant salvation where one thought they previously were, and I pray you would grant encouragement for the weary struggler who struggles on that they might have the lens to see that that is an objective evidence your Holy Spirit is inside of them. Progress, not perfection.

Thank you for your grace and mercy that covers all of our shortcomings and sins. We turn now to celebrate that in the breaking of the bread and the rejoicing in the cup as a community of faith, seeking to show no partiality, but to love and to serve as you love and as you serve indiscriminately and with compassion and mercy to all around us. It's for your beautiful name we pray, amen.

We're almost done. We'll dismiss here in just a minute. If you are a covenant member and are with us today, we end our service with Communion. It's where our hope is laid in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ. So if you're a guest with us this morning who is a believer in Christ in good standing with the church you're visiting us from...

So what I mean by that is if you're visiting us from a church that preaches the Bible, that believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the sole path to salvation, take the cup, take the bread, and let's spend some time considering the mercy and grace of God made available to us in Jesus Christ.

Here's what I would like to ask. If you're *not* a Christian or are not sure, will you just let it pass? I'm praying there'll be the day you celebrate with us the saving work of Christ, but until you know that and are confident in that, will you just let it pass? This does nothing for you. As I say every week, it's not magical. It's a cracker and it's juice. It's not going to give you good luck or forgive your sins.

Now what these things represent very much does that. So in light of the weight of the Word today, I want to just give you a chance to consider what has been said. Consider so great a salvation we've

been given. Consider the mercy of God that covers us as we progress, as we imperfectly stumble forward that you might rejoice in God's glad heartedness in you now, today.

Then if you're like, "God, I don't know if I'm saved," then you should rejoice in that. If you came in here thinking you were and now you're like, "I'm not sure," that's a good wrestle. It's not a bad wrestle. It's very good. Look, if you want to be sure about something, *that's* what you want to be sure about, correct? I mean, I'm a risk taker and a gambler. I ain't rolling the dice on that one. I'm going to lay hold of the Lord and wrestle. I'm going to bring in other people. I'm going to grab ahold of somebody and say, "Hey, I'm not leaving here till you help me with this."

That's my invitation to you after Communion. There'll be men, there'll be women. Don't leave with some anchor around your ankle. Grab somebody and say, "Hey, man, that guy has me questioning. I don't like him. Help me with this." We'll wrestle with you. That's my promise. We'll wrestle with you. We'll walk alongside of you. We'll help pray clarity in as we walk alongside of you.

For now, let me just give you a few minutes by yourself to consider, to think, and then I'll come back up and we'll all take Communion together with the lights up as a family, celebrating the broken body and shed blood of Christ. Take a few moments for yourself.

One of the more astounding realities in the universe is that as we slowly make progress in the Christian faith, the Father never grows weary of us or tired of us. That's why this moment is so important. It's why all we do in the service builds to this moment, because the law has borne its weight on us, the gospel has laid over that weight, and now we simply rejoice in this. For those of us who are in Christ, there is now no condemnation. God has done what we could not do, weak as we are in the flesh, and the law could not do, as weak as we are in the flesh, by sending his Son.

So for those of us who are confident in the saving work of God in Christ, the Bible tells us that on the night Jesus was arrested, he took the bread and he broke it, and he said, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then after dinner, the Bible says he took the cup and he blessed it, and he says, "This is the blood of the new covenant. Do this in remembrance of me."
Amen.

Let me just end with this. Let us walk with you. If you're struggling with doubt, if you're wrestling with what all this means, that's okay. Just let us walk with you. Don't leave here feeling that burden without inviting us into that burden with you. So we'll sing and then be dismissed. There are going

to be some men and women here, and there are going to be some men and women in Connection Central.

So I'm *pleading* with you as one who knows the scab I just picked at that you would allow us to walk alongside of you until your confidence in the saving work of Christ *swells* so that sermons like this lead all the more to rejoicing and not to questioning. See, as we progress, as we mature, as we grow in understanding of the faith, these types of sermons actually serve as fuel to rejoice, not as tripwires that make us wrestle. So let us help you get there.

So to do that you'll have to be honest that that's where you are, and so I would plead with you to not let the kind of fake, faux, veneer ridiculousness of Bible Belt Christianity serve as an anchor on your soul, but let us walk with you. You're not going to shock us. We're not dumb that this happens. We've experienced it ourselves. Let us serve you that way. So let me pray for you. We'll sing a song and then we'll be dismissed. There'll be men and women up here, men and women in Connection Central. Don't wrestle alone.

Father, thank you. You are good and gracious. We love you. It's for your beautiful name, I pray, amen.

Love you guys so much. Let's sing.