MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT

James 2:1-13

Key Verse: 13

“because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

I have read a story which happened on the airplane to South Africa. A white middle-aged woman raised her voice asking a flight attendant to change her seat. It was because of a shabby-clothed black man sitting next to her. The black man was sitting with an embarrassment. So the flight attendant came back after a while and said. “Thank you so much for waiting. There is one seat available in the First Class, so we will change your seat right away especially this time. Then she upgraded the black man to the 1st class.

In Chapter 1, James encouraged us to consider the trials we encounter in life as pure joy because it is the testing of our faith for our maturity. He urged us to not doubt, but to seek God's wisdom in prayer without being deceived by Satan’s temptation, and added do not merely listen to the Word of God, but do what it says. And in the last verse, he mentioned the pure and faultless religion that God accepts is to watch our words, to help needy and helpless people, and to avoid corruption of the world.

In today's passage, James speaks of our true faith within God’s communities. Simply, it is not to show favoritism. It is said that there is favoritism everywhere wherever human being gathers. There are many different kinds of favoritism in the world. But today, we will restrict the domain. We consider what about in God’s communities, that is, churches? Does favoritism exist among believers in Christ? James seriously rebukes the early churches and gives them and us the answer. ‘Yes, there was it, but there shouldn't be.' He admonishes us not to show favoritism, but to practice God's love and mercy, because mercy triumphs over judgment.

1. Do Not Show Favoritism(1-7)

In Chapter 2, James brings up a sensitive problem arising within the churches in 1st century. That is favoritism. Look at verse 1. 1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Another version translated favoritism as partiality. At that time, the church’s members were diverse. Jews and Gentiles, orphans and widows, and servants, nobles and rich people gathered together to worship God. God's grace was given to everyone. The church was a special masterpiece, designed and formed by God in which numerous diversity could be united in Jesus. However, favoritism of the world was appearing in the churches. James specifically exemplifies how favoritism is practiced within the church. Look at verses 2-3. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet,". Here, 'a person wearing a gold ring and fine clothes’ refers to the honorable and rich man or women. Some members in the church showed special attention to them and escorted them to good seats when they entered in the church, while to those with shabby and filthy clothes they let them stand in the corner or sit on the floor. The churches at the time were tolerating this favoritism spreading among Christians.

Look at verse 4. 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Here James explains to us what favoritism is. In verses 2-4, James uses three actions that describe favoritism: “showing special attention,” “discriminating,” and, “judging.” Favoritism is to show respect to some people and disrespect to others according to their appearance, wealth, and position. Furthermore, favoritism is to pass judgment on people with their own evil thougths. The reason James rebukes this problem seriously is that it is not just a misconduct by some church’s members, but it is a serious sin problem that can destroy the body of Christ. Nowadays partiality or discrimination causes many problems in the world, but it is the same in God’s communities. It can destroy the faith of brothers and sisters, even the whole church. So James points out and rebukes not only the act of favoritism, but their evil thoughts behind it as an underlying sin.

So why is favoritism wrong in the church? We can find the answers in verse 1. Look at verse 1. 1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Firstly James calls them my brothers and sisters. 1:18 says, God gave birth to them by the word of truth. In 2:7, they no longer belong to the world, but to the Lord. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are one in the family of God. So we must not show favoritism among brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let's look at verse 1 again. James emphasizes that you are *believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ*. The believers in Jesus Christ are those who have experienced Jesus as the Lord of glory. They are those who serve the glorious Lord only. They do not serve money, position, or power in the world. They do not seek for the glory of man and the glory of the world. Rather they seek God’s kingdom and righteousness. Therefore, there is no reason to show any special attention to the rich and the nobles. Jesus, the Lord of glory refused to receive favoritism in the world. He humbled himself to the point of death and became the Lord of glory by being resurrected from the dead. Jesus did not judge people according to their appearance, but served whoever comes to him with God's mercy, love, and truth. Jesus did not downplay the poor but welcomed them to give them the kingdom of God. Jesus did not flatter the nobles and the rich. Rather, he preached the gospel of repentance to give them the kingdom of God as well. No favoritism could be found in him, but he showed God’s mercy to everyone. So as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, we must not show favoritism.

Another reason why favoritism in the churches is wrong is that favoritism is an act of insulting God and God’s children. Look at verse 5. 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. God chose the poor in spirit to be rich in faith. He inherits the his kingdom to those who love Him. Although they may seem poor, they *are* noble and rich in the eyes of God. They are heirs of God's kingdom. So discriminating is an act against God's will and insulting God’s children.

Look at verse 6-7. 6 Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? Not all poor people are rich in faith and not all rich people are wicked and godless. But needy people have a tendency to cry out and depend on God more than rich people. In other words, rich people often don’t think they need to pray or listen to God. This reminds us why Jesus said it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God. Generally, people with power, position and wealth cling to what they have with no intention of giving it up.

1. Show Love and Mercy (8-13)

Look at verses 8-11. 8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. James mentions the “royal law”: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus called this law the second greatest commandment. The first is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” Apostle Paul wrote this in Gal 5:14, “For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’”. The reason James recalls the royal law is to emphasize that favoritism is a serious sin and breaking the royal law.

In preparing today's message, until last night I have thought I had no favoritism. But when I meditate on the passage again and again, I realized that I *am* a hypocrite who does not practice Jesus' mercy and lovel. I realized what a lazy, selfish, indifferent, irresponsible servant I am who concerns only about my problems and my desire. I have forgotten the grace of God who had shown his mercy on me, who have forgiven me, and called me as Jesus’ disciple. Heavenly Father, have mercy on me. I pray that I may practice your love and mercy as Jesus has shown me. I may serve one person after another in prayer and with God’s words.

Look at verses 12-13. 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! Not only must we love our neighbors as ourselves, but we must be merciful. Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Mt 5:7). When Jesus called Levi the tax collector to follow him and then had dinner at his house, Jesus was criticized by the religious leaders. On hearing these criticisms, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mt 9:12-13). Mercy is “not receiving the judgment we rightfully deserve.” We should be judged, but we are rather shown mercy and forgiven. According to God’s law, we are all lawbreakers before God. We deserved God's judgment and punishment. God, the righteous judge, however, showed mercy over judgment. And he presented His righteousness without discrimination. Therefore, we as God's children should also practice God’s mercy, not playing the judge and showing favoritism on brothers and sisters. Mercy triumphs over judgment. Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. In Matthew chapter 18:21-35, Jesus taught us the parable of the unmerciful servant. The master cancelled all the debt of his servant, millions of dollars. But the servant had no mercy on his fellow servant whose debt was only a few dollars. What did the master desire for the servant to be? Be merciful! When do we become unmerciful? It is when we forget God’s mercy.

In conclusion, Christians must not show favoritism or judge others. Rather, Christians must love and show mercy. We can only do this when we remember Jesus’ grace and mercy to us personally. Mercy triumphs over judgment. As Christians, we are to keep the royal law: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We are to not show favoritism as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ

It is by God’s mercy that we became children of God. But If we who received this mercy judge people with evil thougthts of the world and show favoritism to someone, will it not contradict our faith? If we give special attention to those who seems to benefit me and look down on who don’t, will there not be a contradiction between our faith and actions? James questions, “can you say that faith is true faith?” Can true believers show favoritism? It can’t be!!