

Scripture Reading: James 4

“11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." 16 But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to him who knows to do good & does not do it, to him it is sin.”

The Judgment of the Church

This morning we continue our short series of messages for reformed churches from the Book of James. As we finish chapter four and move on into chapter five we can see that the general theme revolves around God’s authority:

- This week we will see how God’s authority impacts how we are to judge others & how we are to make plans. Then next week we will see its impact on our riches!

As we strive to understand God’s authority and being in submission to that authority, I want us to keep another New Testament figure in mind who had great faith: -Remember those E.F. Hutton commercials? When Hutton speaks people listen was their pitch...

- Well when Jesus says He has found great faith, WE should listen!

Ironically Jesus found great faith in a Roman Centurion! [*considering the Centurions can be an interesting study*] We find the account of the Roman Centurion with great faith in Matthew chapter 8: His beloved servant is dying and he asks Jesus to heal him, Jesus agrees and starts toward his home...

Matthew 8:8 “The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 10 When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

- So, with the GREAT faith of this Roman Centurion in mind, let’s dive into this morning’s text:

James begins with a warning about judging other people, which goes right to this central question of authority: James 4:11 “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?”

This again reminds us that we are not to be ‘masters of morals’ running around passing judgments as Calvin explained when we looked at James’ earlier admonition against having many ‘teachers.’

James is NOT saying that there are to be no judgments in the Church, or even as individuals, but rather he is reminding us that all judgments must be made in humble submission to God’s Law:

- We all bow to God’s Authority!

What James is teaching us here is closely related to the lesson Jesus presented in one His famous and most misunderstood passages in all the New Testament:

Matthew 7:1 “**Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”**

- We are **ALWAYS** quick to see sin in the lives of others:
- Jesus says we must deal with our sin **BEFORE** we turn and try to help our brother!

James is saying that we are not to jump right into judging others.

- James rightly declares that there is “**ONE Law-giver**” and it certainly should remind us that **HE** is in charge!

We must busy ourselves with obeying the words that we hear from Jesus and NOT spending all of our time checking up on others!

Here James is giving us the caution that we all need when it comes to judging the lives of others.

- An important part of understanding God’s authority is that He is God and we are not!

So, we must bow to His law when evaluating or judging our own lives and/or the lives of others.

- **It is His standard that is important and not our own AND we must remember that our knowledge is always limited.**

This applies even to our own hearts, where the Prophet Jeremiah reminds us that:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9

- **Not only are we to be careful about judging others, we are to remember that we need God’s help to even rightly judge ourselves.**

This is why we should rejoice that the writer of Hebrews teaches us that “the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts & intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12 [explain joints & marrow]

And this is why we should always be thankful AND mindful of the gift of the Holy Spirit Who rightly applies God’s Word to our lives:

“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” 2 Corinthians 1:21-23

Before we move on, I wanted to try and give us a more practical example of what Jesus and James are stressing when it comes to judging others & even ourselves. Jesus teaches us to look inward first to make sure there are no logs in our eyes: James in our text is telling us that we do not get to make up some standards of our own as if we were the law-givers rather than God:

- **Saying something like, “I hate it when people do such and such,” would likely be a clear sign of doing that.**

However, I think another example that Jesus gives in the course of His ministry can help us here as well. It is the lesser known parable of two sons found in Matthew 21 and comes in response to Jesus being questioned about His authority:

Jesus says, “28b “A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’ 29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?”

They said to Him, “The first.””

Now there are many lessons to learn there, but for this morning I want to use it as an example of the care we must take in judging others, remembering that God is God and we are not. In that account, Jesus tells His critics the entire story and then asks for their judgment and they give the right answer! What I want us to think about here, is how we or anyone might have judged if we did not have the entire story given to us by Jesus?

- What if we had only overheard the Father’s initial conversation with his two boys?

What would we have thought of the one who said “I will not!” And it cuts both ways, because what would we have thought of that nice boy who said, “I will go!”?

This is what Jesus means when He says the judgment you use is the judgment you will have:

- Think about how upset we get when someone jumps to conclusions about us when they do not know the whole story?

And yet, how quickly we can find ourselves doing just that to others.

This is why James warns the brethren to “not speak evil of one another.” [Facebook example]

- Remember, we are those who are to be swift to hear rather than those who are quick to speak and pass judgments!

As we move on in our morning text, James begins to confront his readers with some of the practical implications of acknowledging God’s control over all things:

James 4:13 “Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; 14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

James is here reminding us that we are in no position to make ultimate plans because we do not even know what will happen tomorrow!

It is related to his warnings about judgments because we have the same problem of limited knowledge here are well: In both cases we must make some judgments and we certainly must make some plans...

- But always with a proper humble attitude, always remembering Who is in control!

We must acknowledge that God is in charge of the Law and History!

In this life we must make plans, both little plans and some big plans, but we must always see them all as under God’s control:

- That is important because it is only He Who knows where history is going AND He is the One who gives us the wisdom, strength and courage to go where history might be taking us!

I am sure we have all have pondered some things we would like to see happen in our families or here at Church of the King.

- IF we pray for them rightly saying “Lord-willing:” Then we must also be ready to accept how God will accomplish the given task

What if you were thankful for what God had provided in your family or church & were burdened to say “Lord- willing” we would like to double our impact ...

- Just think what we could accomplish is we had twice as many children, money & possessions!

Or how about a burden as a church community to launch a new nation that would grow to several hundred million people and could faithfully spread the Gospel around the world?

- We can find examples of each in history, but for the people of God who were involved in these victories, they came with a very heavy temporal cost...

This is what James means by saying “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that”

It must be God who establishes the direction of our lives or that of our Church... AND it will be His Spirit who gives us the strength and courage to accomplish that mission no matter what the cost.

He is also the One Who will give us the patience and comfort to accept that the answer to our requests is often no or wait.

As some of you may have guessed the first example comes from the life of Job: Yes, at the end of the Book of Job, Job does get DOUBLE for everything that he had:

- 14,000 sheep to replace 7,000
- 6,000 camel to replace 3,000
- 1,000 oxen to replace 500
- 1,000 donkeys to replace 500
- And ten new covenant children -- giving him twenty in eternity!

A blessed reminder that is a great source of comfort when Covenant Children are lost at a young age! The second example is the early pilgrims coming to the ‘New World’ They signed the Mayflower Compact probably never dreaming of how great God’s blessings would be!

- However, in the short term they lost about half of their congregation in the first year:

And it was after THAT when they held their thanksgiving feast, a tradition we carry on to this day, usually not remembering much of the history behind it!

- James is warning that we must not just add “Lord willing” to our usual “I will do this or that!”
- Often the “I” is still where we put the emphasis!

The shift must be central and secure, not casual: We must bow humbly to the authority of the one true God: The one Law-giver! We must acknowledge who is in control and who has the authority to command us and ALL of creation.

- This was the “great faith” that Jesus saw in the centurion.

We must learn to be patient:

- The example of Job reminds us that we do not always see the entire picture.
- The pilgrims remind us that God may answer our request far above what we might have thought or even imagined!
- We must learn to have confidence in God!

The Apostle Paul reminds us that we are to learn from various Biblical examples:

Often we look back to their failures as examples of things to avoid, but for this morning I want to encourage us to ponder two examples that should encourage us to remember God's control over our lives:

Daniels friends are the example of confidence in the midst of trials:

After being told that they must bow to an idol or die we see them responding to the King who had threatened to kill them in a fiery furnace: Daniel 3:16b

"**O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. 18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.**"

As another example, we see how Joseph rightly understood all the trials of his life as he answers the last request by his brothers:

In Genesis 50, after his brothers tried to deceive him once more out of fear:

"**19 Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**"

- Joseph, in the flesh, could have been bitter and vengeful, but instead he had truly learned the lesson of Godly patience and mercy

God is our true and ONLY Judge: He is our sole authority for all of life

We must strive to understand the plans God has established for our Church and our families! We must be ready to follow His commands and leading, not trusting in your own wisdom, power or riches!

Communion Meditation: II Kings 6

"**14 Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. 15 And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"**

16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."