

MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT Why the Redeeming Grace Must Become Reflected Grace

“A Journey Through James”
Communion Service

Texts: James 2:8-13; 4:12

James 2:8–13 (NASB95)

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.

James 4:12 (NASB95)

¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

Introduction:

This morning we have the wonderful privilege of observing both of the ordinances that Jesus graciously granted and established for His Church.

These ordinances are intended to bring us joy and spiritual refreshment as we celebrate and experience the wonderful grace of God that stands behind each of these ordinances and is manifested to us each time we observe them as Christ commanded.

These ordinances are not means of saving grace – in other words, they have no power to redeem us from the guilt of our sin or rescue us from the penalty for our sin – that is not their purpose. Said differently, these gracious ordinances are not for sinners who have yet to be redeemed by the grace of God. Nor are these ordinances the means by which that redemption comes to or is received by sinners who have yet to experience the marvelous saving grace of God that comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in

Christ alone. Therefore, the ordinances we are observing and celebrating this morning are for genuine believers who have believed the gospel, experienced the saving grace of God, and gladly submitted to the authority and embraced the Lordship of Christ over their lives.

These ordinances are Baptism and the Lord's Supper which we often call communion. Because we are observing both this morning, I want to make sure we understand what we are observing and why it is important for us to participate in them corporately and personally this morning.

1. They are gracious commandments from Christ

a. Baptism – the initial act of obedience after embracing the Gospel

- **Matthew 28:19** *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*
- **Romans 6:4–7** *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

b. The Lord's Supper – an ongoing act of obedience as we remember Christ's death and confidently wait for His Coming.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

2. They are intimate expressions of God's grace to His People

1 Corinthians 10:16 *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*

3. They are important identity markers of His People

Matthew 28:19 *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

4. They are corporate and communal in their nature

1 Corinthians 11:33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

This is why we observe these ordinances within the boundaries of a regularly scheduled worship service and under the oversight of one of the pastors recognized by the church.

5. They are individual in their participation

1 Corinthians 11:28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

6. They are marked by joyful thankfulness in their observation

1 Corinthians 11:24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

7. They are refreshing and strengthening in their celebration

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

But there is more! What is the message these ordinances are intended to remind us of and to display to the world? **James puts it this way – Mercy Triumphs over Judgment!** So how does James use this massive spiritual truth to encourage us to cultivate and display a whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully-trusting living faith to a dying world?

I. James Reminds Us of the Ongoing Presence of the Law

James 2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

A. Identified as the Royal Law (2:8)

- It is “royal” because it expresses the will of a King
- It is “royal” because it is the governing rule of His Kingdom

B. Described as The Perfect Law (1:25)

- It is perfect because it is shaped by the character of God, describes the heart of God, and fully expresses the will of God for His people, His Kingdom, and His Universe.

C. Prescribed as the of Sin and Death

Romans 3:19–20 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The function of the Law was to set forth the perfect standards and expectations of the righteousness God demands from us. And because we are sinners by nature as well as by choice, there is but one outcome when we stand before God and are judged according to the demands and expectations established by God in the Law.

D. Transformed into the Law of Liberty (James 1.25; 2:12)

Romans 8:1–4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

This is a remarkable truth – as believers, we are longer judged by the law that condemns us to death; rather, we have been liberated and enabled to live out the demands of the law because we have been given a new heart that desires to do the will of God and a new power from the Holy Spirit Who indwells us that enables us to obey and do God’s will.

So, for a believer, the Law that stood against us as a righteous enemy that bound us to our sin and condemned us for our transgression now stands beside us as a faithful friend who instructs us and liberates us to do the will and pleasure of God!

II. James Reveals the All-knowing, Authoritative Presence of the Law-Giver

James 2:8–13 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.

- Behind the Law stands a Law-Giver whose omniscience enables him to evaluate accurately and render judgments that are fully righteous.
- James reminds us that this Law-Giver has written down His will and clearly articulated His expectations in the Scripture.
- And James reminds us that this Law-giver has the authority and the ability to save or to destroy.
- This means nothing escapes His notice and no one escapes His judgment.

III. James Reviews Their Shocking Position (2:8-9)

James 2:8–13 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

In this text, James speaks frankly and directly to believers who should have been displaying a whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully trusting faith in God but instead were exhibiting the exact opposite – a divided heart wrongly focused on getting what they desired from the rich instead of trusting God for what they needed.

Instead of loving their neighbor as themselves and treating them as they would want to be treated, these believers were showing partiality to the wealthy in their midst and dishonoring the poor in their midst.

And while we might consider this to be a minor breach of Christian ethics, James calls it a serious sin and confronts them with the shocking reality that instead of their faith displaying the power of God to forgive sin; they were actually transgressors convicted by the Law as lawbreakers.

Even though they could potentially argue they were not guilty of sins like murder or adultery, James reminds them that the Law is the unified expression of the character, heart, and will of the One who gave it! And to break one of the points was to be guilty of all because the offense was not against the Law but against the One who gave the Law.

Illust: Breaking any part of a window is to break the whole window.

IV. James Reveals a Stunning Reversal (2:12)

So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

James makes an amazing statement to his readers – though they are guilty of transgressing God’s command to love their neighbor as themselves – they are not condemned by the Law for their transgression as they once were for sins and transgressions that may have been considered lesser offenses.

Instead of being condemned to eternal death by the Law of Sin and Death, they were to be judged and evaluated by their conformity to the will of the Law-Giver who had liberated them from bondage to sin and enabled them to obey the Law of Liberty through the power of the Holy Spirit in them.

How in the world did this amazing reversal happen? Mercy they did not merit or deserve triumphed over the judgment they rightly deserved and that God was obligated to declare on them. But...how did this happen?

In a stunning reversal, God poured out His just wrath and executed the sentence of death on the one person in human history who completely and perfectly fulfilled every aspect of the law – in all of his ways and for all of his earthly days – every thought, motive, word, and deed were fully conformed to the will of God. Jesus Christ rendered full and perfect obedience to the Law – and earned life as His just reward!

And then, God in a jaw-dropping act of mercy took the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ and applied it to our account thus enabling Him to grant us eternal life in the place of eternal death. But this required that He take all of our unrighteousness – the sins of the world – and apply them to the account of His own Son Jesus Christ, who willingly bore the wrath of God and suffered the death that rightfully should have been ours – so that we might be forgiven, given eternal life, and granted power to please God in this life – something we never had or even wanted before God worked in us by quickening our dead heart and opening our blind eyes so we would finally see the glory of God in the face of Christ in the beauty of the gospel!

Conclusion:

This is why Baptism and the Lord's Supper are so precious to us! When God forgave us through the work of Christ on our behalf, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell us and enable us to obey the will of God expressed in the Scripture (the Law of God) that, prior to salvation, we had neither the ability nor the desire to obey. And the very first act of obedience after we repent and put our faith in Christ is to publicly identify that we belong to Him by being baptized as a committed follower of Jesus!

And when at times we fail to meet some aspect of the will of God revealed in the Scripture, we thankfully observe the Lord's table by cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts afresh (James 4:8) as we remember the righteousness we received from God and the forgiveness we enjoy from Christ when we remind ourselves that *"if we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9).

In other words:

- Baptism identifies that we have received this mercy.
- The Lord's Supper reveals whether we value and treasure this mercy.

So, in light of this magnificent mercy, what should we do? (2:12)

- We must speak and act as those who have received this amazing mercy from God instead of the judgment we rightly merited. And the way we do this is by displaying this mercy to those around us!
 - To our friends who disappoint us when they sin against us
 - To our neighbors who disregard or disparage us
 - To our enemies who hate and harm us
- Because the proof that we have received mercy ourselves in the face of the monstrosity of our sin against God is our desire and willingness to grant that same mercy to others whose sin is far less than the sins we have committed against God.
- And communion is the time we thankfully celebrate this mercy and come again and again to be refreshed by receiving more of it!

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Why _____ and the _____ are Precious to Us

1. They are gracious _____ from Christ

- Baptism – the initial act of obedience after embracing the Gospel
Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
- The Lord’s Supper – an ongoing act of obedience as we remember Christ’s death and confidently wait for His Coming.
1 Corinthians 11:23–26 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

2. They are _____ of God’s grace to His People

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3. They are important _____ of His People

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

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1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

They help us cultivate and display a **whole-hearted, single-focused, fully-trusting faith** by reminding us that "Mercy triumphs over Judgment."

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But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty,

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