**Just Love**

James 2:1-13

Here is our recap of the series so far:

**Just Do It**

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| --- | --- |
| * Just Rejoice
* Just Trust
* Just Obey
 | “But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22 |

Even in hardship and suffering we can and must ***REJOICE*** because we know God is working in us to shape the character of Christ. We can stand firm in the evil day because we ***TRUST*** in the unchanging goodness and faithfulness of God. Temptation does not come from God but from our own selfish, sinful hearts. Don’t believe in yourself, fix your trust in God completely. And if we rejoice in the Lord and trust in the Lord, the natural result is that we should ***OBEY*** the Lord. This whole book is practical and James focuses on things like the actual words we say, the actual money we spend, the people we love and serve - such as orphans and widows.

***“Be DOERS of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”*** That is our theme verse for the series. Just Do It. Don’t just say it. Don’t just think it. Do it. Put into practice the teachings of Jesus you know.

We ended last week with an exercise called an S.O.S.



***What did you write down last week?*** What did you DO to obey the Lord last Sunday?

I’d be willing to wager that most of us are pretty good at reading the Bible and intellectually processing Bible passages like the ones we have looked at in James 1.

But how many of us ACTUALLY make plans to OBEY what we learn? ***How many of us regularly practice using a tool like an S.O.S.?***

If we don’t put into practice the teachings of Jesus, we are **like the foolish man** who built his house on the sand. The wise man who built his house on a rock is the one who hears Jesus’ teaching and DOES THEM.

***Do we read the Bible like wise people or like fools?*** Do we listen to sermons like wise people or fools? What we are talking about here is DISCIPLESHIP. My job is to TRAIN YOU not just as disciples of Jesus ***but as DISCIPLE-MAKERS for Jesus.*** There is a world of difference between the two. If you think of yourself only as a disciple of Jesus, then you can learn and learn and learn, and just keep on learning without ever expecting yourself to DO anything. What about, for example, Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to OBSERVE everything I have commanded you”? Does that apply to you? Who are you training to follow Jesus? Are you using tools like the S.O.S. to help them learn to obey what the Lord tells them?

Jesus boiled down all of his teachings into **two commands: love God and love others.** That’s it. If we do those two things we please and honor God. If we fail at those two things we fail at everything. That is how James opens chapter two.

To follow Jesus is to follow His law of **Love**

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

James 2:1

Remember James ended chapter one with the same basic point: “Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this - to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from becoming polluted by the world.” ***Do we love orphans?*** Do we care for the most vulnerable - the ones who can’t help themselves? ***Do we serve our widows?*** Are we faithful servants in the household of God taking care of everyone in the house, or are we eating and drinking - even over-indulging ourselves while there are people upstairs or down in the basement who are going hungry and sitting alone?

I hope none of us would do that on purpose if we had **20 people in our home** for a meal. We wouldn’t intentionally split them up into groups and then completely ignore some while giving all of the food to some others. But that is totally possible in the church family. Some people tend to get most of the time and attention - most of the “food” if you will. And others tend to “go hungry,” in terms of the amount of attention and care they receive.

One missionary who served a lot in Africa said it that way to our church in Kentucky one time. It’s like the church is a long banquet table and we, here in America, are feasting away in our suburban churches while many in Africa and other developing countries with almost nothing. Those brothers and sisters look down the table to us and wonder if it’s ok to ask, ***“Hey, would you pass the potatoes?”***

To follow Jesus is to follow His key command: Love. If we show partiality and preference to some in the church while neglecting others in the church - according to James we are not holding well to the faith in the Lord Jesus. It is HIS CHURCH. All of the resources we have as individuals and as a church are HIS RESOURCES. ***We are simply stewards and managers*** who will give an account to the Owner one day soon.

James will show us in this passage three expressions of love. What does real love look like? First, love does not play favorites.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Show no **Preferences** for people (wealth, gender, status, appearance, etc.)

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

James 2:1

Now it’s easy to nod our heads at this one because we understand the premise but actually loving in this way is much harder. **NO PARTIALITY is a very high standard**. James immediately applies it to wealth and the visible status that comes from how a person dresses. If you’ve watched the Chosen at all you have seen the ***very simple tunics of Jesus*** and his followers (tho Jesus has a pretty impressive leather man-bag), compared with the elaborate clothing of the Pharisees and the Romans like King Herod. In ancient times your financial condition and social status were immediately obvious from how you dressed. We’d probably say we don’t operate that way anymore but if someone came in here who looked and smelled - different - we might find this principle tested pretty quickly.

***Do you show NO PARTIALITY?*** Do you give no preference to people based on their wealth, status, gender, race, appearance, accent or anything else?

After going through his example of a rich man and a poor man in the worship gathering, where you welcome the well-dressed wealthy man and give him a nice chair up front but make the poor man sit in the back on the flood, James concludes in verse 4:

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Show no **Preferences** for people (wealth, gender, status, appearance, etc.)

“Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?” James 2:4

The issue here is JUDGMENT. Jesus said, ***“Judge NOT lest you be judged***. With the measure you use it will be measured to you.” What is the judgment they were making in the early church? This wealthy person is worthy of my time and attention and a good seat in church. This poor person is not worthy of being with us, he does not deserve my attention and can sit on the floor - and really, we’d be better off if he wasn’t here at all.

Judgment.

**We are determining a person’s VALUE** and worth in a snap judgment - based on how they LOOK. Making these impulse distinctions turns us into “judges with evil thoughts.”

This could pretty much describe the ***universal experience of MIDDLE SCHOOL***, right? Everyone has to fit into a High School Musical category of jock or musician or junky or nerd. We can all remember what it felt like to walk down the hall and **feel the eyes on you** - the people judging you by your height, weight, athletic ability, grades, popularity, right down to your latest haircut and most visible pimple. I’m awakening some long dormant trauma for some of us right?

Some of those memories are ingrained in us because of the intensity of the emotion. I vividly remember making the soccer team - the joy of that. And not making the basketball team - the crushing blow of that. I was all of 4’ 10” in 7th grade and squeaked up to 4’11” in 8th so that inch wasn’t quite enough to make the team. They literally put you up against a wall and document your height for everyone to see - so there’s no question about the details.

I think we can all agree that we would rather not go back to middle school when it comes to our relationships. That is more or less what James is saying here. Don’t become judges with evil thoughts. **Don’t act like young, insecure teenagers** in how you judge and criticize and gossip about each other!

Look at his rationale in verse 5, which swings us from the negative to avoid into the positive to embrace as we love one another.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. **Value** everyone

“Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?”

James 2:5

A key reason not to judge and discriminate against people is that **we can’t see the heart** - we can’t from a first impression determine the level of someone’s faith or maturity in Christ. It is often the case that those who appear weak and insignificant are actually the most godly, the most mature in Christ. That shouldn’t surprise us since Jesus explicitly taught ***“the last shall be first and the first shall be last,”*** and “the greatest among you are the ones who SERVE,” not the ones who fight for power and status. God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong. His Kingdom is upside down and often runs exactly counter to the way of this world.

James is helping us see that. Don’t bend over backwards for someone just because he dresses nicely, or she dresses nicely. And don’t deliberately neglect someone just because they look a little scruffy.

Remember **when the hobbits first met Strider** in the Prancing Pony in Bree? This is a Lord of the Rings reference for those who are like what’s a hobbit? Stay with me. Frodo and Sam had set out to destroy the one ring, the ring of power - and after escaping the Shire with dark cloaked riders hot on their tail they made it to a neighboring village of humans and had no idea who to trust. A scruffy, hooded figure sat in the back smoking a pipe and watching the inn - and later pulled them aside. Samwise went into defense mode, trying to protect his new master.

Thankfully Strider was a good guy and actually quite important to the story, reminding us of the poetic truth:

“All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost.

The old that is strong does not wither, deep roots are not reached by the frost.

From the ashes a fire shall be woken, light from the shadow shall spring.

Renewed shall be blade that was broken, crownless again shall be king.”
- Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien

Tolkien was obviously riffing on Shakespeare with his “all that is gold does not glitter.” The great playwright said it the other way: ***“All that glitters is not gold.”*** Both are absolutely right. And both are applying the teaching of James chapter two.

When looking at the rich and powerful - not all that glitters is gold.

When looking at the poor and weak - all that is gold does not glitter.

This is actually a very a propos poem and analogy, but we have to get back to Scripture.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. **Value** everyone

“Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?”

James 2:5

Jesus said, ***“Blessed are the poor in Spirit,”*** as the opening line of the sermon on the mount. The foundational virtue that enables growth in all other virtues is **HUMILITY**. God exalts the humble and opposes the proud. This is not just a truism or proverb in life, it is the divine DECREE of God. He has CHOSEN people, deliberately assigning their roles.

One of our favorite scenes in the Chosen is in season three **when Jesus sends out the 12** on their two by two missions and little James pulls Jesus aside. For two and a half seasons you have noticed that the shorter James they call “little” has a visible limp and a back deformity of some kind. Jesus told his disciples that he was giving them authority to heal the sick and cast out demons. This created a dilemma for James who had been with Jesus for a year but had obviously not been healed himself. Obviously, this scene is not in the Bible and Jonathan Roumie is not actually Jesus, but there is a very meaningful principle that comes through in this interaction.

***LITTLE JAMES VIDEO FROM THE CHOSEN SEASON 3***

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. **Value** everyone

“Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?”

James 2:5

***“Can I trust you with this?”*** Some of you are sitting here today and you’ve had this exact conversation with the actual Jesus. He has looked you in the eyes and reassured you that you WILL BE HEALED one day soon - but not right now. Probably not in this life. But what you are going through will bring glory to God and it will help you grow - so He is asking you to trust Him.

The poverty James is talking about here is not just financial. It is poverty in all of its dimensions - physcial health, emotional stability, relational support, vocational opportunity, general resources. Any part of your life that is deficient - **any area of life in which you are POOR** - forces you to trust in the Lord to provide for you.

* You may be poor in HEALTH, but that can make you rich in faith.
* You may be poor in WORK OPPORTUNITIES, but that can deepen your walk with God.
* You may be poor in FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, but that can draw you more into the church family.
* You may be poor in terms of TIME REMAINING on this earth, but that can focus your faith like never before.

“God has CHOSEN those who are poor in this world to be rich in faith and” don’t miss the end of that verse.

1. **Value** everyone

“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?” James 2:5

God has promised us a kingdom. He has promised that we will reign with Him forever and ever. You and I are princes and princesses in the kingdom of God - “joint-heirs with Jesus, as we travel this sod. We are part of the family; the family of God!”

So the exhortation here is to love everyone by avoiding judgment and showing preference to one over another, and to value everyone - especially those who, at a glance, might seem weak or poor or one way or another “less than.” We need to see people with God’s eyes, not the eyes of the world.

A helpful exercise for this is to practice **PRAYING a brief prayer** for everyone you see. “Bless this dear brother to be rich in faith,”; “Lord, encourage this dear sister with the hope of heaven today,”; “Father, remind your precious child here of the fullness of your love.”

Instead of judging people, let’s LOVE people by valuing them and praying for them. **This shows HONOR** to all people, since all people are made in the image of God.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. **Value** everyone

“But you have dishonored the poor man.” James 2:6

We probably don’t say the words, “Sit here on the ground at my feet,” or “go on back there to the back.” In this room the back row has the best seats in the house - that’s where the cool kids sit. So here it’s more the opposite: “I’m so sorry, all that’s left for a family of 5 is the very front row.” It’s your consequence for being late. If you’re on time next week, you can sit wherever you want! I’m totally kidding - if you’re new we will shove people out of the way to help you feel welcome.

Again, the customs are different now, but the attitude is the same. We all make snap judgments and treat people accordingly. We don’t naturally value everyone. ***We naturally JUDGE everyone*** and place them into categories. If we assess someone to be unimportant, we are inclined not to talk to them at the party but to angle for the person who is more fun or more popular or more influential.

I remember this guy in our friend group in high school **we called RADAR** because he never looked you in the eye - he never paid attention to you, even when he was talking to you. His head was always on a swivel, watching for other people; like a radar - waiting for someone more popular to come along, then he would pop up and dart over to that person. But when he was with that person, guess what? His radar turned on again and he kept looking around for the next best target. Knowing how we made fun of that guy kept the rest of us from being really obvious with that kind of behavior. But all of us can be guilty of that sometimes.

***Do we really VALUE everyone we see?*** Or do we assess the value of some people higher than others? This is what it means to truly love people. We don’t show partiality, and we do show value. We HONOR them as precious in God’s sight. We pay full attention. We put our phones down. We turn them over or even - gasp - turn them off.

Think of **the GIFT it is to someone to give them your FULL attention**. Every second you get a vibration, an alert, a message, a reminder. Basically, that is the smart phone universe telling you, “there is something more important RIGHT NOW.” I’m bad with the phone - it’s one of the reasons I’m looking forward to our sabbatical this summer - to turn off the phone for days at a time. Our plan is to get a dumb phone - an old flip phone - that just a couple of people have the number for, in case of a true emergency. Because our goal is to give our full attention to the Lord and to our own family. To value each other for an extended time.

What a gift. The Oakwood family is so generous to allow that kind of time. What an expression of real, practical love for us! One more expression of love here in James 2.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Speak and Act with **Compassion**

“If you really fulfill the royal law… ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

James 2:8

James is so practical. He talks a lot about **money and words**. Very much like Jesus, if you notice. These are the practical pressure points of life: what we actually do with our money and what we actually say with our words. Do we follow the ancient command in Leviticus to “love your neighbor as yourself”? Jesus quoted that along with Deut. 6 to “love the Lord your God” as the greatest commandments in all of the Bible. He said, “All of the law and the prophets hang on these two commands.” So James calls this the “royal law.” The King’s law. The chief law.

Do we ACTUALLY treat others the way WE want to be treated? Do we actually place ourselves into the shoes of the other person?

* Think of the last **cashier** who served you. Did you make eye contact? Did you notice their name? Did you greet them personally? Did you say a quick prayer for them?
* Think of the last **server** at a restaurant who took care of you. Did you ask how he was doing? How she was doing? Did you actually listen to hear the answer? Did you watch for facial cues and signs of stress?
* Think of the last **technician** who fixed something at your house. Did you honor them and offer them a water bottle or cup of coffee? Did you interact with them as an equal, as a human being, or just hustle them to the problem area and make sure they got to work right away?
* Think of the last **customer service** agent you spoke with on the phone. Yes, you waited 20 minutes to get to them, but did you take that annoyance out on them, even though they had nothing to do with it? Did you catch their name and use it in the conversation? Did you sincerely thank them for their time and effort?

Do we SPEAK and ACT with mercy and compassion?

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Speak and Act with **Compassion**

“But if you show partiality you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

James 2:9

Showing preference, partiality - playing favorites - is SIN. Pure and simple. Judging people is bad. **The Law of God shines a light** on all of our behavior and exposes where it is out of line. In the end it’s a question of our words and actions; what we DO and what we SAY. The Law of God gives clear direction in terms of right and wrong. James uses two of the 10 commandments as examples.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Speak and Act with **Compassion**

“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one points has become guilty of all of it.” James 2:10

Ok, you did not commit adultery - well done. But ***you did MURDER someone.*** Well. The fact that you avoided adultery does not get you off the hook for that person you just killed. I wonder if James chose these two examples because Jesus used them in the sermon on the mount to teach the INTENT of the law, beyond the letter of the law. If you LOOK at a woman lustfully, you’ve already committed adultery with her in your heart. And if you CURSE at someone in anger, you’ve already murdered them in your heart. The laws against adultery and murder are not just about the physical acts, they are about the heart and mindset that leads you to the physical acts.

**So let’s evaluate ourselves** by just these two laws of God. Perhaps, to this point, you have managed not to commit adultery or actually murder anyone. But if your heart is boiling with anger and your words spill out with toxic gossip and slander, you are already murdering a person’s reputation? And if your heart is seething with lust and you are regularly looking at porn, you are already an adulterer many times over.

Do you see the standard that God’s Law establishes for us? You can keep the whole law - the exact letter of not just the 10 commandments but the 300 other ones - but if you fail at one point, you have broken the whole thing. It’s a package deal. You cross one line, you are a law-breaker, a transgressor.

***Partiality is such a sin.*** It might appear like a small one compared to the “big ones” in the 10 commandments. But to the Giver of the Law it is a transgression that breaks His heart because it causes harm to one of His children.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Speak and Act with **Compassion**

“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.” James 2:12

Now here is a shift. It is not the law of MOSES by which we will be judged - but the new law, the law of Christ, which is the law of LIBERTY. **In Christ we are FREE** - we are no longer bound by the ceremonial and civil laws of ancient Israel, praise the Lord (because we like pulled pork, right? And I’m all for side burns but Luke Perry, Jason Priestly level is plenty - we don’t have to go to extremes w/ the burns).

Sometimes as Christians we are so glad that “there is no condemnation” for those in Christ, that we forget there IS a JUDGMENT coming for believers too. It’s not a judgment of condemnation, but one of EVALUATION. ***Our works will be tested*** and the wood, hay and straw will be burned up, leaving only the gold, silver and costly stones. We will give an accounting to our Lord and Master. His Law is one of liberty - so we are free to choose HOW we will serve Him. But actually serving Him - that is not a negotiable point. If we live in luxury and self-indulgence and don’t take care of the weak and vulnerable in the church; if we don’t love our neighbors - like our actual neighbors - the Day of the Lord will bring to light the actual reality of our works and the thoughts and intentions behind them.

***So SPEAK with love. So LIVE with love.*** Let’s devote ourselves to the loving service of everyone we can. Let’s do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the family of God. Let’s not get caught up in the American dream so that we only seek our own advancement, but let’s humble ourselves and follow the way of Jesus in DOWNWARD MOBILITY toward greater sacrifice and greater service.

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Speak and Act with **Compassion**

“For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

James 2:13

This is a reminder of **Matthew 25**. “Whatever you have done for the least of these brothers of mine,” Jesus said, “You have done for me.” I was hungry, I was thirsty. I was naked. I was sick. I was in prison. I was a stranger.

The judgment in Matthew 25 is very tangible, ***very practical***. You gave some food or you didn’t. You gave some water or you didn’t. You took someone into your home or you left them outside. You visited someone in distress or you were too busy to actually go see them.

Are we those who show mercy? Do we have true compassion for those in hard situations? Do we actually love our neighbors the way we love ourselves? Or do we just love ourselves?

This is heavy today, I know. It’s a lot to take in. But in the end it’s very simple.

To follow Jesus is to follow His law of **Love**

**What True Love Looks Like:**

1. Show no **Preferences** for people
2. **Value** everyone
3. Speak and act with **Compassion**

We say we follow Jesus. ***To follow Him is to walk in His ways.*** His ways are the ways of love - true, practical, daily, sacrificial LOVE. This rules out partiality and preferential treatment. We must not be people who judge based on appearances and status. Rather, we need to value everyone, recognizing that the kingdom of God is upside down. Those who seem weak and poor and lower are often the ones who are filled with wisdom and faith and godliness. While those who seem strong and powerful and wise are often the ones filled with worldliness, selfishness and greed.

Regardless of who we are interacting with, we need to be those who speak and act with true compassion, mercy and love.

Just love.

Use words that show love. Do actions that show love. ***Pay attention to people who are hurting.*** Make time for the weak and vulnerable. Look for the hurting, the outcast, the neglected ones. “Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Love wins is true, just as black lives matter is true. Those phrases have just been twisted to other agendas than love.

But let’s remember that ***love does win in the end***. Jesus’ love triumphs. His mercy prevails. It prevails first to change US into people who actually love. And as we are changed by the mercy of Jesus, His love shines through us to others.

Who is on your heart today? I bet there is one person whose face you’ve been seeing in your mind this whole morning. Maybe you know their name, maybe you don’t. But you know who it is, and you know where to find them. ***Start with prayer.*** Just pray for that person. Pray for the mercy of Jesus to triumph over their pain, their sadness.

Let’s take a minute now and pray for the love of Jesus to work in us and to shine through us.

QUIET PRAYER.

PRAY.