

“Speak No Evil”

James 4:11-12

Sunday, April 24th, 2022

Judges are often in the news, and recent days, weeks and months have borne that out.

On February 25th, the US Senate confirmed the President’s nomination of Ketanji Brown Jackson as an Associate Justice to the US Supreme Court. She will be taking the seat of retiring justice Stephen Breyer sometime this summer. The unique element in this appointment is that Mrs Brown Jackson becomes the first black female justice on the Supreme Court.

More recently, another Federal judge was in the news. *Are you familiar with this name - U.S. District Judge Kathryn Kimball Mizelle?* She struck down the Centers for Disease Control and Protection’s mask mandate for public transportation this past Monday, April 18th. The Justice Department is filing an appeal aiming to overturn the ruling.

Another federal judge, Rebecca Grady Jennings, on Thursday issued a temporary order blocking a Kentucky abortion law. The legislation bans aborting pre-born life after 15 weeks of pregnancy. The state legislature passed the law in March, and then on Wednesday, overrode the governor’s veto of the measure which had taken place a week ago last Wednesday.

In the passage of Scripture before us this morning, James touches on the practice of judging (a verb), as well as the Judge (capital ‘J’) - a noun. Before we look at the passage (**James 4:11-12**), we must refresh our minds to where we were in the previous passage which we studied last Sunday on Resurrection Day.

Verses 7-10 find James issuing several commands (imperatives) that we as believers in Jesus Christ are to live out in light of what God has already done for us (indicatives). The indicative for these imperatives (God’s action) actually comes in verse 6, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

An imperative typically follows a “therefore,” “since,” or “hence.” A biblical statement of the gospel is present here in James **Chapter 4**. God resists the proud and He gives grace to the humble, *therefore*, we can do as verses 7-10 command us to do:

- Submit to God;
- Resist the devil;
- Draw near to God;
- Lament and mourn and weep!
- Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord.

Another gospel imperative is present as we come to verse 11. We remember that merely fulfilling gospel imperatives is not what gets us to heaven. **Serving and doing - in light of what God has already done for us - is what gets us to heaven.** If we profess that we are believers in Jesus Christ and we're not striving to obey Scriptural imperatives, then our profession of faith in Christ is a sham. It's a fiction. It only exists in your head. Heaven is gained by trusting in what Jesus has done for us - the gospel is what "He, He, He" has done not, what "I," "I", "I" have done.

James 4:11-12 :

"**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?"

A young couple moves into a new neighborhood. Their first morning while eating breakfast, the couple across the street are watching their new neighbor hanging the wash outside.

"That laundry is not very clean," the wife said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap." Her husband looked on, but remained silent.

Every week, when the wife's new neighbor would hang out her wash to dry, she would make the same derogatory comments.

About a month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?"

The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

Notice James' tone has changed from verse 8 in last week's text to verse 11 in today's passage. In verse 8, James calls his readers "sinners" and "double-minded." But here in the last word of the first sentence in verse 11, he again addresses them as "brethren" or "brothers."

With sensitivity and a great love for the church, James appeals to his readers as family. Very often, when the Bible speaks about family, it is talking about the relationship that we have as Christians with other Christians. It's so sweet when our physical family members are also a part of the Church, the spiritual family. God places a high priority on the spiritual family; a flesh and blood family member who is not also a believer in Jesus Christ is in serious need of the gospel. That physical family relationship will not continue into the next life unless one first surrenders to the Head of the Church - Jesus Christ.

James issues an imperative as verse 11 opens. "Do not speak evil of one another." When we speak "of" one another to others, we should choose the kindest, most

complimentary words possible. Yet, what sadly often happens is we speak of others in a way that runs them down or speaks down to them. (That's slander). If the person to whom we are speaking uses harsh language, we often find that it's easier just to go along to get along. And, before we know it, we're running someone else down. James says here that those who are guilty of speaking evil *of* others are guilty of speaking evil *against* their family!

No Christian should ever be a party to slandering others or making false charges against another's reputation. James goes on to say in verse 11, "He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law."

Again, "brother" here refers to a Christian. Whoever speaks evil of a fellow Christian ***judges*** that brother or sister in Christ. This happens WAY too much and it does WAY too much damage. No wonder back in Chapter 3, James called the tongue "a flame of fire and a whole world of wickedness, corrupting one's entire body. The tongue can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself." (NLT)

In James' day, "people in the church were puncturing one another repeatedly with fine gastric mixes of slander, gossip, and criticism, both behind the back and face to face. It was a Devil's feast." (Hughes)

Matthew 7:1 often enters into discussions of judging others. You know this verse - "Judge not, that you be not judged." But, we really don't understand what the term "judge" in this verse means. *Are we supposed to understand this verse meaning that we cannot determine, discern, or choose between sinful and wholesome behaviors?* Even in this **7th Chapter of Matthew's** gospel account, Jesus talks about dogs and swine, good trees and bad trees, and wise and foolish people. So judging whether behavior is sinful or wholesome isn't the context here. We must lovingly and humbly seek to help others confront the sin in their lives, after we've sought God's forgiveness for our own sinfulness.

What the Scriptures forbid is judgmentalism, a critical and censorious spirit that judges everyone and everything, seeking to run others down.

The kind of judging Jesus describes here in **Matthew Chapter 7** is criticizing the speck in another's eye while ignoring the log in your own. In other words, when you critique another person for any reason other than love, you act like you are sinless. You must help your brother remove the speck from his eye - it is commanded in the text. But you must never go to him to critique him without a very present realization of your own sinfulness.

The next time you are tempted to pick up the phone to chew another Christian out, or to pick up the pen to write a scathing letter, or to get on social media in order to make hurtful comments against another, remember what James says here. Do not speak evil of another brother - ever! No matter how justified you feel you are.

To do so, is to not only judge the brother or sister, but it is to judge the very law itself. He writes at the end of verse 11, "He who speaks... evil of the law...judges the law." *To what law could James be referring?* Back in **James 2:8**, he writes, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well." It could have also been **Leviticus Chapter 19, verses 16-18**, which reads,

"You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people... I am the Lord. **17** "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

James addresses this with the 12th verse - "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" When we remove ourselves from under one of God's laws, we act like we are God. And only He is able to save and to destroy. We must remember that God never sends people to do His job for Him. He is the Judge, not we. We are commanded to serve God humbly.

- One of many verses teaching this is **Deuteronomy 32:39** - "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand."

We dare not elevate ourselves above God. We bow to and serve Him, not the other way around. He doesn't require, need, or want our help.

Once, while John Wesley was preaching, he noticed a lady in the audience who was known for her critical attitude. All throughout the service, she sat and stared at his new tie. When the meeting ended, she came up to him and said very sharply, "Mr. Wesley, the strings on your new tie are much too long. It's an offense to me!" He asked if any of the ladies present happened to have a pair of scissors in their purse. When the scissors were handed to him, he gave them to his critic and asked her to trim the streamers to her liking. After she clipped them off near the collar, he said, "Are you sure they are all right now?"

“Yes, that’s much better.” “Then let me have those shears a moment,” said Wesley, “I’m sure you wouldn’t mind if I also gave you a bit of correction. I must tell you, madam, that your tongue is an offense to me - it’s too long! Please stick it out - I’d like to take some of it off.”

I began this message discussing judges in the recent news. Now, we’ll look backward to quotes from two justices no longer living, but who both made major impressions upon the nation’s highest legal court.

John Jay, the first chief justice of the Supreme Court, wrote in a letter to a friend, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers."

“God assumed from the beginning that the wise of the world would view Christians as fools...and He has not been disappointed....If I have brought any message today, it is this: Have the courage to have your wisdom regarded as stupidity. Be fools for Christ. And have the courage to suffer the contempt of the sophisticated world.” A quote appearing in the *Washington Times* by the late justice Antonin Scalia

You heard the fifth membership declaration as Bill joined the church this morning. Will you promise to further the peace and purity of the Church?