

Judging By Appearances – James 2:1-13

“Do you see how he’s dressed? I know, it’s appalling; He looks ridiculous; (etc)”

Now that I’ve expressed some of your thoughts for you – the title of the message today is *Judging By Appearances* from James 2:1-13

Encourage you to follow along in your own copy of God’s word

Though God may use *my* words to impact your life, it’s *his* word that will penetrate your soul

But before get to that, and if you can ignore my shabby attire for a moment, I want to talk to you about something that’s been heavy on my heart this week

I’ve preached on some hard things recently

A lot of imperatives – things you have to do or not do

All of which can be very difficult to consistently live out

If we’re not careful, we can lose perspective and begin to think that the Christian life is all about keeping the rules and adhering to a list of do’s and don’ts

And feel beaten down because we don’t measure up

Thinking God is up there with a great big hammer waiting to lower the boom

What I want you to know this morning is that, that is not God at all

God is a God of grace/mercy

Who shows us favor when we don’t deserve it, and *withholds* punishment when we do

Yes, he wants you to live his way – for your sake *and* for his

But he’s not waiting for you to fail so he can crush you and make your life miserable

Yes, he expects you to *strive* for perfection, and will help you every step of the way

But he also knows you’ll never make it this side of heaven, and his grace covers that – guaranteed by the death of his Son on your behalf

Most important to God is your heart

He wants to know that your highest desire in life is to love him and live for him with every fiber of your being

And when you fail to do so, he longs to forgive you, and start over, time and time again

That’s the ongoing, amazing grace of God, who loves you so much

Does that mean we can ignore books like James? No

Does that mean we should dismiss the conviction of truth when we hear it? No

God gave us guidelines and commands for a reason

And it should be our highest goal to walk in them

But *as* we strive to do so, never should we feel beaten down when we don’t measure up

He loves you too much for that

Have u ever thought that maybe God gave us all these commands to magnify his grace?

So as we continue to work our way through James – remember God’s grace; always

Rest in it; Depend on it; If you don’t, you’ll be one conflicted, miserable soul

If you do, you’ll find that applying these truths is one of the greatest joys in your life, no matter how often you get them wrong

God is a God of grace and mercy – remember that

- James 2:1-4 – the crux of this passage is clear – show no partiality; give no preferential treatment; play no favorites . . . especially on the basis of appearance

Like you thinking that I don’t have anything to offer because of how I’m dressed
That’s judging by appearances – that’s exactly what James is talking about

Unfortunately, that’s not new in church-world

We tend to cater to the rich because we want their money

And ignore the poor because they’re dead weight and a little embarrassing

Like the woman who lived on the wrong side of the tracks and wanted to join a very fashionable, prestigious church (Hughes, 89)

So she went to the pastor and told him so – to which he suggested that she go home and think about it for a week

If at the end of the week she still wanted to join, let him know

She did, and sure enough, she came back and said, “I want to join”

To which the pastor replied, “Let’s not be hasty. How about if you go home and read your Bible everyday for an hour, and then come back and let me know if you still want to join?”

Not very happy about it, she complied, and once again came back with the same desire
In exasperation, the pastor’s like, “I have one more suggestion. Pray every day this week and ask the *Lord* if he wants you to come into our fellowship.”

A week went by, then 2, then a month

After 6 months, the pastor ran into woman on the street, asked her what she had decided
To which she replied, “I did what you asked me to do; I went home and prayed”

“And one day as I was praying, the Lord said to me, ‘Don’t worry about getting into that church. *I’ve* been trying to do so for 20 years.’”

Whether it’s a fictional story like that (I hope), or the situation that James describes, or our own church today (look at me) – we all have a tendency to judge by appearances
To show partiality and assign value based on wealth, clothing, fame, power, position, race, beauty, personality, talent?

And when we do . . .

1. We divide our church (v2-4)

This is the first of 8 implications of judging by appearances – it divides us

If Jesus came to break down the barriers that divide (and he did)

The worst thing we can do is build them up by emphasizing unnecessary distinctions

I’m not preaching this because I think this is a problem around here

I’m preaching it because it’s in the word, and don’t want it to be a problem around here

I’d like to think we are one of the most loving/welcoming bodies of believers around

But the tendency is *always* there to divide ourselves

- I’m not talking about, nor is James, the natural divisions/groupings that occur when people serve together, or are in SG together, or know each other outside of church
Natural groupings based on affinities of similarity are perfectly normal, and healthy – we can’t all know each other
Nor am I talking about the divisions of a *perceived* favoritism by those who feel neglected or left out because somebody didn’t say hi to them or pay attention to them
- What I *am* talking about is the tendency to separate ourselves based only on *external* distinctions

To avoid those who don't look quite right; To treat them differently because of it
When we do that as members of the body of Christ, we create a *class* church that does
not honor God nor magnify his grace by extending it to others
Make it a point to greet/connect with those who are different than you
Ask God to give you a love for them, and to see them as he sees them
Otherwise, we'll judge by appearances and divide our church

2. We reveal our arrogance (v4)

4 – when you judge by appearances, *have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

We have; We've appointed ourselves as the de facto judge of their worth
We've placed ourselves over them – condemning some, elevating others, and ignoring the rest

And it reveals our arrogance – the source of our *evil thoughts* that some are bad and some are good, based solely on appearances

We must give the benefit of the doubt; We must withhold judgment

We must suppress and confess ugly thoughts that put a person in a box just because they dress differently, or have multiple tattoos, or dime-sized ear discs (etc)

I'm not saying throw all discernment out the door

Jesus said – *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.* (Jn 7:24)

In other words, discern the motives of their heart before you jump to conclusions based on their appearance

Anything else reveals our arrogance

3. We insult God (v5)

Read v5 – when we judge by appearances, we sometimes condemn the very people God has chosen for his own possession, his own children

This doesn't mean that all those who are poor are children of God

Not only would that run contrary to the rest of Scripture that tells us salvation comes through faith and repentance . . .

But James includes his own caveat saying that being an heir of God's kingdom, being a part of his people and receiving eternal life – is dependent on our love for God

It's promised to those who love him (5c)

Nor does it mean that God has slighted the poor just because they're poor

He's chosen some of them unto salvation just as he's chosen some who are rich, and people from every walk of life in between

And when we judge by appearances we're saying in effect – “God, I don't think much of your choice in people; sorry”

That's about as insulting as it gets

- If God ignores social differences, so should we – *has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith?* (5)

If God ignores national differences, so should we

Acts 10:34 – *God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.*

If God ignores cosmetic differences, so should we

1 Sam 16:7–*Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.*
Judging by appearances, we insult God

Closely associated with that, is . . .

4. We dishonor people (v6)

James says (6) – *you have dishonored the poor man*

God has chosen him, but you've dishonored him – slighted him; brought shame to him

By virtue of the fact that people are the recipients of God-breathed life – they deserve a basic level of respect

By virtue of the fact that they have a God-given ability to think – they deserve respect

By virtue of the fact that they have God-given feelings – they deserve respect

All of those are characteristics of being made in the image of God

When we judge people by appearances and show partiality – we dishonor the very people *God* has honored, by creating them in his image, saved or not

What's worse, some of them love him as heirs of his kingdom and recipients of eternal life

And here we are dishonoring another brother or sister in Christ, because we judge them by their appearance

- Some of you were here for the Shane & Shane concert this past Thursday
That afternoon, Dan Millage and I went over to LaJames to look around (etc)
Keep in mind, I'm deep into this message at that point in the week

When we walked in, there was this guy in front of us at the counter, taking a *million* years to do whatever he wanted to do

I'm looking at this guy from the back – ratty sweats, unshaven, dirty shirt, greasy hair

I'm thinking – dude, what kind of lazy, low-life are you?

Just get out of the way already so we can get on with our meeting

About that time he turns around, notices my Harvest fleece, and says – “Oh, are you guys from next door? I'm Shane Bernard; nice to meet you”

I'm such an idiot – the very thing I was preparing to preach (etc), I failed miserably in
Did I mention that God is a God of grace?

We have a tendency to judge by appearances

And when we do, we dishonor people – sometimes even God's people

And it doesn't make any sense at all; Judging by appearances we also . . .

5. We act irrationally (v6-7)

Read v6-7 – James is like, let me get this straight

You're trying to get all chummy with the chumps who hate your guts

The same ones who beat you down, and keep you under their thumb

The same ones who drag you into court because you can't repay their exorbitant interest or abide by their one-sided contracts which they drew up in the first place to take advantage of your desperation

The same people who willfully and deliberately slap God in the face

That's what it means to *blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called*

To openly and boldly mock and insult the Lord Jesus Christ who saved you and

redeemed you and restored your life
To cater to people like that is totally irrational; It doesn't make sense

But it illustrates the lengths we will go when our motives and priorities are out of whack
Hoping that someone important, no matter how bad, might notice us and take us places
In the end, we not only slight the poor, but use the rich – act irrationally all the way around

6. We disobey the Lord (v8)

Read v8 – if you don't, you disobey

The *royal law* is James way of referring to all that God, the royal one, says to do
Part of his instruction includes this command to *love your neighbor as yourself*
He said it first to Moses at the foot of Mt Sinai in Lev 19
Then through Christ in Mt 22, as part of his great summation of the Law and Prophets
If we fulfill it, we do well; If we don't, we disobey

James' point is that when we judge by appearances . . .

When we assign value based on everything from looks to race – we are definitely not fulfilling the royal law; we're disobeying it

In doing so . . .

7. We condemn ourselves (v9-11)

We seal our guilty verdict as sinners

Read v9-10 – there's no such thing as a partial sinner
It only takes one broken law to make a lawbreaker, and one sin to make a sinner

In v11, he cites an example to prove his point (read it)

You have become a lawbreaker, even though you didn't break all the laws
And you're subject to (*accountable for*) the consequences of the law, which is death

In his holiness, God requires a blood sacrifice, a life – to satisfy his wrath toward your sin,
and pay the price for breaking his law
Which is why the death of Christ was critical for every single one of us . . .
Anything less would not have paid the price, nor satisfied his wrath

All of this is James way of establishing beyond a shadow of a doubt, that when we
judge by appearances and show partiality, we sin, and condemn ourselves as sinners
It doesn't matter if you're perfect in every other aspect of life, if you fail in this one or
any other, you're a sinner subject to the full weight and consequences of the law

That's why the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is such a big deal
He satisfies the requirements of God's law, and relieves us of our guilt
Did I mention that God is a God of grace?

Judging by appearances – we divide our church, reveal our arrogance, insult God,
dishonor people, act irrationally, disobey the Lord, act irrationally, and . . .

8. We defeat our purpose (v12-13)

Read v12-13 – when we judge by appearances and show favorites, we're looking for favor
In this case, the poor were looking for favor/mercy from the rich

And James is like – you're defeating your purpose

Your favoritism toward some, means a lack of mercy toward others, and it will come
back to you

Mercy given leads to mercy received; Judgment given leads to judgment received

So when we judge by appearances and play favorites, hoping to receive mercy or favor,
we defeat our purpose, because we won't get it

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy (13)

But the converse is also true – if we show mercy, it will be shown to us, because mercy
triumphs over judgment

It supersedes the judgment we deserve; It displaces it; Because mercy reigns

That's why there's such power for example, in turning the other cheek

By showing mercy, you deflate the desire for pain/judgment that someone wants to
inflict on you

Not to mention the fact that our merciful attitude and actions will count as evidence of
the presence of Christ within us . . .

On the basis of which we will be shown mercy at the final judgment

Mercy triumphs over judgment (13)

Which is why we should speak and act *as those who are to be judged under the law of
liberty* (12)

Because the law of liberty is all about mercy

It's the way, the truth, and the life found only in Christ, that liberates us from sin, frees
us from condemnation, and compels us to show mercy to others

And when we show mercy according to that law of liberty, mercy is the result

When we don't, judgment is; And we defeat our purpose

- Judging by appearances is out
Seeing *people* created in the image of God, is in
Take your thoughts captive, and love your neighbor as yourself