

THE FULL FAMILY CHURCH

DATE : 28 SEPTEMBER 2008

MESSAGE : SERIES ON JAMES (3) - **DO NOT JUDGE ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU SEE.**

Last week we pondered on a part in the book of James where the value of suffering was discussed.

It was Jesus' younger brother, James that addressed us. For the better part of his life he grew up with Jesus our Lord in the same household. And although he only became converted after Jesus arose from death, we will agree that he probably knew Jesus better during those days than many other people did.

It was also the same James who later became one of Jesus' greatest followers. He was also referred to as, "Old Camel Knees"; because of the knee scars he got as a result of constant praying.

Today we start our reading from James 2, verses 1-13.

Here James addresses pride. He knew very well how Jesus felt about this matter. This is also closely related to the whole tradition of hospitality during that time. In a previous sermon I pointed out that the Bible is quite clear on the matter of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This did not happen because of people being homosexual, but that the citizens of those cities were guilty of inhospitality, sexual lust and intimacy with angels. Those were the main reasons why God's wrath wiped out those cities.

In this letter of James, the writer is busy expanding on many things that Jesus said and commented on. James does not address un-saved people here. All the issues he touches on, the things you can actually expect from non-Christian, are the very things that point to godlessness.

Yet, James reminds us that we stand in Name of the One who removed us from the curse of the law, the One that paid the final blood offering price, so that we can now stand under grace.

It is now remarkable that this James knows very well, that even though our spirit might be saved, our souls have not yet been saved yet. Paul states it at one point in a letter that we will get our souls saved by great effort.

This is where the fruit of the Holy Spirit become applicable. Those nine characters of the fruit (singular), on which I spoke about from Galatians 5:22 - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, meekness, goodness, faith, humbleness and self-control. Against these there is no law."

When we look at the words of Jesus Himself, especially those in His unforgettable Beatitudes, we see that He touches on all these aspects. James now comes and aligns it further into context. He particularly addressed those people who are a bit more affluent than other. People, who in the process, because of their weak self-esteem, try to compensate this deficiency by being proud. They become hippocrates. They look down on other.

They have a lot to say about this one and that person. When you listen carefully to the content of most of these conversations, it is about other people's external appearance and their characters. They love to stick their noses into other people's matters and cannot wait to initiate a piece of gossip. All of this merely to bring that person into discredit and to make themselves look good. The good and beautiful traits in the other person will never be recognised or mentioned, only the juicy sensational details.

Then, when they make their public appearances in shiny outfits, jewellery or academic pride and self inflated status ... even appearing in church, a false smile plays around their mouths, and even sugar cannot melt away on their tongues. They scrutinise their surroundings like snakes. And once the meeting ends, they cannot wait to pass a comment, no matter how subtle, disguised and well meant, with a willing ear.

This is what James speaks about in this section.

How many times have we not burned our fingers when we are spewed out at the other side after involvement in the attractive nest of status, richness and admiration?

Tonight I have to confess in bitter sadness, that we as sensitive souls of the alternative community may often be guiltier of this misconduct.

We are so focussed on receiving that we struggle to give without receiving. Sometimes we can display the most polite behaviour, but under the surface it only serves as clever manipulation to gain something out of the deal.

And when we cannot get what we want, our tongues changes into razor sharp knives with which we skin someone until only the skeleton remains.

Jesus had a huge problem with that. It opposed directly what the Fruit of the Spirit want to achieve within us. This is what Paul meant when he said that we will save our souls with difficulty. These are the things that will keep us from a wonderful relationship with Jesus.

James, in this chapter, reminds us that it is the humble in particular, the poor and those that are less fortunate, who will see their places in heaven easier. Because they are not tempted by this lust for pride, they remain humble and need to focus more on the love of God.

It is important to note that James does not say it is wrong to be blessed with honour, possessions and status. But in the eyes of our Lord, it means nothing and can ever give us a place of preference in His presence.

James now says: if you then know that those who are less fortunate will inherit the heavens, how can you then look down and discriminate on them? Do they not also form part of the Body of Christ? Are they not part of you and me?

The eye cannot say to the toe, you are less important. The eye is the eye and the toe is the toe. No matter whether the eye is more visible than the toe. They are both equally important in serving the body. If one of the two is not there anymore, the whole body will suffer and becomes dysfunctional. The same applies in this case.

Yes, Jesus says at one stage, that we will always have the poor with us. So get over it. Neither you nor I will be able to change it. But it is through our attitude that we will be able to make a difference. The way in which we honour the poor as an equal part of the Body of Christ will determine that.

James now takes this argument even further. He addressed the traditionalists who love to hang onto the law. Those are the people who know the Bible backwards and have an answer to everything.

Very well, he says, you who claim the law, even you are guilty when you look down on the less fortunate. For even that same law that states that you may not commit murder or adultery, stipulates that you should love your neighbour as you love yourself. If you then violate the law on neighbourly love, while you are expected to love them like you love yourself, then you have violated the entire law. Then you are also a murdered and an adulterer.

What about us? We who stand under the blood of Christ? For us he says in verse 12: "See to it then that your words show that you are someone who is aware that you will be judged by the law that sets free, the law of love. You will definitely not receive any favour if you do not show favour. God's favour for you is stronger than his judgement."

This is what James wants to remind us of. It is referred to as the Royal Law. The Big Commandment, if you like. "You should to love the Lord you God with your whole heart, your whole soul and with all your energy. And the second standing equal to this, is: you have to love your neighbour as you love yourself." This is the Royal Law. Jesus emphasises it shortly prior to His ascension when He says to the disciples, "How will the world know that you are my followers [*disciples*]? They will see that you love one another."

James returns to this issue in chapter 4. It seems like he has not finished what he had to say about this matter.

Read what he has to say in chapter 4.

He speaks about our pride and covetousness, and then he gets to the source of this problem.

Have a look at the last part of verse 2 again. "And at the end the reason why you do not have what you want, is the fact that you did not ask God for it. And even if you would have asked, you do not receive it because your intention is wrong - you want only to satisfy your own desires."

He then compares it with a marriage relationship with God. This is the kind of relationship where you think of the needs of the other person before you think of your own. You make provision for your partner before you look at your own needs. James says that this kind of selfishness, this pride and covetousness in us, causes infidelity in our intimate relationship with God. We become adulterers, because we only think of ourselves. We become enemies of God when we join in and play this *I want I want* game with the world.

No, we have to do what is required of us. We have to honour this relationship with our Creator. We have to show Him that we are totally dependent on Him. In any case He gives us more than we deserve. Only because HE WANTS TO, not because HE FEELS OBLIGED to.

And because we are serious about our marriage relationship with the Lord, we will subsequently also regard those who are lesser in the same light. This is Jesus' command and this is the way in which He tests our relationship with Him.

We have to recognise these things and come to our senses before we can rectify this. God is not interested in our status, our academic degrees, our achievements, our wealth, our cuteness. In this relationship with Him, we have to be humble. We have to listen more and speak less. We have to show it to our neighbours in the most practical ways you can think of. Only then will the Lord lift us up. Then it will be good status; a godly status because we then live under His protection and His provision.

Listen to me very carefully. To be a Christian does not mean to have a weak self-esteem. It also does not imply that we have to regard ourselves as worms. No, we are princes and princesses, because our Father is the King. Jesus created us in His perfect image. That also means a good self-esteem. But because of that we may not look down on people. That is not displaying a good self-esteem. That is arrogance. This kind of arrogance, selfishness and pride, had cost Satan his prime position in heaven. God casted him and a third of all the angels who went into rebellion against Him, out of heaven. They will never have the opportunity to return to Him.

Jesus' whole life opposed arrogance. He rather became the slave, the servant, and because we would like to follow His example, we have to follow this as well.

James further explains this point in verses 11 & 12 when he points out that we should refrain from saying nasty things about one another. In other words, if you cannot say something good about a person, keep quiet. Zip your lips. We have not been appointed as judges therefore we may not judge. Jesus is the judge who will sit on the judgement seat at the end. It is His calling to judge. The more you have to say about other people's lives, the more Jesus will have to say about us. Not one of us are above criticism, neither can we afford to take this chance.

In stead of gossiping, rather pray for that person. Not in public, but in you prayer closet where you can cover that person's nakedness.

James closes this chapter, by making a final appeal to us, to show our dependence of God in everything that we do and plan to do. Not one of us can safely say that we will still be alive tomorrow. If you think you can, you are a fool, because no one knows his/her days. Therefore we have to submit everything we plan to the divine protection and the will of our Lord.

Jesus Himself told us that our days are like the lilies of the fields. Today they blossom, and tomorrow a dry wind rises and nothing is left.

The older people used to have a beautiful expression and I was raised with that: "If the Lord spares me, I will do this or that." In Latin is it known as DV, Deo Volente. God willing.

This is what James says. Stop being arrogant, proud and selfish, because in the process your razor sharp knife destroys helpless people who are also part of God's creation. Jesus died for them as much as He died for us.

We should do what James asks of us, when he echoes the words of Jesus. We should stop our obnoxious arrogance, pride and boasting.

He ends this chapter with a clear warning. Remember that he does not address this warning to non-believers. He directs it to us - people who call themselves Christians, reborn heirs and those who carry the image of God.

In verse 17, he warns: "Keep in mind: If one knows the right things to do and does not do it, is it a sin."

Why sin? I was under the impression that we no longer stand under the law? Correct. We do not stand under the law anymore, but then we have to act like people who are not under the law anymore. The fact that we are under grace and no longer under the law, does not give us the right to act in a wild, reckless and lawless way. If you and I are true followers of Christ, God's law will be engraved in our hearts. Even though Jesus do not expect from us to live out the letter of the law, He expects us to submit to, to live out the meaning, and to obey that.

Let us make a decision as from today to keep our critical tongues and our eyes that want to find fault, and our hearts that brew on evil plans to bring down our neighbours. Let us change this pride to humbleness. Let us honour our Lord who grants the sun to shine on all of us by living and obeying the Royal Law every day. Let us show our Lord how serious we are regarding His blessings in our lives by loving one another the way He loves us. Let us think of others first, before we put our needs first.

Let's first of all mend our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, then all these other relationships will be restored. Do it, and see how much more favour will come your way.

Amen.

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