



The Westminster Pulpit

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“Bumped Into First Class” **Sermon on James 2:1-17**

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Scripture has various voices.

There is the voice of the prophet, “Behold, the days are surely coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with my people.”

There is the voice of the priest. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

There is also the voice of the Sage. You heard the wisdom of the Sage in the proverbs Heidi read to you a few moments ago. “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.”

The voice of the Sage is also in the book of James. James will say things like: “Faith without works is dead.” “Be doers of the Word and not merely hearers...”

“If you think you’re religious but do not bridle your tongue, your religion is worthless.” Listen to the sage wisdom of James.

James 2:1-17

My brothers and sisters, do you, with your acts of favoritism, really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please’, while to the one who is poor, you say, ‘Stand there’, or, ‘Sit at my feet’, have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who

drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery', also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Wise words that I love. They add up to good sense! "A penny saved is a penny earned."

I'm all about wise words on saving money, especially on travel. I always search for the cheapest way to do a great vacation.

For the last few years, my family has crashed my brother's home in Seattle. There, we receive free room and board; we travel by light rail and bus. With the money saved, we splurge—a trip for a few days to Victoria, British Columbia. So, this year, my brother dumped us off at the ferry station in Seattle, and we waited, early in the morning in a large room filled to the rim with people ready to board.

Then we heard the announcement, "We will now board our first-class luxury travelers." As those first-class people stood up, I leaned over to my grown children and said, "Don't worry, you're just as good as they are. You may not have their money, their education, their top deck view, their homes, their cars, their attorneys, but you're just as good as they are." To which my children rolled their eyes, and my wife told me to "hush."

Then they announced, "We will now board our executive travelers. I leaned over to my kids and said, "Michael, McKenzie, stay seated. We're not executive travelers. Your father may be old, but he is wise. Your father knows that whatever the class, we all arrive at our destination simultaneously. The money we save, will allow us to eat." My children rolled their eyes, and my wife hushed me.

"Next, we board economy class." "Michael and McKenzie, don't move until you hear 'coal shovelers and deckhands.'" By this time, I realize I'm talking to myself, and my family has moved on without me - something they like to call "vacation."

James knows that the world has its classes, but James knows the Church must not.

On this ship, in this knave, we don't board by classes. You don't sit with the crowd on a Communion Sunday waiting on the voice, "We will now invite those to the table who have ten

sins or less.” “We will now welcome our 10- to 25 sins-a-week people, those who have contributed \$10,000.00, or put into the church 100 hours of sweat equity this month.” No, we don’t do that.

We simply say the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Come! Come, you who have much faith and you who have little. Come, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed, come! Come, you who have been here often and you who have not been here long, come! Come!

But James is seeing a class system in the church. The wealthy are welcomed with open arms! “Sit here! What can I get for you?” And the poor, well...

The whole thing made James’ blood boil. So, he got up in the pulpit, all high and mighty, and took the church to task. “You show partiality - you commit a sin! Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it!”

It takes a special person to be able to tell people to shape up! You have to be above board in all that you say and do. You have to be someone who knows the truth, sees the truth, and who can speak the truth. And that’s why you have employed me. Actually, you’ve employed yourself as well.

Haven’t you taken someone to task for something they have said, done, or posted on the internet? Somehow, you’ve been bumped up into first class and have a view of the truth, and you’ve let it rip!

How did that go for you? These days, people can’t handle the truth because, as we know, everyone thinks they have cornered the market on the truth. We are so splintered and divided in our truth-telling. We’re yelling and we can’t hear a blessed thing! And so, we all have decided to make life easier by finding people who look like us, act like us, and sound just like us. A class system of sorts.

I don’t think James can be heard at all these days. But, if we could sit down with James and help him to be heard and followed, what could we say to help him? I think I’d start by asking, “James, what are you trying to get across?” And I can hear him say, “I just want the church to look and act like Jesus.” I can hear him say, “I think every single one of us, no matter our class, color, or culture, needs a savior. I think this we have in common.” Do you think that’s true?

Do you need a savior? If Jesus were to stand before you right now, what do you need? What’s the anxiety that you need exorcised from your soul? What’s your brokenness that needs healing?

I happen to know a mother, a father, a brother, a family in this church who are deeply grieving a son, a brother. What kind of savior does that family need?

I know a father in this church whose son is addicted and is now homeless. What kind of savior does that father need?

I know a husband in this church whose wife is slowly disappearing into the depths of Alzheimer’s. What kind of savior does that husband need?

I read about a boy who was arrested for another act of the horrible. His father said of his son, "You have to understand that my son was ridiculed by his fellow students day after day." What kind of savior did that boy need?

I read that the same boy, who will be tried as an adult, has a mother who in November, was found with small amounts of Meth, fentanyl, and muscle relaxants. She received a five-day sentence and was not allowed to have any contact with her family. What kind of savior does she need?

I read that the same boy, who appeared in court this week, had his grandfather comment, "The boy would not have done what he had done if he had had a different father." What kind of savior do you think that grandfather needs?

I read about the coach in the hallway who gave his life for others. One of his students said, "For me, that coach believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. He pushed me to have high aspirations through his faith in me." What kind of savior does that student need?

What kind of savior do you need?

When the air turns crisp like this, and the sky so blue, I think of that September day, so many years ago, when the firefighters climbed the towers in New York City and, in smoke and flame, salvation was a hand that reached into it all without a questionnaire. "What's your height, weight, sexuality, race, and political party? Are your first class or no class?" There is no question as to your country of origin. No questionnaire. They didn't ask. A savior doesn't ask. A savior says, "Grab hold!" Here, my life I will give to save you. You are mine."

If you look around, everyone in here needs a savior of one kind or another. And as you go out the door, everyone you see needs a savior of one kind or another. And as you go about your life today, tomorrow, or for a thousand years, everyone you see and everyone you meet needs a savior. Do you think we can get on board all at the same time? See each other eye-to-eye, know the love that we need? Do you think we can begin there?

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