

Coram Deo
Soli Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church by
the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“The Judgment of Judging”

14th in Sermon Series on Book of James: “Pressure Points”

April 28 2024

James 2:12-13

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEuqMlv02aw>

A very critical, negative barber never had a good thing to say about anyone or anything. A salesman came into his shop one day and told him he was going on a business trip to Rome. The barber asked, “What airline will you be taking and what hotel will you be staying at?” When the salesman told him the barber criticized the airline for being undependable and the hotel for having horrible service. “You’d be better off to stay at home,” he advised. “But I expect to close a really big business deal and then I’m going to see the Pope.” The barber continued, “Don’t count on seeing the Pope. He only sees important people.”

Several weeks later the salesman returned and stopped by the barber shop. “How was your trip?” asked the barber. “It was wonderful,” the salesman said. “The airline was great, the hotel was excellent.” “Did you see the Pope? What happened?” The salesman said, “Oh yes! I even bent down and kissed his ring.” “No kidding. What did he say?” asked the barber? “Well, he placed his hand on my head and said to me, “My son, where did you ever get such a lousy haircut?”

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James was trying to build a community of faith that was unlike the world around them which was moved by prejudice, partiality, favoritism, judgement and condemnation. And so, he was telling them not to act as those outside of the community of faith do. But rather act in mercy, kindness, forgiveness. Recognizing the liberty they received from Christ.

I

In other words be careful; **your judgments are judged.** *¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Our judgments are judged. When we judge, usually it will eventually come back to you. Those who have a habit of judging and criticizing others; often don't think about how it affects others or how it affects our walk with the Lord.

A man I knew many years ago would use Scripture to push people about judging and condemning them for one thing or another. He decided one day to make his point about his judgment about others and to declare to everyone what was going to happen to them. The sign was mounted on the front of her car. The sign read, "Prepare to meet Thy God!"

I always thought it kind of him to warn people about his reckless driving.

You see, our judgments are judged.

Yet, visionaries, entrepreneurs, activists, poets and writers have always been judged in various ways because others have not been able or willing to take the time to understand what they are trying to do or say; and they would then dismiss them as kooks. Or if after hearing them out rejected outright and judged them as wrong or reckless. Someone once asked Robert Frost, "Mr. Frost, what does that poem mean?" He replied, "What is it that you want me to do, say it again only worse?"

Someone ask Pavlova, "What does that dance mean?" and she replied, "If I could have told you, I would not have danced it!"

II

Our judgments are judged, but **we are also judged by our judgments.** ¹² *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,*¹³ *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

We are judged by our judgments. Our judgements say as much about us, as they do about those whom we are seeking to judge.

When I was a child and pointed at another child, my mother reminded me that when we point at someone to judge them, three fingers point back at you.

I'm reminded of a person who was being shown through an art gallery and who moved from room to room and from picture to picture commenting, "I don't see much in that!" The attendant who accompanied the group listened to her until he could stand it no longer; and said, "The pictures are not the ones on trial here. You are."

There is a wonderful story told of Joseph Parker of London's City Temple, and a prince of preachers. One Sunday morning Parker told his congregation that before the service someone had written him an intimidating note and slipped it under his study door. It informed him that the writer would be present at worship and intended to make a critical assessment of the sermon, a philosophical analysis of every sentence the preacher uttered. Parker went on to say that at first reading the note filled him with anxiety. Who could stand such scrutiny? He had taken the trouble to read it twice, however, and lost most of his concern when he noticed that the writer spelled "philosophical" with an "f".

When the Methodist Circuit riders first came through the area, each rider had a supervisor in their region that would come by each year and meet with the Circuit Preacher to see if they should move to another circuit. Normally, the circuit preacher would stay three years but could be moved earlier. The supervisor would ask three questions. The first was, were there any converted? If the answer was no, then the supervisor would move on to the second. Of those in the past that had been converted were any baptized in the past year? If no, the final question would determine if the circuit preacher would remain. Did anyone get angry at what you said, or

were upset by what you said? If yes, the minister was able to stay. Why? Because if no one was even moved to be converted or baptized or even angered then the minister was making no impact.

Our judgments give us away. We think we are doing the judging, but the very words we speak are the words that judge us. Haven't you noticed that our judgments of other people's character reveal our own? We listen to those who are critical of the gifts and accomplishments of others, and say to ourselves, "Why are they so bitter, or jealous, or resentful?" Their criticism reveals more of themselves than of those whom they criticize. Their insecurity, their inferiority, their envy, shows in their criticism so that we want to tell them, "Don't say another word. Every word you speak gives you away. You become an open book to be read by all.

We are judged by our judgments. *"...every one of you who passes judgment are without excuse, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself..."*

III

Our judgments are judged, we are judged by our judgments, and finally, we are **judged by the Judge**. ¹² *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,*¹³ *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

We are judged by our judgments, but what we forget is that we are judged also by the Judge.

Kierkegaard reminds us that when we come to worship there are no spectators. We are not permitted to come merely to watch and judge, for in worship there is only One Spectator and One Judge. He goes on to make fun of the way we talk about God in our ordinary conversations as though He were absent. He reminds us that all our com

I was asked this past week why the Old Testament has an angry God and the New does not. I responded by say, that the Old Testament is about Laws and the New Testament, is about how Christ fulfilled the Laws and paid the price for us. It is in Christ that we see the nature and face of God.

Fiorello LaGuardia was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII, he was called by adoring New Yorkers 'the Little Flower' because he was only five foot four and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character who used to ride the New York City fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the police department, take entire orphanages to baseball games, and whenever the New York newspapers were on strike, he would go on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids.

One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor." the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson."

LaGuardia turned to the woman and said "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions--ten dollars or ten days in jail."

But even as he pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He took out a bill and paid the fine. Then he said

"Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant." The following day the New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that amount being contributed by the grocery store owner, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

James tells us there is a Judge, who sentences according to the Law, but then steps down among us to pay the price for us. His judgement is just but merciful.

The American poet, Robert Frost, one day found himself wandering through a cemetery, looking at tombstones. As he strolled he read the inscriptions and the dates and the engraved words that encapsulated the life of the person. Born when, died where, and a few words to sum up a lifetime; words chosen by others to remember a friend or a loved one. Someone's determined judgment on a live. Frost asked himself what he would have chosen for himself--how he would have judged his life or how he would have liked to have been judged.

It is a good question? By what words would you wish to be remembered? Malcolm Muggeridge has on his these words: He wrote well "When others thought about it, they determined they could not have come up with a better judgment of his life. St. Augustine called himself "a vendor of words". Robertson Davies, has a Welsh motto "A Man should listen to the promptings of his heart." And his father Rupert Davies has "He who strives hardest shall conquer". And both listened and conquered. But Robert Frost had on his tombstone, "He had a lovers quarrel with the world." And he did. His quarrel, and it was a quarrel was great, yet it was a lovers quarrel. His judgment of the world was done in love.

We have always had lovers quarrels, yet more often than not, they are only with ourselves. These quarrels are never too harsh. We say things like, "how foolish could I have been." But we never say, "I was a fool" We make excuses for ourselves; "I wasn't myself when I did that." We give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. But this is not that case with others though. Others we just quarrel with. We judge them as fools, and we do not give them the benefit of the doubt, as we do ourselves.

Take driving for instance. We judge ourselves by a different standard. You know what we do when we drive. We signal left and turn right. or we turn without making any signal at all. Or we go through a red light. or we get into the wrong stream of traffic and hold everybody up until some kind heart lets us back into the right lane. When these things happen we say that they are the unusual mistakes of an otherwise excellent driver. But let anyone else do the same thing, and watch out! Where did you get your license from a cracker Jack Box. And for those who don't know what a cracker Jack box is. It is a box of caramel corn with toy prize for children in it. It's like "Happy Meal" before they were sued and had to remove the toy. So now no one is happy. The children because there is no toy so no joy, and the parent is unhappy because they are paying twice as much to get half as much.

James said, *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*"

In other words, if you are going to quarrel, make it a lovers quarrel.

You think about that. Amen.