

Faith Overflowing – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 15 – September 5, 2021

- I. **James 2:8-10** - ⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.
- II. **Today is a good time for self-reflection.**
 - a. Last week in my sermon on community, I said that words get so watered down and overused that they lose their meaning.
 - b. We hear these words being thrown around all the time that used to mean something different or more serious... words like hate or racist were rarely used to describe a person’s behavior or beliefs, but these days they are a common description.
 - c. It’s not very helpful when these words, or many others, are used to label groups or individuals.
 - i. First of all, most people don’t believe they are guilty of these things
 1. Have you ever heard anyone actually say, “Yep, I hate. That’s a great description of me”?
 - ii. Second, the conversation usually ends in division
 - d. Our country seems to have a dividing line with each group oversimplifying the huge diversity within people... regardless of their beliefs.
 - i. On the one hand, you see conservatives with degrees of belief from mild to extreme...
 - ii. On the other hand, you also see liberals with beliefs that vary from mild to extreme...
 - e. No one likes to be called a racist or privileged... just as no one likes to be mocked for being politically correct or “triggered”.
 - f. The interesting thing about most of these exchanges is that they take place from a computer or on a phone rather than in person.
 - i. It’s too easy to insult people or be rude when we never have to see them again...
 - ii. It’s also easy to insult or label a person when we know nothing about them... because everyone has a story.
 - g. What’s your story?
 - i. If someone really got to know you, what would they say about you?
 - ii. Your beliefs about certain things are probably genuine and thoughtful...
 1. Maybe you are very empathetic and caring
 2. Maybe you are especially intelligent and well read
 3. Perhaps you come from another country, or your parents did

- 4. You might have a real heart for Jesus and the people who need to know Him
- iii. Any number of things make up your story – and all of that goes into why you believe certain things.
- h. When we get to know another person's story, it's a lot harder to label them
- III. **James tells us to be careful about showing partiality.**
 - a. The author, James, is not the Apostle who was John's brother – instead, he was the half-brother of Jesus.
 - b. He is a leader in the early Church in Jerusalem, and they had many of our current problems.
 - c. It was probably easy to pick out a person by what they were wearing, what they looked like, or the job they were doing.
 - i. Romans looked one way, Jews looked another, as did those from Persia or Africa.
 - d. For Jewish people, the old way of doing things before Jesus was to stay away from other people groups – so it was their job to discern if a person was not Jewish and stay away from them.
 - e. However, after Jesus came to fulfill the Law, all these ceremonial laws became obsolete.
 - i. The Ten Commandments, which can be summarized to love God and love your neighbor, were left for all of us Christians to follow.
 - ii. James tells us that treating one person as important and worthy of respect because they are rich is NOT loving our neighbor.
 - iii. And in a striking statement, he says, “whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it,” (James 2:10).
 - 1. In other words, a little sin here or there cannot be rationalized...
 - 2. We treat others with love no matter what they look like – or what they believe.
 - f. The word, partiality, that James uses comes from the word to “turn your face toward” – in other words that you notice and engage them
 - i. Are certain people worth noticing over others?
 - ii. Are certain people easier to ignore?
 - g. Jesus even tells us in John 7:24, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”
 - h. We all have a tendency to set some people aside, or choose people based on appearances, or even their beliefs.
- IV. **God calls on us to see people with the view from the cross.**
 - a. The cross is love beyond comprehension.
 - b. The cross is love poured out on the whole human race – regardless of their race, their politics, or any other thing that might separate us.
 - c. The cross is where Jesus paid for all our struggles to love others.

- d. In a divided world of government, systems, countries, rules and varied beliefs, the cross is a bridge that connects through love
 - e. Jesus our Savior bridged the gap that divides us and showed the true meaning of loving your neighbor.
 - i. Just see the Gospel reading as He went to the areas where non-Jews lived and healed them and loved them
 - ii. And beyond that, He brought many of them the greatest gift of all – faith in Him.
 - f. Faith in Jesus is the greatest gift God gives, because it means we receive all the blessings that Jesus won on the cross.
 - g. Praise be to God that Jesus, who knows us perfectly – the good, the bad and the ugly – still chose to love us and forgive us by grace through faith.
- V. **Ultimately, faith is the gift that overflows into the lives of others.**
- a. What James is telling us today is that we can't possibly live like others don't matter or like God is not important if we have faith.
 - b. When we are baptized... when we have faith in Jesus, it is only natural for us to care about others – to learn their story – and to show outwardly that we have an inward faith.
 - c. These good works aren't about getting on God's good side or getting to heaven or something – that's already been done by faith!
 - i. What James is saying is that a dead faith has no works (James 2:17)... a living, active faith will come out in all kinds of ways to show our love for God and our neighbor.
 - d. A living faith will take the time to get to know someone before we judge them or reject them.
 - e. A living faith will see that all of us humans have one similar problem – sin.
 - f. If there is one teaching that you can take home and use, it's to focus on the commonalities rather than the differences in each other.
 - i. It's easy to label a person, but much harder to find out if that label fits
 - ii. We all have the common problem of sin, but we have a solution - faith
 - g. It seems to me that this is where Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step groups get it right, and maybe we can learn from them.
 - i. When a person walks in the door as a newcomer in rough shape, no one judges them or ignores them... in fact, the meeting changes from whatever was scheduled to a 1st Step meeting.
 - ii. Many people speak to their own experience, strength and hope in their struggle with alcohol or addiction... and how God delivered them from their obsession.
 - iii. The new person is welcomed – no matter how they look, their race, their political affiliation, or any other thing – because everyone recognizes the common problem – being powerless over alcohol.
 - h. As Christians, we can also recognize a common problem – sin.

- i. No matter the race, political affiliation, or any other thing – all should hear the Good News of their salvation through Jesus Christ.
- j. Our faith is alive and overflowing... building connections and bridges by loving others... even those who are much different.
- k. Go in this very faith – seeking to build bridges just like the cross of Jesus did for you. Amen.