



## JUDGING AND PRESUMPTION JAMES 4:11-17

### Open to James 4.

Last week we left off at vs 10 which tells us to humble ourselves and vss. 11-17 James follows that up with two negative examples of what the humble life *doesn't* look like. I could easily title this sermon “Two Ways To Be Arrogant” or “Two Pictures of Pride”. And James starts with prideful speech. **11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.** This can be translated a variety of ways, from “don’t slander” to “don’t talk down to one another”. In chapter 3, we learned that the tongue is a destructive fire and apparently James is under the impression that there are people in the churches he’s writing to who are busy burning one another down with their words.

Now it’s important to realize who he’s talking to, “brothers”. These are Christians—not secular pagans. People like you and me who are tempted to weaponize our speech against others if it will help us get ahead and especially if we feel we’ve been wronged. But James gives us this warning **The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.** So, James zeroes in on judging others here. And he condemns it for a reason that kind of catches us off guard. He says that when we judge others, we become judges of the law. Weird right? ~~“Those people at that church really judge the law!”~~ James is giving us a look under the hood into what is actually happening when we sin and gives this interesting legal analysis. Not what goes through our heads, but what is actually happening.

He says that when we talk down to and judge on another, we have functionally decided which of God’s commands apply to us and which ones don’t. And if someone does me wrong or makes my life harder, I can press pause on the commands to turn the other cheek, and give them the justice they deserve. And James says, when you do that, you’re not doing the law, you’re custom making your own law according to your feelings in the moment. You’ve become a divine legislator and put yourself in God’s place. So for James, when we sin against someone, we go into God and say if you don’t mind let me sit on your throne for a second, I’m writing a temporary amendment to the love your neighbor law—bc mine just ticked me off. Problem is, **12 There is only one lawgiver and judge,** And it ain’t you, **he who is able to save and to destroy.** Which, of course, is God.

And so James rightly asks? **But who are you to judge your neighbor?** “Who do you think you are?” And the implied answer is so insightful: For James, when you judge your neighbor, you demonstrate that you’ve forgotten who you are. You’ve had identity amnesia. When you look down at someone you forgot Rev. 3:17 wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Like you’re spirituality is white collar. You’ve forgotten that you’re a fellow beggar at the foot of the cross, empty handed, desperate for grace and the only thing you offer to your salvation is the sin from which you need to be redeemed. And that your job isn’t to amend God’s law as you see fit but to do it.

We sin in arrogance when we judge others because we put ourselves in the place of God. And this brings us to vss. 13-17 James describes a second kind arrogance—arrogance displayed in living like you don’t even

need God. It describes the sinful illusion of self-sufficiency and independence. 13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.

Now I want to be careful here, and make sure we avoid two potential interpretive errors. The first would be to see James and condemning planning. Like we’re not supposed to plan ahead. That’s not what he’s saying. Paul openly talks about his travel plans to come to Rome and beyond, “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.” (Rom. 15:24) Planning for the future is often wise. Proverbs 30:25 says that even the ants store up food in the summer and that’s wise. So nothing against planning here. And second there’s nothing against being in business to make a profit. There are those who would use a verse like this to say that James is condemning any effort to conduct business in effort to create financial gain. But we know that’s not the issue that James is addressing. He tells us the issue.

He says, “What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15 Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So, the problem here is massive presumption on God’s grace and the illusion that you’re going to make things happen for yourself apart from God. Not only that, but these people are proud about their sense of independence and autonomy. They take pride and boast in their perceived ability to will their dreams into existence.

You and I tend to celebrate this kind of ambition. But James says that’s arrogant and evil. According to James they can’t even will their next breath. How about you approach it like this, “If the Lord wills, we will live. If the Lord wills, my heart will still be beating in 10 seconds. If the Lord wills I’ll make it to lunch and safely home.” That’s the kind of felt dependence that should characterize the believer. And to ignore God’s provision at every step and act like you’re the master of your own life is sin. 17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. Whoever knows God is behind everything from the last breath you took, to whether you wake up tomorrow, to whether your business is profitable—to know that and not operate with a dependence on God and ascribe glory and thanks to Him, is sin.

And so we have two kinds of arrogance here. The arrogance of trying to play God seen in judging and speaking against one another. And the arrogance of living, and dreaming, and planning your life in a way that doesn’t even need him. And it’s hard to overstate how current these warnings are for us today. How applicable and timely and appropriate. And so, I want us to slow down a bit and take a look at 3 implications these warnings have for our lives. Three cautions to us as we move from being hearers of the Word to doers. **Pray!**

### **We must constantly fight the temptation sinfully judge our neighbor.**

And I say sinfully judge intentionally, because not all judging is sin. It’s never been more popular to believe that rendering any sort of negative judgment about someone’s life is wrong. Even people who don’t even know the Bible quote Matt. 7:1 “Judge not, lest you be judged.” Tupac famously said, “Only God can judge me.” And in our culture, judging means expressing any sort of disagreement with someone’s lifestyle or decisions. If you say that someone shouldn’t be doing that, you’re being judgmental. But of course, that’s not true. We’re called to make judgments all the time as believers. About whether someone is a believer when thinking about marriage or when someone applies for membership and baptism. Called to judge if someone is living in sin so we can go to them and plead with them to repent. Called to identify who qualifies to be elders and deacons. Called to make a judgment about whether it’s wise to let our children go play at someone’s house. We even praise good judgment!

And the Bible commands it, “Do not judge by outward appearances, but judge with right judgment.” (Jn. 7:24) So there’s a kind of judging that the Bible commands and kind of judging that it condemns. So, I want to take a second and help us distinguish between the two...And first right here in John 7:24, we judge sinfully when we judge by appearances. Different versions of Black Lives Matters. Ask people what they mean! Wrong to affirm (Rom. 1:32) or condemn on the basis of what appears to be.

We judge sinfully when we assume the part is like the whole. And we’re seeing this more than ever now in our culture with the rise of a Marxist ideology called Critical Theory. Where your personal identity is the sum of your group affiliations. You’re racist or equitable, oppressed or oppressor, guilty or innocent not based on anything you’ve said or done, but simply because of your gender, race, economic status, sexual orientation and the like. Who you are personally is no better than the group you’ve been associated with and it’s absolutely unbiblical. To impute to each individual some judgment you’re made about a group is sin. Robin DiAngelo author of “White Fragility” big CT proponent, says that every white person should eliminate, “I’m not racist” from their vocabulary.<sup>1</sup> adding that “Racism comes out of white people’s pores. It’s just the way we are”.<sup>2</sup> She ultimately concludes that every individual white person is racist.

Are there racist white people? Yes. Denying that is silly. But saying that each white person is truly racist on the grounds of their skin color alone is sinfully judgmental. And I am so thankful that Jesus didn’t take this approach and judge each individual simply by their group association. Jesus didn’t just see demographic and people groups. He saw individuals with faces and stories and unique purposes for which he created them. Jesus doesn’t just call me sheep—he calls me Chase because he knows all his sheep personally. Jesus doesn’t call me by my category. He calls me by my name. In fact, Jesus seems to go out of his way to crush the replacement of individual identity with herd identity. Pharisees—Nicodemus. Prostitutes—One who washes his feet. Tax Collectors—Matthew. Gentiles—Roman Centurion. Aren’t you glad that Jesus knows you and personally and uniquely and has a consideration for who you are that extends beyond your group association? Then why in the world would you construct a different standard of judgement for someone else? **We must constantly fight the temptation to judge sinfully.**

**We must cultivate a felt dependence on God in all things.**

“Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit” On the surface of it, it doesn’t seem wrong. But it’s what they don’t say and don’t acknowledge—that they need God to do any of it. I mean they’ve got a goal, travel plans, a length of stay—they’ve even determined they’ll be successful and make a profit. No need for God. And James is revealing in these individuals an attitude that is everywhere in our culture. It’s the myth of the self-made, autonomous, individuals. I can do all things through willpower, strategy, and entrepreneurial effort. I have the power and ability to chart my own course and actualize my dreams. James says What is your life? **You’re mist.** You’re here for a second and then gone! ~~“All you’re ever going to be is mist son.”~~ I’m going to tell my son he’s mist but that mist in God’s hands can shape the world. And when we forget that, we begin to think we don’t need God and even begin to give ourselves credit for his grace in our lives.

In the movie Shenandoah, Jimmy Stewart is blessing the food for a meal and he prays a prayer that is so brutally honest about how we tend to feel. Praying over the food, he says, **“Lord we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it and harvest it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn’t be here and we wouldn’t be eating it**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/07/health/white-fragility-robin-diangelo-wellness/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org/post/why-all-white-people-are-racist-cant-handle-being-called-racist-theory-white-fragility>

if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dogbone hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you Lord just the same for the food we're about to eat. Amen."

Is this not how we tend to think? Especially when it comes to work? Do we not tend to believe that if we worked for it, God didn't give it to us? Look at battle after battle in the OT, you hear "The Lord threw them into Israel's hands". What do you think that means? They fought, sweated, bled and won bc of the Lord. God gave them victory not apart from their effort but through their effort. He worked through their effort to bring victory that they would not have otherwise gotten. This is what it means what God blesses the work of our hands, it means that while we may scrap, and sweat, and bleed in our exertions that the victory—the increase—is ultimately from God. And so our posture then in our planning and goal setting and coming and going is, "God nothing will happen today without you etc." **Sleeping prayer.** I never pray it when I wake up 😞 In God's sovereignty I'm just as dependent on him awake as I am asleep.

### **We must guard against setting a low bar for righteousness.**

This is really easy to do. We tend to think about sin as committing a moral error. We think of sin as breaking a "Thou Shalt Nots". The Bible says love your neighbor and we said something ugly so we sinned by what we did. But if this is the only way you understand sin, you are going to be spiritually handicapped because there's another species of sin that flying completely under your radar. A totally different category of sin that we don't talk nearly as much about. And no verse in the Bible states it more clearly and concisely than James 4:17. **17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**

You and I tend to think of sin as the things that we do—these are sins we commit—sins of commission. But this verse introduces a category of sins called sins of omission. This sin isn't seen isn't something we do, but something we don't do. Something we should have done but didn't. It's Jesus in Mt. 25 saying I was hungry and you gave me no food I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. It's the first two men in the parable of the good Samaritan walking around the man on the road. Man I was just minding my business don't call me out—I didn't do anything. Exactly. In the Bible you can sin by doing nothing.

When we talk about righteousness, we tend to think about the absence of moral error. My speech was righteous if I avoided saying something ugly or untrue. Example: Were you righteous in your family? We think if we did something bad. But defining righteousness negatively is a really low bar. And it's a bar that we're usually satisfied with if we meet it. Did you encourage your family this week—well I didn't yell at them. Have you been generous with your money—well I haven't cheated anybody. Have you shared the Gospel? Well I haven't told anyone to live for this world.

You see we have to realize that righteousness in the Bible isn't just the absence of sin it's the presence of godliness and spiritual fruit. Not defined by what's absent but by what's present. And if we give ourselves an A for simply not putting down our spouse this week, we demonstrate we're miles away from what God has called us to. We bought a house with a lot of yard. All you have to do to turn a garden into a wilderness—is nothing. And when you understand this, sin doesn't always look like people doing bad things. Sin often looks much more modest and acceptable than that. It looks a life of sitting quietly on the couch and minding your own business. Sin can look like nothing at all, because often times doing nothing at all, is profoundly sin. It's knowing the right thing—knowing the call to care for the poor, be generous with your resources, encourage one another—it's knowing all that and saying, "Well I haven't hurt anyone. That's good enough for me."

This changes the way we repent doesn't it? When we examine our lives we're not just asking what I did wrong, we're asking where have I failed to act rightly? People in this room need to make phone calls and

mend relationships. Need to help someone out. Need to ask for someone's forgiveness. And when you begin to view sin not by simply what you done, but what you haven't done, your sin becomes all the more crushing to you and drives you to the only source of rest and that's Christ.

Ask yourselves, have I left things undone? Relationships, generosity, gifts/talents, money, time etc.