

Why We Need God's Mercy

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[0 : 00] Please follow along as I read. If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture,! If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture,! You should love your neighbor as yourself. You are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law 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 he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder.

If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

[1 : 21] Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts once again to you and pray that you would meet us now as we open your word and sit under its preaching.

Lord, you know what we need and you have promised that you will build your church. And the primary way that you do that is through the preaching of your word. So would you, in this moment, build your church through the preaching of your word.

And God, would you cause us all to hear and to respond as we should. Lord, I ask that you would grant me sufficient grace to be faithful to bring your word to your people today.

And I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. I think you would agree with me that one of the important ways that we learn from our mistakes is not just being told what we did wrong, but being told as well why we did it wrong.

And the reason is that we are in a better position not to repeat something that we have done wrong when we have a better understanding as to why what we did was wrong.

[2 : 50] And so mere correction is not enough. We need an explanation as to why what we did was wrong if we don't already know that.

In this passage that we have come to this morning, we see James modeling this in a brilliant way. Those of you who were here last Sunday would recall that we considered the earlier section of James chapter 2 where James was correcting the practice of showing partiality or showing favoritism in the church.

And what is clear when we come to this passage in James chapter 2 verses 8 through 13 is James is not finished. It's clear that James still has in view his earlier correction of showing favoritism and he now provides an explanation for it.

But James doesn't just show us the wrongness of showing favoritism in particular. What he does is he shows us the wrongness of sin in general. And in the process what James does is he shows us why we need God's mercy.

Why do we need God's mercy? Why does every single person in this room under the sound of my voice absolutely without question need the mercy of God?

[4 : 28] Here's why. Because we cannot perfectly keep God's law we desperately need God's mercy. There's no other way friends.

This is why we need mercy this morning. Because none of us can perfectly keep God's law. And God isn't like some of our teachers have been or are.

He doesn't grade on a curve. He doesn't say well the results are kind of bad so I'm just going to lower the standard and let those who really got a C get an A and those who would normally fail they're going to get a C.

He doesn't do that. The standard remains the same. And so brothers and sisters and friends we absolutely need God's mercy because we cannot perfectly keep God's law.

So how does James make this point? Well he does it by bringing us face to face with two truths in the Christian life that Christians really need to learn very early on in their journey otherwise the journey could be more difficult than it already is.

[5 : 53] And this morning I want us to consider these two truths in our remaining time together. And the first truth is about keeping God's law. James brings us face to face with a very gripping truth about keeping God's law.

He addresses it in verses 8 through 11. Notice again what he says in verse 8. If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture you shall love your neighbor as yourself you're doing well. Now here in verse 8 James is directly quoting from Leviticus 19 verse 18 the commandment that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves and he calls it the royal law.

Now why does James call this the royal law? Why is it the royal law that we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves? Well this word royal simply means belonging to the king and although all the laws of the king belong to the king James is somehow under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit holding out this particular law and he attaches the royal law to it.

Why does he do that? Why does James tell us that the royal law is to love one's neighbor as one love oneself?

[7 : 28] I think we could get helped to answer that question by looking at Mark chapter 12 verses 28 through 34.

We were going to project it. The project is not working so if you would just turn there in your Bible Mark chapter 12 verses 28 through 34.

This is an encounter that Jesus had with a scribe and I think we can get some help to understand why Mark calls this commandment to love our neighbor as we love ourselves the royal law.

Starting at verse 28 Mark chapter 12. And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another and saying that he answered them well asked him saying that he meaning Jesus answered them well he asked Jesus which commandment is the most important of all?

Jesus answered the most important is hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

[8 : 50] The second is this you should love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said to him you are right teacher you have truly said that he is one and there is no one besides him and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbor as oneself is much more than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely he said to him you are not far from the kingdom of God and after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

I want to point out two striking observations from this response that Jesus gave to this scribe that I think again will help us to appreciate why James calls the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves the royal law.

Notice that when Jesus was asked which is the greatest of the commandments he didn't mention one of the ten. He didn't mention the first that we should have no other gods before the Lord.

He didn't mention the fourth that we should observe the Sabbath. He didn't even mention the sixth that we should not murder. He said the most important one quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 6 as the children of Israel were going to enter into the promised land on the brink of entering in here oh Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

[10 : 49] the second observation that I think is helpful for us to see is that when Jesus was asked what commandment is the greatest Jesus answered more than he was asked.

Very important that Jesus answered more than he was asked. Why? The man only asked him what is the greatest but Jesus went further and Jesus told him the second most important commandment.

And I think the reason that Jesus told him the second most important commandment is that he and we are not as concerned about it as we lend ourselves out to be more concerned about the first commandment.

And so Jesus points him to this commandment that we so easily neglect. That we so easily overlook and don't consider how important it is.

And in answering him Jesus quotes the very verse that James refers to as the royal law from Leviticus 19 and verse 18. You shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.

[12:07] And I think by doing this Jesus gets to the issue that James seems to be getting at that James perhaps is saying to us that we need to be more concerned to take more seriously this command than we are inclined to do.

Just imagine for example if James had said the royal law is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength or even the first commandment. How much more would we focus on that law and to neglect of the second most important commandment. And this is so important. You may remember from the Sermon on the Mount how Jesus taught that when we are going to worship he says if you're going to the temple you're going to worship and you remember that there's some issue with you and your brother he says put your gift down or you halt your worship to me and you go and you make it right with your brother before you come to me. Jesus placed priority on horizontal reconciliation that's related to the royal law. This encounter with Jesus and this scribe ends with Jesus saying to him in verse 34 you're near to the kingdom of God. And here we are able to appreciate that there are people who can be near and far from the kingdom of God. And Jesus seems to be saying that this knowledge of the two greatest commandments to love God wholly and fully alone and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves the awareness of that brings one near to the kingdom of God.

[14:01] But it is only actually fulfilling this royal law. Loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. In reality not just knowing it it is only when we do that that we give evidence that we are in the kingdom of God.

That we give evidence that we belong to God. And we give evidence that we truly love God. Because if we love our neighbor truly it is only because we love God truly.

It is only because he has transformed our hearts that we're able to do that. And so under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit James is saying that the second commandment the second most important commandment is the royal law.

And in context we can see why James does this. In context we can see why James holds up this particular law and calls it the royal law.

And he explains it in verse 9. He says but he's connecting what he just said to what he's going to say. But if you show partiality you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

[15:21] And so essentially what James is really saying he's saying when you show partiality we're not loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. We're not loving our neighbor as we should.

He's reminding us that showing partiality breaks the royal law to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. And he says when we do that we are committing sin and we are convicted by the law as transgressors as law breakers.

And here James is not alone. the apostle John makes the same point in a different way in 1 John 4 19 through 21. He writes we love because he first loved us.

If anyone says I love God and hates his brother he's a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And this commandment we have from him whoever loves God must also love his brother. When we don't, when we show partiality, when we show favoritism, we're not loving our brother as we ought.

[16:39] And so when we break the royal law we bring into question, we raise a question about our own love for God. And it's amazing how we're able to do this.

If you think back to the illustration that James gave us earlier that we looked at last week, two individuals come into a church, one is discriminated against, the other one is treated more favorably.

And I imagine if we were to poll the church at that time, or even poll ourselves as we are showing favoritism, we would be convinced that we are worshiping God, that we are loving God with all of our hearts.

And that's because we can be blind to not loving our neighbor as we should. And it helps us to see that this command to love our neighbor as we should really has a far reaching effect.

It goes beyond just showing favoritism and the violation of what God calls us to do. We can see it in many other areas where we do not love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

[17:53] But it actually gets worse than what James is pointing out to us. In verse 10, James says to us, for whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

See, it's easy to think that, okay, well, I need to work on this favoritism piece. No, James says, you break one part of the law, you break all of it.

So when we fail to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, not only do we break the royal law, but we break the whole of God's law and be accountable for breaking all of God's law.

And the reason is in verse 11, James explains it. For he who said do not commit adultery also said do not murder. If you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you become a transgressor of the law.

Now, let's be careful that we don't miss the larger point that James is making. James is not making a point, trying to make a point, that all sins are equal.

[19 : 02] He's not doing that at all. All sins are not equal. Some sins are far more serious than others. In God's sight, we see it as he laid out penalties in the Old Testament, that some particular sins warranted death, some particular sins warranted restitution, and so forth.

And if you doubt that, you commit certain crimes and see if it wouldn't land you to prison, whereas others, certain sins, would not land you there. But that's not the point that he's making.

He's not making the point that all sins are equal. What he's making the point of is that all sins are serious. even the small sins or the lesser sins, they are serious because when we break them, when we break any of them, we break God's whole law.

And so we can't pride ourselves in keeping the big ones. We can't pride ourselves in keeping most of them. With God, it's all or nothing. We keep all of God's commandments or we keep none of God's commandments.

And the reason is that the law has been given by one person whose character is unchanging, whose character is reflected in all of his laws.

[20 : 23] And so breaking a single law is a violation of God's character and thus a violation of the whole law. but it even gets worse.

It's actually worse than we think. Let's suppose for a moment that all of us in this room are able to keep all of God's laws except one.

Whichever one, you don't keep. It doesn't matter. Let's say we can keep them all except one. It's easy to think that okay, well what we need to do is just really work on this one.

If we can keep this one then we can keep them all. But when we think about keeping God's law, we think about it from our own standard.

It's kind of like, have you ever graded your own paper? Anyone ever, you know, how the teacher sometimes tells you grade your own paper? How many know that when you grade your own paper the score is higher than when the teacher grades it?

[21 : 35] See, we grade our own paper. But the teacher sees stuff and sometimes we may even be innocent. Or we just say, you know, I didn't mean to put that, I know the answer to that, so I'm going to give myself the right answer to that.

But the teacher doesn't know what you were going to put, so the teacher will give it to you wrong.

See, when we think about God's law, I will guarantee you that if we had an anonymous test and put down as many of God's laws, the Ten Commandments as we could remember and ask us to say, have you broken these?

I think that there will be some of us who will say, never broke that, never broke that, never broke that. But let's think about it from God's point of view, the one who gave the law, and the one who sent Jesus, who in the Sermon on the Mount opened the eyes of the Pharisees and he said, it's not good enough not just to put a knife in your brother's body.

So if you hate him without a cause, you've murdered him. it's not good enough just not to sleep with another man's wife. But if you lust after a woman, you look at a woman and lust after her, you've committed adultery.

That's the law that we are called to keep. We are called to keep a law not just from outward conformity, but also from inward motivation and thoughts.

[23 : 13] And so when the law and our keeping of it is assessed from God's point of view, friends, we fall short because the only standard that God accepts to keep and fulfill his law is perfection.

And the truth is, we may do very well with most of God's laws. I think on an objective human scale, if there's something called an objective human scale, we may be scoring really, really high.

We may be in the 90s. But with God, that's still failure. He doesn't accept that. And so the truth is that there's only one person who has ever walked the face of the earth who has kept God's law

perfectly, without fault, to the last degree, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. So we don't break God's law because we break one of them. We break God's law because we break all of them.

Because we don't perfectly keep any of them. And this is the era of Seventh-day Adventists who believe that in keeping the law, especially the Sabbath, that they're able to make heaven, that it is required for them to do this because they cannot do it perfectly.

[24 : 46] The person who puts forth the greatest and best efforts to keep the Sabbath day or any of the laws still falls short, still is not able to satisfy God's righteous requirement, and the verdict is you've broken the whole law, despite your best efforts.

I mean, let's just start with the first commandment. The first one, that we are to love God, but no other gods perform. We are to love him with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, as Jesus said it.

Friends, as much as we love God this morning, none of us loves God perfectly. None of us. We may be commended in our love for God.

Our love for God may be noble, it may be a wonderful example to follow, but friends, it is not perfect. It is not perfect, and it falls far short in the sight of a holy and a perfect God who knows our hearts and knows the deepest thoughts and motivations that we have.

The only person who's ever done it perfectly, the only person who truly gets a well done is the Lord Jesus Christ.

[26 : 12] He is the only one of whom the Father says, this is my Son in whom I am well pleased.

Now, does this mean that because we can't keep the law perfectly, that, well, it doesn't matter, you may as well just live anyway, and it doesn't really matter?

No. The same God still calls us to keep his law, which is his will, as Jesus has shown us. We're still called to earnestly and faithfully and honestly obey him, seek to obey his law.

Despite our imperfections, despite the fact that we fall short. And it's so important for us to see this. It is important for us to see that this is our reality, because it is only when we see this truth, this reality that James brings us face to face with, will we see the second reality, the second truth, which is needing God's mercy.

James points to our need for God's mercy in verse 12 and in verse 13. Notice what he says.

[27 : 51] So speak and act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Notice that James refers to the law as the law of liberty.

He refers to judgment under the law of liberty. And he's not referring to some other law, he's referring to the same law that he was talking about before, that we are to be obeying.

And a lot of times, we don't naturally think of God's law as the law of liberty. We think it's more of a law of bondage, a law that you must not do that and you must not do this and you must do that and you must do this.

But friends, God's law, rightly described, is a law of liberty. Because true freedom is found under God's law and living God's way.

[29 : 01] That's true freedom. The freedom that many seek away from God's law is not freedom, it's slavery. It's bondage to sin. And the only reason they can feel that it's freedom is because they're blind.

And they're lost. It's been said that liberty is the ability to do what we should, not what we want.

It's the ability to do what we should, not what we want in our natural selves. And God's law that tells us how to love him and how we are to love our fellow man doesn't bring us into bondage, it brings us into liberty.

It brings us into freedom. But the larger point that James is making is that we are to speak and act as people who are going to be judged under God's law.

Under God's revealed will in God's law broadly given to his people in his word. James is not telling us that we need to live in a manner to be justified by the law.

[30 : 24] He's not saying that at all. He's not making that point. He's not talking about the justification under the law. He's talking about judgment under the law. He's saying that law is the law that's going to judge you and you need to speak and you need to act.

with that awareness. And again Jesus amplified the law that is broader than what we see just in the letters.

It has implications. He amplified it to show that this is God's will for his people. And so we are called to obey.

But it's not just outward conformity. It's not just the things that we do outwardly. It is also living with this awareness that we are going to be judged comprehensively by a perfect judge who knows all and who knows his law.

You know sometimes that we can go to court and the judge will not fully know the law. And sometimes there's a little wiggle room there because a lawyer smarts the judge or something like that.

[31 : 38] But in any event even if the judge fully knows the law the judge doesn't know our heart. But the judge and the true lawgiver God himself fully knows his law he fully knows our hearts.

He is the one before whom no secret is hid. He is the one before whom we live our lives. And when we break part of his law we are accountable as a transgressor of all of his law.

Now James is still addressing this issue of showing favoritism and helping us to see why it is wrong. Remember earlier last week we looked at verse four.

Remember what he said in verse four? He said have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James is making the point that when we show favoritism we have set ourselves up as judges and in doing so it is evil and in doing so it is merciless.

[33 : 02] He says when you make a distinction between the poor and the rich you mistreat the poor over the rich he says that is evil and that is merciless to do that. He says when you're doing that you're acting as if you're not going to be judged.

When you're doing that you're acting as if you're not going to be judged by a perfect law by a perfect judge. He says you need to speak and act as one who is aware that you are going to be judged.

And be aware that you're going to be judged by this standard that if you break one part of the law you break the whole law. And it's not on a curve.

And it's not keep most of them and then you're okay. It is you have to keep it all perfectly. And you fail at one point. You fail in the whole thing.

Now why does James warn us? Why does James need to warn us that judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy?

[34 : 15] Why does he warn us? I'll tell you why he warns us. James warns us because James knows that we need mercy.

he warns us because he knows that we cannot keep the law. If we're able to keep the law, then he doesn't need to warn us.

Because there's a possibility that even though he's bringing this warning that there may be some who could get around that simply because they're able to keep the law.

James warns us because he knows we are not able to keep the law. And so we need mercy. We need mercy.

If keeping it was the norm, we would not need mercy. But we need mercy because it is not the norm. And so, brothers and sisters, because we cannot fulfill the law, James brings into focus both the terror of the law and the wonder of the gospel.

[35 : 25] That's what he does in verses 12 and 13. He brings us face to face with the terror of the law to tell us that we are accountable for it, but we cannot keep it.

And he warns us. And then he helps us to see the wonder of the gospel that through Jesus Christ, God's mercy is available to law-breaking sinners.

The wonder of the gospel is that although law-breaking sinners deserve justice, they deserve the justice of the law, they receive mercy and grace.

And he tells us that mercy triumphs over judgment. So James is actually saying, since you cannot fulfill God's righteous requirements under the law, I will therefore be in need of God's mercy, show mercy to others.

show mercy to others. You see, sometimes when we don't show mercy to others, it may not be evident to somebody else who gives you mercy.

[36 : 40] But friends, when we don't show mercy to others, it's evident to God who sees all and knows all. God's And he is the one who we ultimately need mercy from. Now, if you look at verse 13, you think that James is saying to us, or you come away believing that somehow we get mercy

from God by being merciful to others, you're missing the point and you're misunderstanding our dilemma.

James is not saying that and we could give mercy to others as much as we can, overlook things as much as we can, as much as we want to.

It is not going to help us ultimately with getting mercy from God because God's mercy can't be earned. And the mercy that we give, even the mercy that we give falls short.

It's not perfect mercy. If you could kind of think of it this way, you know how when children are learning how to draw and you tell them to draw a person, how they draw a stick man with, you know, little sticks and so on, that's the way our mercy looks.

That's the way our mercy looks compared to God's full-blown perfect mercy. And so the mercy that we give to one another is in no way any kind of payment or basis upon which we can expect to receive mercy from God.

[38 : 20] We simply give mercy because we've received mercy. mercy. But it's not a payment for mercy. And when we live with the awareness of our need for mercy, we will be more merciful.

When we are aware that we need mercy, not from someone like ourselves, we need mercy from a perfect judge who has given us a perfect law that has to be kept perfectly, it helps us to be mindful that we need to be merciful.

But when we do things like mistreating one another and judging one another and making distinctions between persons, showing favoritism, we're living with amnesia, we're not living with the awareness that we are going to be judged.

And so what James says is, he says that mercy is, in verse 13, judgment without mercy is, judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. Friends, giving mercy is part of the evidence that we have received mercy.

[40 : 01] I think the question is, do we give any mercy? Or is our hearts hardened on giving all the evidence that we have not been transformed? that the touch of God has not reached our hearts?

God doesn't call us to give perfect mercy. If he did, we're hopeless. He calls us to give mercy. He calls us to give some mercy. And so James says, judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

brothers and sisters, God's mercy triumphs over God's judgment. And his children are called to join him in being merciful.

Alec Mortier points out that the highest expression of mercy triumphing over judgment is this. He writes, in the cross of Christ, justice was fully done.

Its claims were fully met. And God's mercy to sinners triumphed in the provision of complete forgiveness and a full salvation.

[41 : 31] So what is his response to this? How do you respond to coming face to face with this truth that we are accountable for all of God's law and breaking one part of it makes us a breaker of all of it?

And that because of that, we need God's mercy. If your response is that you're going to really just do better and try harder, friend, you've not understood what our real dilemma is before God.

Try and try, we may. It will never resolve this issue that we have before a perfect God requiring us to perfectly keep his law.

And see, God knows this. And the whole point is to get us to throw our hands up and run to Jesus because he's our only hope. He's the only one who has kept the law fully and perfectly.

And we are to grab onto him and hold onto him and allow God to see us through his righteousness, in his righteousness. It's the only hope of being accepted and being justified before God when we see our dilemma.

[42 : 54] And friends, when we see the dilemma, the faster we see the dilemma, the faster we run to Jesus. And so our only logical response to what we've heard this morning is to recognize our absolute need for God's mercy if we're going to be justified in his sight.

The British preacher and songwriter Augustus Toplady, he understood this dilemma very well. He understood where sinners stood before a holy God, and he wrote the words of the hymn, Rock of Ages, Clef for Me.

And I want to just, as we close this morning, have us to consider two verses. In the second verse, he writes, Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's commands.

Could my zeal, no respite, no. Could my tears forever flow? All for sin could not atone. Thou must save, and thou alone.

In the third verse, he writes, Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress.

[44 : 19] Helpless look to thee for grace. Foul I too, the fountain fly. wash me savior, or I die.

Friends, we don't come to the Lord this morning with our insufficient efforts and tell him to make them up. We come empty-handed.

We bring nothing. Martin Luther, the great theologian, said, the only thing that we bring to our salvation is the sin that God freely forgives.

And friends, this is a helpless place, but it is the best place to be before God to recognize that we utterly cannot help ourselves, and we absolutely need his mercy and his grace if we will be accepted in his sight.

And so, because we cannot perfectly keep God's law, mercy, we absolutely need God's mercy.

Let's pray together.

[45 : 36] Father, we thank you this morning that mercy has triumphed over judgment in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Lord, that you have saved men, women, boys, and girls because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

And we pray this morning that we who have trusted Christ will rejoice in your saving work, and those who have not yet done so would recognize their dilemma before you, and they would do what Augusta's top lady has written and they would fly to your fountain and cry out to you to wash them lest they die.

God, I pray that you would do that for those who do not know Christ this morning. Open their eyes, help them to see the need for mercy that only you can give.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.