

Message - 7/5/20
James 4:11-12

Opening illustration: Have you ever heard the warning - Whatever you do, do not.... Fill in the Blank ...Do this. How many times have you heard a parent, or a boss or a friend say that to you? How many times have you said that to someone? Usually, it is about a topic that can be too easily overlooked, too easily taken for granted, but in reality, it is very important, or it has significant consequences if you do....!

It reminds me of the time that my Dad told me one of the many **whatever you do, do not....** statements. When my Dad helped me buy my first car, he told me, **whatever you do, don't ever leave the keys in the car.** That came to mind when I was dating Charlotte and I drove up in front of her home and walked her to the door after our date, fully intending to come back to my car and leave for home. However, her family invited me in, so I went in, and the time just flew by. When I went out to my car to drive home, I saw that it was gone. And yes, the keys were in the car. My heart sunk to my shoes. The car I had saved to buy for so long, my sweet Mustang, was now stolen. And I would have to now tell my Dad. So, my future Father-in-law drove home, and when I went in to tell my dad that someone stole my car. **His first question was, 'Son, did you leave the keys in the car?' I still remember how hard it was to answer - yes, I did Dad.** At that moment it was clear that I did not heed his warning, a warning that he made loud and clear. Well, if we fast forward, there is a good ending to the story, because that same 66 Mustang is in my garage this morning. I will come back to this story later.

Today we are going to see how James gives us a similar warning in our passage today. James is telling us to pay attention to something that is extremely important to the church, something that is easy to forget, easy to disregard, easy to not see it as important as it is.

James is again addressing our speech, but unlike how he addressed the tongue in chapter 3, here James focuses our attention to a specific area of our speech. The speech we direct to one another in the church, speech among the family of God.

Main idea: Our speech impacts our unity

Scripture:

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. 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. 12 There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Prayer

I have three points - **The Tongue, The Lawgiver, and The Question**

I. The Tongue

James uses strong language in our text today. 'Do not', this 'negative imperative' appears 5 times in his letter, and 4 of them refer to our speech. This is an important topic for James, and he is wanting his audience to grasp the importance effect of the tongue, especially on one another.

'Do not... 'speak evil' against one another....' James is telling us in our short two-verse passage, to not speak evil against one another. But this passage begs the question - **What is evil speech?**

- A. Speech that is critical,
- B. Speech that tears down, is demeaning
- C. Speech that judges, or condemns, or slanders one another

This is another instance where James is probably paralleling the message he heard in **the sermon on the mount from Jesus**, where Jesus tells us to not **judge, (or condemn, or judge unfavorably)**, one another.

Matthew 7:1,2 - Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

Evil speech is showing that we are judging someone unfavorably. It can affect the unity of the church by sowing division, it separates people from one another.

People that are called to build together, build up one another, encourage each other. James is warning us that our speech can be destructive if we are not aware. **Evil speech is speaking down to someone else, demean them,** and elevate my opinion, and ultimately judge them as wrong. James knows that for everyone, the stronger we hold our opinion or view, the easier it is to feel justified in sharing it, even if it may be shared critically, especially if our opinion is different from our neighbor.

Just like the original audience James was speaking to, they had issues where they had strong opinions. It was a different century, but people are people. As people we have strong opinions. In their century it was whether they had a right to eat food sacrificed to idols, or, should they maintain the Jewish festivals, or how to view circumcision, or even how to respond to the Roman occupation and taxation.

We don't have those issues, but we have our own 21st century issues - like our opinions about the wisdom of the various coronavirus responses, or our view of politics in an election year, or even the recent handling of the memorials and statues. James wants us to watch our tongues when we speak together, regardless of the century, or the topic, to guard from evil speech among brothers. The unity of the church is at stake.

Here at Center church I believe we are working hard in guarding our speech together. I think that we are doing well in guarding from the evil speech that James is warning us about. However, I do think we are in a challenging season. A season that is becoming prolonged and more intense in ways we have yet to see, and we will need to continue our diligence in this area. We need to all take James' warning to heart.

Do not speak evil against one another, Brothers... (and sisters) He begins with 'one another', but then focuses his attention on the close relationship we have together as believers when he uses the term, 'brothers', meaning brothers and sisters. He uses it 3 times in verse 11.

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

This is how we are to be thinking about each other, because it is easier to speak well to the ones that we love. This relationship should inform how we think about and speak to one another, guarding our unity together in the family of God. If we see each other this way, **speaking down to one another is not an option.** As brothers and sisters in Christ:

- a. We All have the same Savior
- b. We are All saved in the same way, putting faith in Jesus Christ
- c. We are All justified by Christ in the same way,
- d. We are All are forgiven of our sins the same way,
- e. We are All entered the family of God by adoption the same way,
- f. We All have the same Heavenly Father,
- g. We All have the same access to God the Father,
- h. We All have the same Spirit of God living in us,
- i. We All have the citizenship in the same heaven,
- j. We All are loved by God the same, as his children
- k. We All are accepted by God the same, as his children
- l. We are All are saved by grace alone, to the glory of God alone

How do these verses 11 and 12 fit into this chapter? Are they out of place? No, because our speech can be a way that we can all either draw on the grace of God through humility towards one another, or resist God through any evil speech to one another. James is telling us that speaking against our brothers and sisters in Christ is proud, and something that opposes by God.

II. The Law

11b. 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.

How does speaking against your brother or your sister ‘*speaking evil **against the law and judge the law***’? What is James wanting us to see about the seriousness of our speech?

First, what would come into the minds of the original audience is that the OT law states clearly in **Leviticus 19:16** that slandering one another is against the law, then adding in verse 19 *that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.*

In **Matthew 19:19** Jesus repeats the law, saying that we are *to love our neighbors as ourselves.* James refers to this as the **'royal law' in James 2:8** -

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. James 2:8

So, when we speak evil against our neighbor, when we judge unfavorably our neighbor, we are judging the law, by not following it.

So then, who is our neighbor? James is using the three different terms to describe for us who our speech affects - **'one another', 'brothers', and 'neighbor'**. They all refer to the believers together in the church. God has given us his 'royal law' that we should love our neighbors, which is 'one another', as ourselves.

When we fail to show love for our neighbors, for each other, but instead speak evil against our neighbors, then according to James, we are **placing ourselves above the law,** or as James says, we are ***judging the law, not following the law.*** We then find ourselves *judging the law* as not applying to us, rather than *being a doer of the law.* This type of critical speech is wars against the humility James calls for in the preceding verses.

James then states in verse 12:

"There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy".

'lawgiver' - This is the only place in scripture that this description for God is used. His law is the expression of who and what he is; he gave us his commands in order that, by obeying them, we might fashion our lives in his image. **How we speak to one another is included in God's law, and God's direction for his people.** God is the lawgiver, we are the image bearer. When we speak wrongly against one another we are breaking, or judging his law for us.

III. The Question - (12) *Who are you to judge his neighbor?*

James ends this short two verse passage with a **question that just hangs out there**. I believe James wants to promote thought and self-review as he asks ... *'Who are you to judge his neighbor?'*

However, the sentence before this question is important, because it creates the **context** for the question - ***'There is only one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and destroy.'*** James not only brings this **unique title** of God to our attention before he asks his question, he also helps us to see the **unique actions toward us**.

God who could justly have condemned and destroyed each and every one of us, **chose rather to save**. Our Father, extended undeserved mercy to each of us. It is on this ground of undeserved mercy that both the critic and the criticized stand together as *brethren* of the same Father.

But who are you ...? How do you hear that question? How do we see ourselves in light of this 2-verse review of our speech to one another?

Do you hear this question with a harsh, almost sarcastic tone making you feel condemned, because you have judged others unfavorably at times? So now you just need to try harder to control your speech? If so, that is missing James intention. Condemnation is not his goal, awareness and conviction are his goal. Condemnation only drives us into ourselves to work harder, only to fail again. Conviction directs us to Christ for forgiveness and freedom, and help to change.

Or are you hearing the warning as James intended and responding with a desire to guard your heart from any evil speech to a brother or sister in Christ, knowing that this is an area that we all can be tempted when there is a disagreement of opinions.

Whether we judge one another unfavorably out loud or not, it can still be something **in our heart**, and when this is the case, **words are not far away**. If you see your speech falling under James' negative imperative, simply look once again to Christ. Last week we learned that **grace equals help**, and *'he gives more grace'(6)*, to empower our speech to be humble together.

Let me return to the Opening story - To my Dad's credit, when I came home, he got up, (He was actually in bed when I got home) and he helped me call the police, fill out the report, and we even went out to look for it together. He showed me mercy which I did not deserve.

When I recall that memory of my car being stolen, it is my dad's response I remember the most. I remember more of his mercy that night than breaking his 'law', His 'whatever you do, don't leave the keys in the car...law.' It has always said to me how He showed his unconditional love to me as his undeserving son. How much more unconditional love and mercy will we experience from **our perfect heavenly Father**, as we come to his throne of grace. He will give us mercy, and grace to help in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

As we go forward into this confusing social season, remember that **our speech impacts our unity**, and let's allow **the warning** from these two verses to guide our speech among one another, brothers and sisters, neighbors, - and protect the unity of our church, to the glory of God. **Our speech impacts our unity**. Let us together strengthen our unity, by extending mercy to one another, not judgement and not tear it down. Remember our unity is built upon Christ, not upon commonly held social opinions.

Earlier in the message I itemized what evil speech is, and how it impacts our unity. This is James **warning to us** in these two verses. However, **do you also see the opportunity? The opportunity in heeding the warning to speak out of mercy to one another?** Extending mercy rather than judgement is a way we can build our unity together. What does this look like in our speech together? Our speech is powerful. Yes, it can be destructive when we use evil speech towards one another, but it is also so very powerful when we use it as God intended - to build up and unify. **What does it look like?**

- Speaking Encouragement to one another, giving it often, especially to the discouraged brother or sister.
- Speaking hope, seen in Christ to one another, especially to the hopeless brother or sister.
- Speaking Help to one another to see where the promises of God intersect with the trials in the lives of your brothers and sisters.

- Speaking scripture to one another, (that is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword), to help Build up the faith for the brother or sister that is weak in their faith that day.
- Speaking by Praying for one another

That same **lawgiver** and **judge** has another title - **the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort**. (1Cor 1:3) His mercy is endless. As a church, let's be committed to extend mercy in our speech to one another, knowing that:

Our speech impacts our unity.

IV. Close and pray