



Date: 07-27-2025

Sermon Title: Mercy Over Judgment

Text: James 2.1-13 NLT

Anchor Verse:

James 1:7- 8 NLT

“For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

Definitions:

Justice

The Bible speaks of justice as a chief attribute of God, with biblical justice inextricably tied to God’s mercy and grounded in the relationship between God and humankind. From the time of the wilderness wanderings when the Hebrew people were given ethical instructions about their treatment of widows, orphans, and strangers, the practice of justice has been understood as the mission of those who follow Yahweh.

Mercy

The compassionate disposition to forgive someone or to offer aid, assistance, or help to someone in need. Closely connected are such concepts as grace, goodness, love, loving-kindness, compassion, and patience. Mercy (Heb. *rāḥam*, *ḥānan*) is an essential quality of God (Exod. 34:6; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 103:8). This is the quality (*ḥesed*, “covenant love”),

demonstrated throughout their history (cf. Deut. 30:1–6; Isa. 14:1; Ezek. 39:25–29), by which God faithfully keeps his promises and maintains his covenant relationship with his chosen people despite their unfaithfulness

Grace

A central term in the discussion of relationships between people and with the divine. Heb. *ḥēn* and *ḥesed* are the primary terms indicating God's disposition to show favor toward humans, and God's continuing loyalty toward those accepted into divine favor. This favor manifested itself in acts of deliverance in time of need and provision of daily sustenance.

James 2:1–13 NLT

My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives? Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you dishonor the poor! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear? Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law. For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law. So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

Three Questions:

1. How can you be saved and show favoritism?
2. What is the royal law?
3. What is the law of freedom that we will be judged by?

Notes:

1. How can you be saved and show favoritism?

What is wrong with favoritism?

Favoritism Misrepresents the _____ of God.

Deuteronomy 10:17NLT

“For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed.

Romans 2:11 NLT

For God does not show favoritism.

Favoritism Undermines _____ in the Body of Christ.

Galatians 3:28 NLT

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Favoritism undermines justice
- Favoritism elevates status over worth
- Favoritism violates the royal law

Notes:

2. What is the royal law?

Luke 10:25–29 NLT

One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” The man answered, “ ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Luke 10:36–37 NLT

“Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

Micah 6:8 NLT

No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

Mercy is displayed by those in a _____ - _____ with God.

Notes:

3. What is the law of freedom that we will be judged by?

James 1:25 NLT

But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

Matthew 5:3–11 NLT

“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers.

_____ **Jesus Is What Frees Us.**

Notes:

Next Steps

1. Examine Your Heart for _____ Favoritism

Action Step: This week, intentionally greet and engage someone at church or in your community you would normally overlook. Learn their name and story.

2. _____ the Royal Law: Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

Action Step: Do one tangible act of love for someone who cannot repay you. Think of a neighbor, coworker, or church member who might feel unseen or undervalued.

3. Make _____ Your First Response, Not Your Last Resort

When offended or inconvenienced, ask: What would mercy do here?

Action Step: Offer undeserved kindness this week—to a child who disobeyed, a coworker who failed, or a family member who frustrates you.

JUST, JUSTICE

In a philosophical sense, justice is understood as fairness, correct treatment, or equitable distribution of resources, but biblical justice is more than a mathematical distribution of goods. The Bible speaks of justice as a chief attribute of God, with biblical justice inextricably tied to God's mercy and grounded in the relationship between God and humankind. From the time of the wilderness wanderings when the Hebrew people were given ethical instructions about their treatment of widows, orphans, and strangers, the practice of justice has been understood as the mission of those who follow Yahweh.

The biblical tradition is alive with examples of men and women who brought justice to situations of oppression and injustice. From Deborah, the prophet and judge who administered justice, to the 8th-century prophets who called Israel and Judah to act justly toward the poor and oppressed, to Jesus who demonstrated the centrality of justice through his words and actions, biblical images of justice offer a window to God's response to injustice.

Both *šĕdāqâ* and *mišpāṭ*, Hebrew words for "righteousness" and "justice," can be understood in legalistic terms. Heb. *šĕdāqâ* can refer to ethical and moral standards or equality of all people before the law. Likewise, *mišpāṭ* can refer to law, the process of deciding a case in civil or religious government, execution of a judgment, or rights of an individual under civil or religious law.

Heb. *šĕdāqâ* and *mišpāṭ*, as also Gk. *díkē* and *dikaíosynē*, often are translated as "judgment" and "righteousness," words not normally associated today with justice. However, with reference to a situation of oppression or injustice, their importance to the OT and NT concept of justice is clear.

Justice is rooted in God's character (Isa. 5:16; Deut. 32:4), and justice is what God demands of followers (16:20). A central concept is that the justice of a community is measured by their treatment of the poor and oppressed (Isa. 1:16–17; 3:15). Although the message of justice is woven throughout the Bible, the prophets especially issued a strong call for the covenant community to recognize God as the God of justice and to repent of their injustice. Their primary message can be summarized in the words of Mic. 6:8: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

The Jubilee tradition in Lev. 25 reflects Israel's understanding of God's demands for justice in the midst of an unjust society. Intended to be observed every 50 years, the Jubilee incorporated Sabbath Year practices of the Covenant code and the Deuteronomic code, providing for land to lie fallow and indentured servants to be set free every seven years. During the Jubilee Year, debts would be forgiven and lands sold because of indebtedness would be returned to the original owners. For agrarian societies like Israel, return of land and forgiveness of debts amounted to economic restructuring of society. Undergirding the Jubilee Year is the biblical principle of redress that corrects past wrongs to approximate equality and restores the human community to wholeness.

Bibliography. B. C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down* (Louisville, 1991); S. C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (Oxford, 1982).¹

MERCY

The compassionate disposition to forgive someone or to offer aid, assistance, or help to someone in need. Closely connected are such concepts as grace, goodness, love, loving-kindness, compassion, and patience.

Mercy (Heb. *rāḥam*, *ḥānan*) is an essential quality of God (Exod. 34:6; Deut. 4:31; Ps. 103:8). This is the quality (*ḥesed*, "covenant love"), demonstrated throughout their history (cf. Deut. 30:1–6; Isa. 14:1; Ezek. 39:25–29), by which God faithfully keeps his promises and maintains his covenant relationship with his chosen people despite their unfaithfulness (Gk. *éleos*; Rom. 9:15–16, 23; Eph. 2:4). Israel was often reminded of the relationship between God's *ḥesed* and their covenant with God (Deut. 7:9; 1 Kgs. 8:23; Neh. 1:5; Isa. 55:3; Dan. 9:4).

¹ Michelle Tooley, "[Just, Justice,](#)" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 757.

God's mercy is more than punishment withheld. It actively helps those who are miserable due to circumstances beyond their control. This is demonstrated in Jesus' healing of the blind (Matt. 9:27–31; 20:29–34) and lepers (Luke 17:11–19). The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) shows how God is “the Father of all mercies and the God of all consolation” (2 Cor. 1:3); the parable of the merciless servant (Matt. 18:23–35) puts this divine quality in a negative setting. God's merciful faithfulness is most evident in his sending Jesus and saving his people (Rom. 11:30–32; Eph. 2:4). God's mercy will be manifest at the final judgment (2 Tim. 1:18; Jas. 2:13). God is merciful and expects his children to be merciful (Matt. 5:7; Jas. 1:27).²

GRACE

A central term in the discussion of relationships between people and with the divine. Heb. *ḥēn* and *ḥesed* are the primary terms indicating God's disposition to show favor toward humans, and God's continuing loyalty toward those accepted into divine favor. This favor manifested itself in acts of deliverance in time of need and provision of daily sustenance. Favor is shown in the face of the benefactor, so that “seeking God's face” (Ps. 27:8–9) and imploring God to “make God's face to shine” and to “lift up God's countenance” (Num. 6:25), are all expressions of seeking God's favor, God's disposition to help and to provide for the well-being (*šālôm*) of God's people. Favor once shown can also be withdrawn: this is commonly expressed as anger, the opposite of favor (cf. Heb. 10:26–31), represented by the hiding of the face or removal of the offender from the presence of the benefactor (Ps. 13:1 [MT 2]; 51:11 [13]).

The casting of the divine-human relationship in these terms reflects the manner in which human beings interacted. People in an inferior position (with regard to power or resources) would “seek the favor” of a person in a socially superior position. Joseph “finds favor” in the sight of Potiphar, the jailer, and Pharaoh's household (Gen. 39:4, 21; 50:4). This human dimension remains important in the narratives of Ruth and 1 Samuel, as well as in Proverbs. At such a level, “favor” does not necessarily create an ongoing relationship. It may be a single act of beneficence with a response of simple gratitude. Frequently, however, it does initiate an ongoing relationship in which the beneficiary returns loyal service for the favor shown by the benefactor, and the benefactor continues to provide assistance and access to resources (cf. the story of Joseph).

² Edward P. Myers, [“Mercy,”](#) in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 885.

The relationship of “grace” between God and the people of Israel is ongoing. God’s acts of “favor” in the wilderness establish a relationship which now has clearly articulated mutual obligations. An initial stance of uncoerced favor leads to the formation of a relationship in which the benefactor will continue to provide assistance, and the beneficiaries will remain singularly loyal to the Patron and offer services to the Patron. Within the Deuteronomic and prophetic traditions, this loyal service was to be fulfilled through beneficence toward one’s fellow Israelites. Generosity and justice in human relationships were obligations imposed on the people as their fitting response to God’s generosity toward them. God’s *ḥesed*, “loyalty,” remains “favor” in that where the human beneficiaries continually fail in their loyalty and service, God continues to call them back into favor, punishing for a time but always restoring those who have broken faith. Even the declaration of a “new covenant” which replaces the “old” broken by the ancestors is a declaration of God’s commitment to set aside all those offenses and insults to God’s favor, and approach the people anew in favor (Jer. 31:31–34).

In the NT period, “grace” (Gk. *cháris*) is embedded in the language of the Greco-Roman institution of patronage. Seneca claimed that patronage constituted the “chief bond of human society” (Seneca *de Beneficiis* 1.4.2), and so the NT proclamation of God’s favor would have been heard and interpreted within this social context. Patrons gave access to goods, entertainment, and advancement. The client, who received the benefit, accepted the obligation to spread the fame of the giver and declare gratitude for the patron’s gifts (cf. Seneca 2.21.1; 2.24.2). The client also accepted the obligation of loyalty and service to the patron. A third figure in this network has been called the “broker” (cf. *mesítēs*). This figure was a patron to his or her clients and a client or friend of another potential patron. The broker’s chief benefaction was access to another patron and the resources at his or her disposal.

Within this social-semantic field, *cháris* has three distinct meanings. It is first the disposition of a benefactor to aid a suppliant, “not in return for something nor in the interest of him who renders it, but in that of the recipient” (Aristotle *Rhetoric* 2.7.2). In this sense it is most akin to Heb. *ḥēn*. It also refers to the client’s proper return for a benefit, namely gratitude and loyal service (cf. 2 Cor. 4:15; Heb. 12:28; 13:15–16), as well as to the actual gift or benefit conferred (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6–7, 19). Paul is known as a proponent of “salvation by grace.” He is concerned (e.g., in Galatians) to establish God’s uncoerced initiative in reaching out to form a people from all nations through God’s anointed agent, Jesus. Requiring Torah-observance from gentile converts threatens to set aside or nullify the favor of God which Jesus, the

broker, has gained for his faithful clients (Gal. 2:21; 5:2–4), because it casts doubt on Jesus' ability to secure God's favor. It shows distrust toward Jesus, the immediate Patron of the new people of God formed from Jews and Gentiles, called into God's favor (Gal. 1:6). God's favor, however, seeks a response of faithfulness (*pístis*) and service from God's clients. Paul speaks, therefore, of the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) which is the goal of his mission, calling forth the proper response of those who have benefited from God's gift. This involves the offering up of the believers' whole selves to God's service, to do what is righteous in God's sight (Rom. 12:1; 6:1–14). As in the OT, this response centers not only on honoring God, but on love, generosity, and loyal service toward one's fellow believers (Gal. 5:13–14; 6:2; Rom. 13:9–10). The giving is free and uncoerced, but the ancient hearer knew that to accept a gift meant accepting also obligation to the giver.

The author of Hebrews affords exceptional insight into the workings of "grace" within the patron-client relationship between God and human beings. Whereas humanity stood apart from God's favor on account of the sins which stained the conscience, Jesus' priestly sacrifice (brokerage) brought forgiveness and cleansing, so that Jesus' clients might have "access to the throne of favor," i.e., come into God's presence, seek God's face (favor), and receive "favor to help in time of need" (e.g., the resources to hold on in the face of opposition; Heb. 4:16). In order to attain the promised benefits of a place in God's city (Heb. 11:13–16; 13:14), the clients have need of "faith" (*pístis*) and "endurance" (10:35–39). They must remain loyal to their Patron in the face of society's hostility and not waver in their trust. To give up God's gifts (and show slight regard for God's "spirit of favor"; Heb. 10:29) for the sake of peace with society would be an outrageous insult to the Patron, a spurning of God's gifts and of Jesus' costly mediation, resulting in God's "wrath" (Heb. 10:26–31; 3:7–4:11). The author here gives insight into the reciprocal nature of *cháris*: God has accepted the believers into favor through Jesus' effective mediation; the believers, as honorable clients, are now to return "grace" for "grace," to "show gratitude" (Heb. 12:28) to God by continuing to bear witness to their Benefactor in a hostile world (13:15) and by assisting one another by love and service, encouraging and supporting one another in the face of an unsupportive society (13:1–3, 16; 6:10).

Bibliography. F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis, 1982); D. A. DeSilva, "Exchanging Favor for Wrath: Apostasy in Hebrews and Patron-Client Relationships," *JBL* 115 (1996): 91–116; R. M. Hals, *Grace and Faith in the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, 1980); K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hese*

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³ David A. deSilva, [“Grace,”](#) in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 524–526.