

JAMES RESHUFFLED, *Save Me!*
April 22, 2018

Anyone take their blood pressure this morning?
I want to raise it a bit this morning.
Kind of like a stress test.
You deliberately increase stress to see if your heart can take it.

So I need you to call to mind a place of pain and suffering.
An injustice that infuriates you
A loss that breaks your heart
A fractured friendship that is deeply distressing
A feeling of alienation, like you're all alone in this world
An aggravating person that just makes you so angry
Or just the endless grind of everyday life.

How's our collective blood pressure?
Before we flat-line, enter James.
Last week he gave us a plan for getting through all forms
of physical and emotional suffering.

Can anyone remember even one part of that plan?
Consider it all _____ God making you _____
Don't think God has turned against you. He's good all _____
Ask for _____
(That's the opposite of "worry praying") Do you know what that is?
Your prayers are a continuous instant replay of your problems,
a rehearsing of all the what-if's.
By the time you get done praying you're a nervous wreck!
Be patient far longer than you think is reasonable. – Remember Job!

Now we continue.
James knows us so well.
He knows that when we're suffering,
we're going to get really mad at the person/persons
who you see are causing all the trouble.
You're going to want to give them a piece of our mind;
We want to set the record straight.
It's what we do – some of us do it better than other.
Come on. Aren't there a few people in your life you'd *love* to tell off?

OK, hold that thought and let's go to the book. James 1:19-20

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

It's not really what I want to hear when I'm mad . . .

But there *is* one thing I absolutely love about what it doesn't say. It *doesn't say* . . .

“Hold your tongue because I'm checking to see if you're naughty or nice.”

It doesn't say,

“Hold your tongue so you can earn the gold-star patience award.”

It says,

“Hold your tongue because I want righteousness to win in this situation just as much as you do.

I want to set the record straight just as much as you do.

And I know it *feels* like giving vent to your anger and speaking your mind will help,

But your unleashed anger won't bring about the righteousness that we *both* desire.

God isn't upset with how angry we are at injustice or ignorance.

He may well agree with you 100% about our assessment of the situation

He's just saying

Do you want to be *proved* right or do you want what's right to prevail.

Take yourself out of the equation,

put away your anger,

hold your tongue and

do lots of listening.

It's the only way to get to the righteousness that we both desire.

Come on, don't work against me; work with me.”

Therefore . . .

Since that's the goal. Here's what I want you to do.

Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent
and humbly accept the word planted in you
which can save you.

If we were to put this in an equation, it'd look like this:

Get rid + Humbly accept = Save you

I'll admit, at first reading, I find this equation quite off-putting and confusing.

Moral filth? Are you talking to *me*?

Moral filth is the terrible stuff that *other* people do who are *causing* my suffering.

The sins that make God *really* mad,
Like the sins for which God is going to judge America,
If you want to get rid of *that* moral filth, James?
Preach on!

And then I'm supposed to accept the word planted in me.
What word? The Bible?

The end result is it will save me? I'm confused here too.
I thought I was already saved.

And I thought the people you were writing to were already saved
You know. We said the prayer and get to go to heaven when we die.

I'm going to start at the end of the equation and work backward,
Cause at least "save you" sound promising.

It's true, sometimes in Scripture, saved does mean the good stuff I get after I die.
Like in 1 Peter 1

It is by the great mercy of God that we have been born again,
because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Now we live with great expectation and we have a priceless inheritance,
an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled,
beyond the reach of change and decay.

And through your faith,

God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation.

This salvation *is* about all that I have to look forward to in the life to come.

But James is using the word "save" differently.

Five times he uses the word "save" in this letter.

with no mentions the life to come.

James is fully engaged saving our souls through the rough and tumble of *this* life.

For example, James says if you're sick to call the elders of the church to anoint you
will oil and pray for you,

5:15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.

If saved meant getting you to the good stuff on the other side of this life,
no one would come for prayer.

James wants us to be saved in the sense of
having peace of mind and joy in our soul,
no matter how tumultuous and unjust our circumstances are.
He wants to *save* us *from* destroying the quality of our own lives

I need that; I'll consider to his equation.

So now, James, you want to talk about moral filth and pervasive evil.
My question is, "Whose?" Back to the book.

You know what James does? He says, take a look, here . . . (mirror)

James 1:23-24

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says
is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself,
goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

OK, I'm looking.

But moral filth and pervasive evil? Isn't that a little *harsh*?

James is about to do exactly what Jesus did when the religious leaders
brought to Jesus the woman caught in the act of adultery.

He bends down and starts writing in the sand.

When he gets done, there's nobody left point a finger at anybody else.

So take a look at what he write in the sand . . .

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture,
"Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.
But if you show favoritism,
you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

And here's what playing favorites might look at church. James 2:1-4
My brothers and sisters,

believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.
Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes,
and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in.

If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say,
“Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man,
“You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,”
have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with *evil* thoughts?

Wow! You mean There should be NO difference how we treat people who walk
in our door if . . .

One is rich and the other is not
One is talented and the other is not
One is likeable and the other is not
One shares your political opinions and the other does not . . .
One person has lots to offer me or the church and another does not.

God help us if someone walks in the door and we say, Cha-ching
The world calls that networking.
You got to get around the people and ask, How can they benefit me?
But that’s *NOT* the church.
We exist to ask the question, ‘How can we benefit *you*?’”

If we make any such distinctions,
James says we [have discriminated as judges with evil thoughts](#).
There’s not one of us who’s not guilty.

But, Lord, I protest!
It’s not like I’m openly rude or anything.
I just keep my distance.
Maybe a little snide comment on the side here or there,
But certainly you don’t consider that on the same level as moral filth!

The moral filth I see out there is far more serious
than this miniscule blemish I see in the mirror!

James says, come here, let me explain something. James 2:10-11
[For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point
is guilty of breaking all of it.](#)
For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.”
[If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.](#)

So the royal laws is: “[Love your neighbor as yourself.](#)”
Any infringement of that, and favoritism in an infringement of that,
makes me a lawbreaker just as much as if I was an adulterer and the murderer.

I've got to deal with my sin of favoritism as radically
as I want God to deal with the sins that are causing me distress.

So while I'm crying "murderer"
James bends down and writes in the sand, "favoritism"

And just so we don't think God will just wink at our minor infraction:
James writes. (2:12-13)

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,
This Royal Law of Love . . .

gives freedom from the oppression of class distinction
gives freedom from having to measure up before you're allowed to belong
gives freedom from cliques and in-group and out-group
gives freedom from being labeled "winners" and "losers"

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives
glorious, *glorious* freedom!

And why bother?

because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful.

God won't judge you based on how respectful you were to the pastors.
He will judge us based on how respectful you were to the person
you really have no use for.

I ran across a great example of the royal law of Love at work
in an off-hand comment by Paul in Colossians 4:9

He's sending an envoy to the church with Tychicus, and says:

He's coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you.

Do you know who Onesimus is?

He's a run-away slave who met Paul and got saved.

Think slave. Think run-away slave. Think stigma. Think social class distinctions.

Paul says, "*He's one of you.*"

You know what I think?

I think God puts Onesimus' deliberately in our community
to see if we really get the royal law of love.

But sometimes, also to test us, he also puts in some celebrities.

You know that Willie has played for Gloria Gaynor

The "*I will survive*" recording artist.

She attends a church in Brooklyn and I love her answer to the question,
Isn't it difficult to attend, being a celebrity and al.

No. Our pastor reminds us, God has no co-stars.
There is only one person who gets preferential treatment.
And to HIM, every knee must bow.

OK, so anyone still point fingers at the moral filth out there?
James has leveled the playing field.

That brings me back to our equation.
If we get rid of moral filth, and . . .
And humbly – yes, I am feeling much more humble now –
receive the word that has been planted in you.

Now if James said only “receive the *word*.”
I'd think he meant the Bible
I'd feel pretty discouraged.
You see, I'm weak and
not really good at doing something just because the Bible says . . .
I've got a lot of knee-jerk reaction to life are pretty firmly imbedded.

BUT . . . James says, Receive the word that has been *planted* in you.
The word planted in you isn't a what, it's a *who*.
The word became flesh and dwelt among you.
The very Spirit of Jesus has been planted in you,
And HE can change you from the inside out
so that you *can* live by the royal law that gives freedom
And that will SAVE your soul.

So what do we need to do this week?
How about every day you look in the mirror and
before you shave or put on your make-up
we check closely for any blemishes of favoritism.

You know, New Beginnings is the most diverse church I have ever seen.
We all love that about New Beginnings.
But if we *really* want to set ourselves apart
from every other social institution in our society,
We perfect the royal law,
That we may be known by our LOVE.