**“Done Well”**

Psalm 146

# Isaiah 35:4-7a

James 2:1-10, 14-18

Mark 7:31-37

 15th Sunday after Pentecost, Sept. 4/5, 2021

From James: “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Script, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.” Then recorded in Mark: “They were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’”

“Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

**Bridge**

There’s a debate in theology about whether-or-not preaching should leave-off with what’s called the “**Third Use of the Law**”. In that “**Third Use**”, the **helpful use of God’s direction (or the suggestion of an application of that Law), guides how we’re to act,** makes clear the difference between right and wrong / shows us what is Good in what we should be doing, because every Christian would love to hear (I know) a **“well done” from God** as a result of our **actions**. But as **helpful** as **it is** (even the **guiding direction of the Law**), the “Third Use” (the helpful one) **never can provide that “well done”** because it can’t avoid being, also, the “**Main** Use of the Law” **condemning because of human inability to do any of it perfectly**. Even the “Third Us of the Law” serves to **guide us to recognize a need for a Savior**. Since we won’t perfectly-do all the Law **guides us to do**, **helpful suggestions even** **crush-us**.

The book of James, then, stands as an almost **mockery of us** compared to what we hear perfectly-“well-done”-by-the-Lord in the Gospel of Mark. James suggests **what** **we Christians must do as Jesus does**. James is perhaps the best “3rd Use of the Law” book (what an appropriate place to go on **Labor Day** … to “**labors**”). Mark records the One who **labors well**. While James guide us to also labor well, the book’s **“best use”** is to drive us to need to depend-upon the **One who saves us by, Himself, doing well for us**.

So, with James and its **contrast** in Mark’s Gospel, we have the **Law met with hope through Jesus**. September (like August was) in one book of Scripture, but the Law spoken in James’ will always (you should note) be seen in the hope of the Gospel recorded in Mark. What’s **expected of us** gets always **fulfilled and accomplished successfully (and on our behalf) by God’s Son, Jesus**. James tells us everything the Heavenly Father demands of us to **try to do** (because **the world needs our efforts** and without those efforts, how can faith really be active in us if it doesn’t make us **react-to-it in gracious ways**), but our **inabilities** to “well-do” those things make Jesus’ **abilities** **and willingness** **to “well do and do for us” shine** **with obvious distinction**. Dependence up **His shining**, then (God’s grace to **allow believers** to benefit and actually **express beyond ourselves** His Son’s mercy), is fruit from grace’s faith. Everything in **James just expression from the One who’s the Subject of Mark**.

**Text**

So, we start in James in Chapter 2. Chapter 1 speaks of the **necessity for Christians to willingly embrace challenges like Jesus did / to try from a willful Spirit blessed us by the Gospel’s grace**. It’s what the Father expects … it’s the “royal Law”. In this **evil world** (Chapter 1 says) trials and challenges reign supreme. This world dumps-on people specifically (as it says) trials and tribulations, challenges and stresses … it’s a completely **fallen** world. James says, though, that **growth happens** **as we embrace our duties in those trials, emulating Christ as He took them on (not avoiding them, but meeting each graciously, and rising to the occasions)**: “**Remain steadfast**”, James summarizes his first chapter, “**by being** quick to hear God’s Word and slow to speak, being **doers of the Word**, though, and **not hearers only** … slow to anger, honest” / repentant and (by the way, and for example) “**visit** (and care for) orphans and widows, **keeping oneself**, always, **unstained** **from the world**”

So, in chapter 2, he describes caring for people as doing that perfectly and “**impartially**”. We’re to care without “**respect to persons**” (as the word translates). Our **judgments** can never have anything to do with an **outward appearance … but need**.

James is meant to provide guidance (but then reliance on Christ) regarding Christian action and also thought. It condemns “comfort levels” in us. Where an Arab seeks Christ (or Christians), or two cross-dressers repentantly do (yet holding hands with each other still), or an unwashed homeless man, or any number or other **challenges to human comfort levels**, **there** the discomfort must point our eyes to the **Christ who died for the sake of every individual individually**.

Today we hear of Him confronted with and dealing with, touching, and healing a **man who had (among other things)** **no health insurance**. **Beggars** begged Jesus to help him. Jesus (you’ll notice) had just returned from being “out of the country”, going to unfamiliar territory. Tyre and Sidon **wasn’t home** (and wasn’t the **comforts of home**). Jesus was (there), in very foreign territory, with foreign people native not of Galilee or Israel at all, but of Tyre and Sidon. He then (it says) went “to the region of the **Decapolis**” (a Greek bastion of metropolis’ very foreign to Galilean ways of living). Residents in those 10 cities were all **secular folks (extremely so)** and gathered-together in that environment **seculars from every country on the planet**. The Decapolis cities were the New York, L.A., and Hong Kong of the day, known for bringing the best in technologies together with the most-diversity (a true melting pot of the “worldy”). Jesus was “**in the world**” in every sense of the word in the region of the Decapolis. You could say He walked the alleys of New York, L.A., and Hong Kong, along with San Francisco and New Orleans and Las Vegas and Amsterdam, when He purposefully walked the cities and streets of the Decapolis.

But you do not see (in any account) **“partiality” on Jesus’ part**. While not “of the world” yet “in it”, Jesus was “there” to be **being willingly-available / ready to help and heal, teach and ultimately save wherever (and for whomever) His help was needed**: Jesus “took **this man** aside and, privately, put His fingers into the man’s ears, and after spitting He touched His tongue, looking up to Heaven, sighing, and saying to the man ‘be opened” … and the result was that “the man’s ears **were opened**, and **he** **spoke, then, plainly**.”

The Gospel for us (and for everybody) is that Jesus’ impartially-used ability and willingness can be joined-to **by everyone** through an equally humble sorrow for sin and baptism into the One who became sin for every last sinner. Even with any of **our inadequacies**, we’re gifted to be **not-condemned by God’s grace in substitutionary-action (perfect ability and willing sacrificial acts) of Jesus**. The **Law that that no one on this fallen earth can fulfill**, **Jesus did**, **paying also for our failures in that upon the cross**. And while we, of course, ought to **try to do Good** to the glory of our Savior and Father as well as the needs of people of all situations, **every short-coming that we have Jesus’ substitutes with His success**. Even where we fail in **big ways or just thoughts**, **Jesus’ met our failures with His victory on the cross for us … accentuated by His resurrection from the grave just two days later**.

## Application

In the debate about whether to end preaching and teaching with the “3rd (helpful) Use of the Law”, I guess I don’t mind **suggesting** some application of right over wrong, yet everyone knows the difference (I’m convinced) between the two. We may ourselves, sometimes (for a while), think in false terms of “**gray scales of circumstance**” or wonder if God grades actions on some **curve that He does not use**, but James won’t sit for that. Scripture (he knew) quickly enough **puts to work** **the Gospel after repentance of partiality and un-performance (and Jesus does successfully what we can’t or won’t or didn’t do)**. He **over-rides with grace** slackings or deceptions in us and **renews us for Good that He accounts to us as “well done” labor** …

… **but He’s the One (Jesus)** who **truly sees no distinction one to another, loves and heals and does so to even us (touching us, even). And we’re foreigners to, both, His Hebrew humanity and His heavenly divinity**. **We**’**re strangers who He saw fit (because that’s what He does) to bring near and save by His perfect life and then willing death and successful resurrection**.

Thanks be to God for His **impartial grace and mercy upon us** … His **success through the Gospel won by His Son, Jesus**. **JESUS** has, truly, “**done all things well**” … and **for us**. In +His name. Amen.