

CREATING, NOT CRITICIZING
Genesis 1:27-31; James 1:13-27

Read James 1:13-27

Intro: I had an old rifle that had harvested many deer for me, and also for my brother Phil, who owned it before I did. It was a sporterized military carbine that had been produced for the Persian cavalry in 1929. It was a sweet little deer rifle, but with all the rounds that likely went through it before we ever owned it, and then the hundreds, and perhaps thousands of rounds Phil and I shot out of it, by the early 2000s, it was shot out. My cousin, Mark, is an artist of a gunsmith. He had already built Sheila a beautiful rifle and he wanted to do the same for me using the action of my little Persian Mauser. He does such work in his spare time and it took him almost 10 years before my beautiful new rifle was ready. By then we had moved here to Ohio where rifles are not legal for deer and so it was a couple years until I got a chance to shoot it and when I did I was just leaning against Dale and Pat Dohner's barn door. I didn't do well. It was not optimum sighting-in conditions.

And then Jon Bowman invited me to use his rifle range. He said he had everything I'd need. When I got there, I saw what he meant. The range was perfect and very safe. And his shooting bench was a large cable spool – one could not have a steadier base to shoot from. But then he pulled out a device I'd always seen but had never used. It was an adjustable bench rest. You place your rifle or shotgun in the rests and all you have to do is hold the rifle tight to your shoulder and squeeze the trigger. It was amazing! I couldn't miss. My custom rifle was a nail driver. Here, all this time that I'd thought the rifle was inaccurate or the expensive scope I'd bought for it was defective, when the nut holding the gun (me) was out of adjustment.

This brings up a truism I read this past week, the writer said, *“A marksman doesn't hit the target by focusing on how not to miss it. He pours his time, energy, and resources into creating the perfect shot. In the process, the things that hinder his success fade into the periphery.”*

That's why I want to take the brief time we have this morning to talk about how, instead of criticizing the less than perfect people in this less than perfect world, we must find creative ways to win them to Christ.

As I talked about this talk with Ron Sprunger the other morning he listened with interest and then later he sent me a follow up email with this truth. *“Criticism can easily grow when a person is idle instead of active.”* And then he followed it with something I've heard him say numerous times, He said, *“A farmer once observed that the mule that does the most kickin' does the least pullin'.”*

The world expects Christians to be critical. And one of the main reasons for that is too often Christians ARE critical. We criticize the language people use, we criticize the way people dress, we criticize that people live together before marriage or get divorced. We criticize people who marry someone of their own sex, and we scream hateful things to young women who walk out of an abortion clinic. Are these all things that grieve God's heart? Yes! And there lots more things that do that too – some of them are things that the same Christians who tend to be critical, tend to fall into. That's why Jesus told his listeners in his Sermon on the Mount to not judge or they would be judged with equal harshness. (Matthew 7:1-2)

My suggestion is, was we talk about revival and restoration in our series this summer REVIVAL: Living the Gospel and Restoring the World lets find creative ways to deal with what, in our text, James refers to as “moral filth” (James 1:21). I believe as we resist the temptation to be critical, our creativity with be much more a draw to people who need Jesus and to leave their sinful life.

First of all, lets remember . . .

We are ALL created in God's image

- We heard in our text from Genesis, *God saw ALL that he had made, and it was VERY good.* Genesis 1:31 I love Peterson how says it, *God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good!* Genesis 1:31 (The Message) I've said it before and we need constant reminding, God don't make no junk. He created the world and everything in it and it was all very good. And then he made humanity in his own image and he outdid himself. He loved what he'd done. In fact, he loves his creation so much that he sent his son to die for that creation that had brought ruin upon itself. He didn't get mad, he got even. When the enemy tried to steal his crowning creative achievement, he got even but sending the perfect sacrifice.

- He could have allowed humanity to get our just deserts, but he came up with a creative solution. We can learn a lot from that. And then James brings up that creation idea when he says that . . .

The word of truth we have makes us the first fruits of all he created.

- With the truth we have as Christ Followers we have a responsibility. We are the leading edge of his creative plan to redeem humanity. We waste precious time if we choose to criticize. People who are in the world and wrapped up in the sin that comes from being lost don't really know they're lost. It may be daytime, but they're stumbling around in the darkness of ignorance. But instead of burning with the hot flame of our indignance, we need to lead them back to the light.
- Last week we talked about Zacchaeus who was a sinner by every account and the religious leaders would not let him forget it. When Jesus called him down from the tree and invited himself for dinner at the hated tax collector's home, they made no bones about the fact that Jesus was going to the home of a sinner. And Jesus said, in so many words, "Exactly! How does one seek and save the lost except by going to the lost?" The critical way to deal with sinners is to call them out for their sin, the creative way to deal with sinners to find them where they are, meet them there and love them into the Kingdom.
- We do this by . . .

Following God's example of creating out of chaos

- Our impact on society should strive to be creative. I think all of you would agree with me that our society seems more chaotic all the time. What used to be wrong now is considered perfectly normal and what used to be considered good is wrong. We are in a crazy mixed up world. So, let's surprise it. Instead of crying foul, how about we take some time to listen to what people are saying in culture?
- This is James' suggestion when he tells believers to be quick to listen, slow to answer, slow to anger. (James 1:19) Peterson says, "*Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear.*" James 1:19 (The Message). I think we will have less to criticize if we really know what makes people tick.
- I'm not suggesting we overlook what is clearly sin. James tells us in verse 21 to get rid of moral filth. And then he tells us to humbly accept the word we have which can not only save us, but those we impact. Be doers of the word. YES! Be humble! Don't forget where we came from. Don't forget the way we've been saved.

Conclusion: We have communion coming up and that is a good time for self-examination in this. As we prepare for communion, we always give a time of confession and searching our hearts to see if there is anything that would suggest we would be taking communion unworthily. As you ponder this, is there something you need to repent of when it comes to dealing with a sinful world? We will give you time to consider this as we prepare for the bread and the cup.

Let me conclude with two situations that came to my attention over the past 10 days or so. One came in a phone call from a fellow pastor who was seeking my counsel about how to deal with a family in which a child had come out as a homosexual. The family was in an uproar and the parents were beside themselves with shame, grief, anger, and denial, just to name a few. Their response is not unusual. And to a certain extent, all the emotions they were feeling is natural and to be expected and I certainly understand. But, to go overboard with it will most likely bring harm and no good solution to their concerns. They will only serve to drive the child away. That's the danger with being critical.

The other account was something I heard on the radio just yesterday. It was about a dad whose son was a heroin addict in Denver. Would this be distressing for any parent? You bet it would! And perhaps as this boy descended into the drug culture, his parents probably did their fair share of criticizing and cajoling. But the dad decided to do something different for a change. He flew to Denver, found his homeless son on the streets and spent the week with him . . . ON THE STREETS! He accepted the food given by homeless feeding programs provided by churches and dug through the garbage for food. He slept on the street with his son. He watched as his son stole to get his next heroin fix. He experienced just a bit of what boy did day in and day out. He said he got an average of 2 hours and thirty minutes of sleep per night because he needed to sleep with one eye open. He told his son that he and the boy's mom knew that he could very well die the life he was leading and they knew that he probably didn't care about that. And then he went on to tell the boy that if he did die, his parents would die too. Not that they wouldn't be breathing and existing, but that if their boy would die, a huge part of them would die too. It

didn't have a happy ending, but it didn't have a tragic ending either, yet. Dad returned home and the boy was arrested for burglary and he was getting treatment in jail. This was a creative way to tell a horrendously lost young man of a parent's love.

God help us to be creating and not criticizing. Amen.