

James 1:19-20 'The Righteous Life That God Desires!'

Last time in James we looked at the second half of v17 and v18, 'Shifting shadows, birth, truth and the firstfruits', I called the sermon. We saw that after James calls God "the Father of the heavenly lights," conveying the idea that God is the source of all of the light of the universe, the sun, the moon, the stars and all of the celestial bodies which are constant, even though our view of those things can be obscured. He explained that like those things, God does "not change like shifting shadows." Yes, although our sin and circumstances can distort and obscure our vision of God, He is "unchanging." He is not in the process of becoming; no. God already is. Indeed, "I AM WHO I AM" He said.

We saw also that "He chose to give us birth." He gave us birth physically, but then "He chose to give us birth" spiritually, even unto eternity! And He has given us this second birth through the preaching of His "word of truth," the Bible. Yes that is how salvation comes to us, that is the vessel which God has chosen to use. His "word of truth!" And I explained, that even as God and His love to His people are unchanging, "not shifting shadows," well, so too is His "word of truth." And I said, but in this world of uncertainty where there is no right or wrong, (and indeed what is wrong today will be right tomorrow, and also that we can all have our own version of truth) Jesus said, "I tell you the truth." And "I Am the truth." Those two absolutes that encapsulate everything. Our unchanging God, and His "word of truth." Indeed He is "the God of truth" says Isaiah. No, the Bible doesn't contain truth, it is truth! Inerrant and unchanging!

And finally we looked at that idea of "firstfruits" v18. The first picking of the crop which was offered up to God in faith, believing that the following harvest would be overflowing from His bounty! Beginning with Abel's offering, then the instructing of God concerning the crops in Leviticus. That a person's "first sheaf of grain" would be waived by the priest before God on behalf of the offerer, immediately followed by "a year old male lamb without defect." This was clearly pointing to the sinless life of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, that small offering in faith, pointing to the greater harvest! Jesus was the "firstfruits" of which James and his parishioners "were a kind," pointing to the great harvest of souls, of which we are a part, and this harvest will continue until Jesus returns!

And so we pick up the text in James 1:19-20: 'The Righteous Life That God Desires!'

Now brothers and sisters, these following verses are probably some of the most well known and most quoted and used pieces of scripture, throughout the whole of the Bible. Indeed, I'm sure that you have heard me use these very things many times, as I've sought to use them by way of making a practical application, to convey certain things from those texts to which I was referring. So, v19 & 20 "My dear brothers take note of this, everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." And I've pointed out on more than one occasion, that ashamedly, quite often with me, the opposite is true. I am slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to become angry! And if we think of these words in a general sense, then their practical application is quite clear. Be a good listener, hold your tongue, and seek to keep the lid on things when people are driving you crazy, and you feel like you are going to blow your top!

Again, this is a fair application of James' words here. And if we left them at that, then certainly we wouldn't go wrong. But if we do away with that little subtitle which has been added in the NIV and many other study bibles, and we place v19 directly below v18, we will then find out correct context. v18 "he chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all

he created. v19 "My dear brothers, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. v20 For man's anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires." But friends again, these things are true in a general sense, and even rightly applied in a general sense, but as the commentators explain, these things that James speaks of here are specifically referring to "the word of truth" through which we have been given new "birth." And while this verse is tremendously helpful in a general sense pertaining to Christian conduct, if we apply them to "the word of truth which has given us birth," it gives us reason to rethink what James is actually telling us here! The original puts it this way. "My beloved brothers know ye this." It is an imperative. "But let every man be swift to listen, slow to speak and slow to wrath."

Now in Mark 4:24a, Jesus said, "Consider carefully what you hear." And in Luke 8:18 he also said, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen." So what we listen to and how we listen to it. Jesus goes on to say in Luke "whoever has will be given more, and whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." Jesus is talking about the attitude of heart, with which we approach and listen to the Word of God. He is saying a heart that comes in contrition, (trusting not in one's own self and self-righteousness) to that person the bounty of God's Word has no limit. Indeed what they already have will be added to. But the person who comes to the Word of God, when it is taught or preached in their pride and vanity, (believing that they have it all under control even standing in their own stead, and having no need of Jesus) even that small measure of light that they already have, will be taken from them. Now there is no room for self-sufficiency, in the Kingdom of God!

So we are to "consider carefully what we hear," and "how we hear" it, when God's Word is preached and taught! And since James' whole thrust is about how we respond to the "Word of truth that has given us birth," our new birth, so that our life reflects this new birth. As with a newborn child, what we feed upon is all important. And how we feed upon those things is also important!

Last time we looked at the crucial need of "truth." And how Jesus said, "Amen I tell you the truth." And indeed He said, "I am the truth." And Isaiah told us that God is "the God of truth." Yes Amen, so shall it be! And yet today it seems in our modern world, that our lives are almost devoid of "truth." Even many who claim Jesus, (out of their own evil desires and agendas) are leading many people down the path to hell. Joel Osteen, Jimmy Swaggart, Joyce Meyers, Benny Hinn, and Kenneth Copeland, there is a myriad of them on TV. No, not all tele evangelists are bad, there are many fine men for Christ on Line. But stay away from the false ones. They "are of their father the devil Coming as "angels of light." If you are unsure of them ask me, and if I don't know them I will check them out for you. But yes, what we listen to and is preached to us is all important, because Beloved, as important as it is to put good things into our physical bodies, it is of a far greater importance to put good things in, to be nourished, within our spiritual bodies! "Don't entertain the devil," the old translation says. What we listen to and feed upon spiritually so to speak, is all important. A life filled with spiritual McDonald's and Kentucky fried chicken might taste good for a while, but it will end up with us having a spiritual clogging of the arteries, and spiritual heart disease. What we listen to is all important, but also is how we listen, Jesus said.

And now I say these following things brothers and sisters with all sensitivity. How we prepare to hear God speak to us, matters! Do we spend time preparing, anytime at all, before going along to Bible study or coming along to worship? Simply quietly, preparing to meet with God and His people? Do we pray, in whatever situation we might find ourselves or in or are dealing with? Yes do we pray, 'Lord speak to me today, give me guidance through what your servant has prepared from your word?' 'Yes give me guidance and understanding so that I might know the pathway ahead.' We should also pray for those who do teach us and preach for us. 'Holy Father empower your servant with your Holy Spirit today. That I might hear you speak through them.'

Friends, all these things are an indication of how we are listening or seeking to listen to God speak to us! In Acts 17:11 we read: "Now the Bereans were of a more noble character than the Thessalonians. For they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." Now the word which Luke uses here for "examined" is "*anakrinontes*" and it translates as meaning, they "scrutinised." Even that they "sifted" through everything that Paul had to say to them. Did it line up with the Old Testament? Was it in line with what Peter and the other apostles taught? I've mentioned it before. That if this is what the Bereans did when listening to Paul, how much more should you and I question and "scrutinise" what is fed to us? What they listened to and how they listened to those things, determined that "noble character" of the Bereans.

In 1 Samuel 3:10, when God was first calling the young boy Samuel into the priesthood as he was serving in the temple. And when he first hears God the Holy Spirit speak to him, (after the first two times believing it was old Eli the priest calling him) Samuel says. "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." And in Acts 10:33, after being led by God through that amazing vision, Peter is sent to Cornelius` that non-Jew`s house. He'd gathered all of his family, his relations and his neighbours together, and when Peter arrives he says. "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything that the Lord has commanded you to tell us." This is the attitude of heart, which will have us hear what God will say to us Beloved. "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Yes friends, what we listen to in relation "God's truth" and how we listen to it is all important!

Again v19 "My beloved brethren, Know ye this: Everyone should be swift to listen and slow to speak." Blanchard explains that the Jewish Rabbis had a saying: 'Men have two ears but one tongue, that they should hear more than they speak. Ears are always open ready to receive instruction, but the tongue is surrounded by a double row of teeth, to keep it within proper bounds.' It's good, isn't it. I'll say it again. 'Men have two ears but one tongue, that they should hear more than they speak. The ears are always open ready to receive instruction, but the tongue is surrounded by a double row of teeth, to keep it within proper bounds.'

When speaking to the religious elite of the day, (after them accusing Him of releasing people from demon possession through the power of the devil himself) Jesus said in Matthew 12:34-37 "You brood of Vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." So when we think of the Lord's words that people "will have to give an account for every careless thing spoken," it does make you think doesn't it. It certainly makes me think, as I'm forced to examine the many foolish and hurtful things that I have said over my life. And not merely in the distant past, I'm ashamed to say. But friends let's be clear, we are forgiven for those things, Jesus` Blood is more powerful than all of our sin. And yet we may still live with the consequences of the hurt and pain, that we have caused to others!

Brethren, the context of the Matthew passage is of the religious elite in their pride and vanity, seeking to rob Jesus of His glory so to speak. They would boast of themselves and their great knowledge and learning. Well similarly, James says that "everyone should be slow to speak." If we have been born again through "the word of truth," then like the rich believer in v10, "we will rejoice," we will glory in, "our low position." We will be "slow" in speaking of ourselves. Will be "slow" in our boastings, and our high and mighty superior knowledge. We will always come before the Lord`s servants with a teachable spirit. Yes contributing when we feel it to be beneficial to the body of the Lord, but never for pride or vanity's sake. It must always be glory be to You, O God. Yes we are to be "slow to speak" in our boastings, and we are to be "slow to speak," we are to hold our

tongue, when it comes to gossip, ridicule and slanderous talk. James goes on to say in chapter 3 “with the same tongue we praise God and curse men made in his image.” Like the religious elite of the day, it's all hypocrisy. It's all about wearing different kinds of masks for different people. The one who has been “given birth through the word of truth,” must not go down those roads. And if we find ourselves upon them, we repent. Yes, we do a 180°, and go back the way we came. And we confess to those that we've wronged. Yes we are to be “swift to listen, slow to speak.”

Beloved, being born again through “the word of truth” should produce in us are more circumspect mind. And this must be evidenced in the way we respond, to “God's truth” in us. As we seek to keep a firm bridle upon our tongue! v26 “If anyone considers himself religious and does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless” King Solomon put it this way in Proverbs 10:19 “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” And also in Proverbs 12:16-19 we read: “A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.”

Friends, can you see the way Solomon depicts the tongue as a kind of weapon or tool, that can be used for both good and evil? And for the owner of that tongue it can result in both good and bad consequences. Even eternally so. In light of the “truth of the word of God” in us, we should be “swift to listen, slow to speak and slow to wrath.” The Puritan commentator Thomas Manton explains that this “wrath” or “anger” needs to be understood in two ways, while again referring to v18 and “the word of truth.” Firstly, it is a grave warning to the Preachers and Teachers of the Gospel. Having just said that we should be “slow to speak,” not being filled with our pride and vanity, but in humility responding to the Word of God's truth.

James now explains that when anyone does feel the call of God upon their lives, into some kind of word ministry, they need again to take heed of their motives, and the manner in which they perform that role. Because as we are all aware, there is a great deal of trust that comes with that those positions. And with that trust, comes tremendous responsibility before God! And Manton points out, (and this is something that really struck me) that James doesn't say don't get angry. He says “everyone should be slow to wrath” or anger. And why? Because this is a clear reflection the character of “the God of truth.”

When God proclaimed His name before Moses in Exodus 34:6 He called Himself “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness. And yet in Exodus 34:7b, He does go on to say, “yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” What does this tell us? Well that there is indeed a time for “wrath.” Moses smashed to pieces the first tablets of the 10 commandments at the sight of the idolatry of the golden calf. Jesus overturned the tables of the money changes and drove them out of the temple. David cut off the head of Goliath at the defiance and mockery of his Lord and God. So there is a place for “wrath,” indeed a place for fire and brimstone preaching.

But as Manton points out, the danger is, that there is a fine line between righteous anger, and one's own sinful passions and vanity! So when a person steps upon that holy ground of bringing the Word of God, they had better be assured that their motives are pure, and that they leave “man's anger,” (because that's what James speaks of here “man's anger”); yes, they better be sure that they leave it behind. Because as we saw earlier, “for every careless word spoken there will be an account to give.” How much more so when spoken upon the holy ground of speaking in God's Name! So the Preacher

and The teacher must have their passions in check, so that they do not bring “man's anger” upon the holy ground of the preaching of God's Word!

But so too the hearer of God's Word must beware. Satan loves it when the people of God are burning with rage. Because then he knows that he has a foothold upon their soul. When David was on the run from King Saul who was trying to kill him. He had a band of about 600 men with him. And while they were in the wilderness they were keeping watch over all of the flocks and herds in the surrounding lands. As was the custom, if someone had provided protection for you, you would reward them with provisions. But not this man Nabal. David sends envoys to him but he insults them and David himself. So David's pride is wounded, and he vows to kill not only Nabal, but every male in his village. That man who God had declared, “is a man after my own heart,” his reason has now left him. He had stopped relying upon and listening to God, and he would take matters into his own hands!

And I guess brothers and sisters, that's what we are saying when we get angry, isn't it? *I won't accept these things as they are, it is up to me. I'm going to do something about this.* Friends, James qualifying statement to v19 is “for man`s anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires.” Literally, “for the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God.” When unrighteous anger flares up, God and His righteousness is left behind.

Listen to David's words in 1 Samuel 25:13 “Put your swords on. About 400 men went up with David.” So he is on his way to wipe the village out. But unbeknownst to him, Abigail had caught wind of what was about to happen and had taken a gift of food to David. She meets him in a ravine as all of the men are descending towards her. She gets off her donkey and falls before him. She apologises for her wretched husband, he accepts her apology and then we read these things in v32-35 “David said to Abigail, praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgement and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.’ Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, ‘go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.”

Friends, of anger, the commentator says, “Anger growth not by degrees like other passions. But at her birth she is full grown. The hate and fury of it is at first, and therefore the cure of it is deliberation.” But what does he mean? Take a breath, just take a deep breath and a backward step, and ask God to help you move those thoughts on, as Gary says. That's the only cure. God may send an Abigail, but more than likely he will not. Friends, James` goal here is that we understand what God is seeking from us in response, to His “word of truth giving us new birth.” And it's all in practical ways. “Know ye this: Everyone should be swift to listen.” Swift to avail ourselves of God's Word. Understanding that what we listen to and how we listen to those things is all important. With open ears, and with an open and humble hearts. Pride and vanity has no place in the presence of God and the preaching of His Word.

Yes we must be “swift to listen and slow to speak.” Slow to speak of ourselves as Blanchard puts it. What we are, what we have and what we do. No, “A humble and contrite heart, O God you will not despise,” the scripture says. We must be “slow to speak.” Not believing we know it all. We must be “slow to speak” of others, unless it be to build them up, and to love them, as Jesus has called us to do. And finally we must be “slow to wrath for man's anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires.” So when things happen that drive us crazy, and Satan fans those flames of anger

within us, we take a deep breath and a backward step and we pray, because we don't want to give the Evil One a foothold upon our soul.

Amen! Let's pray!