

James 26-08-19b

We resume our study now in James chapter one, and I want to digress for a moment and talk about tact, about the approach in speaking to someone with a message of importance, especially spiritual importance. All of us can think of those in our periphery that could so benefit from focusing on God and the things of God, on cultivating relationship, on following the exhortations that we first and foremost should be taking personally ourselves. But inevitably, after we rightfully look at ourselves, we think, oh, if only, we see the distance between the potential in someone else's life and where they actually are.

And we think, well, can I say something? Proverbs says, a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold and pictures of silver, and be ready to give an answer. And I think maybe they're questioning, they didn't outright ask me a reason for my hope, but I see an opening here, maybe I could say something. So if there is an opportunity to speak, and we know that the tongue and managing how we talk and what we say is one of the themes of this book.

I wanted to point out something that becomes evident in observation. Let's just start here in verse 12. And being an English major makes one sensitive to person, are we speaking in the first person, in the second person, or the third person? First person is I, me, we.

Second person, you, you all. Third person, he, she, it, them, they. Pronouns have become a thing.

But notice the construction here in terms of how this message is being expressed. We can start at the beginning, but I want to start at verse 12. So James does not say, blessed are you if you do something.

It's out there in the observation world of third person. Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love him. So we're looking at an objective group.

We're not saying that I'm in it or out of it, you are in or out of it. This is objectivity. Those who fit these parameters enjoy these consequences.

So the man who endures temptation, and that's a singular, and it is a reminder that the individual has to decide how to handle temptation. When he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those. You have now joined a group of those who love the Lord.

So you see the idea here. He starts out and we're looking over the fence at this man who endures temptation and does it in a way that is approved by God. You remember Paul says, study to show yourself approved unto God.

James is using the third person approach here. And this crown of life is promised to those who love him. Then in verse 13, let no one say when he is tempted, we're still in the third person.

Now don't say this when you are tempted. We're looking at others and it's safe. You're not going to raise someone's hackles or their defenses or cause offense.

Were you talking to me? Are you talking to me? You think of the taxi driver thing. Let no one say when he is tempted, we're still talking about this guy that is being tempted. He can either be approved and be a part of the group that loves God and receives the crown of life.

He should not say, I am tempted by God. He's not going to be approved in that case because God is not tempted and he doesn't tempt others with evil. So this guy, if he wants to be approved and receive the crown and see, we're looking at him.

I'm not threatened by this message yet. And now we're talking about God. Look at God.

Well, everyone would agree that God isn't tempted by evil. And the concomitant is he doesn't tempt anyone else with evil. God is good.

He is light and him is no darkness. Well, of course he wouldn't push someone in an evil direction. So we're still on safe ground here, but this message is coming across and it isn't filtered.

It's not blocked. It's not raising someone's hackles, but each one, verse 14, is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. And so it's a lot easier to see a problem in someone else than it is to turn our laser-like focus on ourselves and objectively see where we are falling short.

So we're looking at this guy, this somewhat hypothetical individual. It's an abstraction. We're not talking about anyone in particular.

It's principle expressed in the third person. Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires. He's dragged out by his desires and he is fooled.

He's seduced. He's allured and enticed by a false promise of benefit and some sort of advantage. And it's a deception.

It's a falsehood. And we're looking at this guy saying, wow, be careful. Don't let your desires drag you away from where you need to be and fool you into a life of misery when you could be heading for the crown of life.

So it's easy for us to absorb the concept here and digest it and objectively say, this all makes perfect sense without going on the defensive. And then in verse 15, here's another principle. When lust conceives, it gives birth to sin.

And sin, when it grows up, doesn't speak of life and health and benefit and fruitfulness. It grows up into death. It matures and brings forth results in death.

But look at what happens in verse 16. My brothers, my beloved brothers, James says, don't be deceived. Don't be fooled.

And I'm not going to push that exhortation away because who wants to be deceived? And he says, you are my beloved brethren. You are my spiritual family. Don't be fooled.

Don't be deceived. It's a warning. And we can take this in a positive light.

I appreciate you warning me that there's a possibility of being deceived. Every good giving, and remember, we're going back to verse five here. God gives abundantly, generously, freely, liberally, and without rebuke, without reproach.

God gives these and he doesn't slap you before he hands it to you. He gives us as much as we want. And he doesn't chide us in the process.

That's the kind of giving. And it's a perfect gift. It is exactly what we need.

It is telios, it is complete. The same word that is used in this when it is mature. Sin, when it matures, brings forth death.

Telios is in that same word. So what is it that is going to mature? Is sin going to mature? Or is the gift of wisdom going to be perfect? Are we going to have perfect death? Are we going to have perfect wisdom? There are so many wonderful vocabulary ties. I wish we could stop, we could all take two semesters of Greek and then come back and look at this.

It would just blow your hat in the creek. But every good act of giving, which is generous and without rebuke, comes from the Father. The perfect gift, this wisdom, this word of truth that we need comes from the Father.

And we're still, he says, now don't be deceived. Now he's back to talking about God. This is the nature of God, the nature of how he gives and the nature of the gift that he gives.

So we're still on safe ground here. And it's wonderful to look at God and focus on his character and his grace and his promise. These things come from the Father of lights.

He's the one that originated that which guides us in the sky, the greater light by day, the lesser light by night, the stars. We know the times, the seasons, the days, and the years. He's going all the way back to the law.

Because remember when James is writing, there is no New Testament scripture whatsoever. There is not a scrap. There's not a gospel.

There's not an epistle. Luke hasn't written acts. None of that has taken place.

So when he talks about scripture and the word and the law, it is all Old Testament. And that's gonna be a fascinating thing. When we get to the law of liberty, you can start chewing on that.

How is the law of Moses something that represents freedom? We'll get there. But this comes from the Father of lights with whom is no variation or shadow of turning. In the context, the world, our fallen desires, our environment shifts and changes.

Suddenly we're allured by one thing. Suddenly we're pulled in another direction. We are dragged in and out by various things.

We can be double-minded and unstable. This is the opposite of instability. Double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

When you accept this gift of wisdom from the Father, it is light and it does not change. There is no variation. And literally shadow of turning is no shifting shadow.

They used to use sundials. You can go all the way back to the days of Hezekiah and the sundial and the steps and watching the shadow to see the passage of time. But God's word is fixed.

In Hebrew, there is a verb that talks about the stability of the word of God. Thy word is fixed in heaven. No variation, no shifting shadow.

Time of day doesn't change what the word says. It's truth or it's applicability, it's pertinence, it's power, it's divine origination and purpose. Doesn't change, no shifting shadow.

Of His own will, instead of our desires that beset us and tempt us and lead us astray and drag us out, God's will is fixed, stable, and eternal. And of His own will, He brought us forth, not our desire conceiving and bringing forth sin. God's will, God's desire brings forth us as children of God, made in His image, operating in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, walking in the light.

He brought us forth by the word of truth, the word of wisdom, and we are unique. We are a firstfruits, a kind of firstfruits. This didn't persist, didn't pertain in Old Testament days.

We in Christ, we after the resurrection and ascension, James says, He brought us forth by the word of truth. It is the word of truth that has power, not the false message of deception that He warns against back in verse 16. But notice, and I'm back to my subject here of tact.

Now He is using the second person, talking about the giving and the gift from the Father. Notice in verse 18, of His own will, He brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits. And this is a good thing.

Who doesn't want to be a firstfruits produced, created by the will of God? A kind of firstfruits of His creation. So then, or know this in verse 19, my beloved brethren, second time He's used that phrase, let every man be, notice how gentle this is, every man in this light, He doesn't say you should be, He doesn't start wagging the finger. He's going to get to the second person.

But look at the beautiful, tactful foundation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that James lays here. So my beloved brethren, I am communicating these things to you in love and with a shared sense of opportunity and responsibility. Let every man, and by implication, let every one of us, but He doesn't say let every one of us.

He says, let every man be tachus to hear and bradus to speak and bradus to get angry, slow. Why? And the word orge occurs almost symmetrically here. You have orge at the end of verse 19 and it begins verse 20, orge, orge.

And it's emphatic in a gentle, but sort of persistent way. What is the danger? If you speak to someone and they get the idea that you're preaching at them or you're trying to get them to change in a way that they don't think they need to change, what is the usual response? Anger. So he says, we need to be careful.

We should be quick to hear. I am giving you the word of truth here. Let's be quick to hear it and slow to start talking.

Usually it's the opposite. When we're in a conversation and we have a strongly held opinion, we are quick to speak and slow to hear. We're just the opposite.

We're waiting for an opening when the other person is talking. As soon as they pause to take a breath, I'm gonna get in there and I'm gonna take the floor. I am slow to hear, I'm quick to speak.

James says, in the light of what we have just covered, every man, he's not saying you, finger wagging, every man should be a good listener and take a beat before speaking. Quick to hear, slow to speak. And in this interaction, notice that the realm that we're talking about here is communication.

We are listening and we are speaking. First and foremost, we should be doing this with God. We listen to his word, we speak in prayer.

We should be a lot more quick to hear the word of God than to start blathering on in prayer in an uninformed and unthinking way. Same thing in our horizontal relationships. Take time to listen, especially to the word of God, to this gift of wisdom, to the word of truth that God uses to birth us, to create us as a first fruits.

He doesn't do it by fiat, he does it with the word of truth. This is what renews us. This is what creates us in Christ as a first fruits, the first and best of the crop.

It's what the first fruits were and they were offered as a sacrifice. They were brought before God as acceptable and as pleasing in his sight. And as a recognition that this crop, whatever else comes in, it's God's grace.

And here is the first of it. I recognize God's role. We should reflect that.

We should be a kind of first fruits, which is both representative of what is to come in the crop and it's presented to God and acceptable to him and pleasing in his sight and is a recognition of his grace and his provision. The word of truth does that for us. So how attentive should we be to that word of truth? We want to be that first fruits.

We want to be approved in his sight and receive the crown of life, right? This is so tightly woven, so carefully constructed. The progress of thought here is just beautiful. The more you look at it and see the connections and the flow of thought that James establishes here under the ministry of the spirit, it could not be more cogent and more effective in gently bringing us to the point of looking at ourselves.

You know where this is going. You're going to look into the law of liberty like a mirror. What do we do with what we see? That's where he's headed.

But notice the foundation, how gently, how beautifully he has said, here are the objective things that ought to pertain for those who love God, for those who want to receive that gift that they have asked for. And they do it without doubting. And we don't want to hear the word and immediately have an anger reaction.

Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. Why? Because the anger of man, notice not your anger, wag, wag, wag. The anger of man does not produce.

We have these different words in Greek that mean to give birth to, to bring forth, to produce, to result in. And this is another one, this theme, what is the result going to be? When lust conceives, it produces, brings forth sin. Sin, when it matures, brings forth death.

The word of truth brings us forth as a first fruits. And when we are swift to hear, we need to avoid a knee-jerk reaction or get angry. If it steps on our toes, if it hits a little too close to home, if we think, well, the messenger is thinking about me.

He's doing this of his own accord. It's not the power of the word. It's the power of the messenger.

And he's preaching at me. He's wagging his finger at me. Be slow to anger because the anger of man does not produce, does not result in and bring forth the righteousness of God.

And that's what we're aiming at. Do you want to revel in feeling righteously indignant or angry, or do you want to have a life that produces God's righteousness, the righteousness of God? That's what's on the line. Do you want to be tossed like the waves? Do you want to be unstable in all your ways? Or do you want to be founded on the rock? Ask God for wisdom and be quick to hear it.

And before you start objecting or distracting or speaking, and before you react in anger, let the word do its work. He brought us forth by the word of truth and he can transform us by the renewing of our minds so that we know the good and acceptable and perfect will, as Paul says. So therefore, verse 21, laying aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, this is a second person.

Now, James has turned the corner. Every man should be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. The wrath of man, looking over the fence at it objectively, doesn't produce the righteousness of God.

We can acknowledge that. Therefore, you lay aside all filthiness and the abundance of wickedness, the production of wickedness. When it says overflow there, this has the idea that this is being produced.

You remember the wisdom of God is given liberally. Well, wickedness will foment and multiply. And this is what we can do.

And notice again, it doesn't say change yourself. It says, lay something aside, lay it aside. It's present, pick it up and move it out of the way.

It's an obstacle. It is preventing what we have objectively decided is good, looking at the man and those who love God and so on. So in order to do this, in order to be swift to hear and slow to speak, in order to avoid anger, what do we do? How do we do this? It's wonderful to say it, but there's a lady that says, organize your house and just keep the things that spark joy.

Well, there are a lot of things that spark anger in us and we're almost helpless. It just hits a sore spot. It penetrates and exploits a weakness.

How can I not be exploited? How can I not be attacked in an area of weakness where my knee jerk reaction is anger? Be slow to anger, be slow to start the verbal defense. How dare you say that about me? You're wrong, let me vindicate myself. Let me defend myself.

Let me explain all the ways that your impression is wrong and I'm perfectly fine. Slow down speaking, slow down anger. Anger is not gonna lead to righteousness.

And if we think about this, anytime we're in conversation or even reacting to the word of God, if we find ourselves angry, how are we going to lay hold of righteousness by faith? How are we going to be characterized as someone who loves God and is qualified to receive the crown of life if we're just angry? If you watch the news and it makes you angry, flip to something else. Turn on some wonderful spiritual music of which we have a healthy supply. Review a few memory verses that will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee.

That's not anger. Anger is not gonna lead to righteousness. Righteousness is our goal.

Why else are we here except to be first fruits to God? Anger is not gonna do that. Righteousness doesn't proceed from anger with rare exceptions like the Lord Jesus cleansing the temple. But I'm not gonna presume to have his level of knowledge.

So I'm gonna avoid anger. How do we do it? Well, what is the therefore? Therefore, in verse 21, lay aside filthiness. This is a word in Greek that means dirtiness.

In the Septuagint, if you remember our study in Zachariah, remember when the priest is standing there and he's got filthy robes? And they say, take off his filthy robes and put clean ones on. The word in the Greek translation of Zachariah is this word. Dirtiness, unclean, unwashed, needs to be laundered.

So if we have dirt, we need to lay it aside. We need to get it out of the picture. Lay aside filthiness.

This is generally moral filth. If we have prior interests, if there are guilty pleasures and we know better, lay that aside. You are not gonna be able to avoid anger and you're not gonna be able to avoid talking out of turn as long as there is this unconfessed sin that is not only unconfessed, but isn't set aside.

It's got to be, instead of being dragged out of the house, put the filthiness outside of the house. Take out the leaven, if you will. Lay aside filthiness.

And things that represent wickedness never are static. It's like leaven. A little leaven grows.

It leavens, it spreads, it multiplies. And we can spot things that may start small. There are people who really ought to stay completely away from alcohol in any form.

And if they start with a little, then pretty soon it's a little more, and a little more, and a little more. Or you watch a little bit of entertainment, but then you get engrossed and you get to

binge watching and it soaks up time and attention that should be put elsewhere. There can be a hobby that starts to consume more and more.

There can be an obsession that starts out as just something you enjoy, but then it becomes an obsession. Wickedness tends to grow, to fester. You might have a small cut, but then it gets infected and first thing you know, it's way worse.

So those things that are growing and taking over in ways that they shouldn't, that's a way to spot wickedness. We hope that we are taken over by God's word and God's spirit. And we're invested in the positive things that lead to the crown of life, not these negative things that fester.

So lay aside filthiness, moral filthiness, things that drag us down a bad road, and wickedness, overflowing wickedness, multiplying wickedness. Lay it aside and what? Receive with humility the implanted word. You have to think that James is remembering the parable of the soils.

The word needs to be implanted because not only have we been born from the word of truth up above, but it rehabilitates us. It delivers our souls. I don't want to be angry.

I don't want to talk out of turn. I don't want to be unstable in all my ways. I don't want to be dragged out by my own desires.

How can I avoid that? Well, first of all, identify the filthy stuff and that which is growing and causing problems and lay it aside. Just, and we have this ability or we wouldn't have the command. Say, well, it's too strong.

It's too powerful. I just can't get away. My willpower is not enough.

God says we can because the command is take a hold of it and lay it aside. Grab it by the stacking swivel, get it by the handle and get rid of it. Lay aside filthiness, overflowing wickedness and receive.

The getting rid of it is active. The implanted word is passive. Receive the word.

That's why we're here this morning. We're receiving the word of God. We're endeavoring to let it sink into the soil of our souls and do its work, bear its fruit, but it takes humility.

And it's very difficult to be humble and angry at the same time. If you think about it, I don't feel particularly humble when I'm angry and cultivating humility is a good antidote to the presence or the possibility of anger. You can start to get angry at someone and say, well, you know, I was in that place once and people were patient with me.

God was patient with me. Why should I be angry? What do I have that I did not receive? I have been forgiven much. But this anger is out of place.

Humility will displace anger. If we have an anger problem, and it's easy looking around at the world and some of the insanity that is going on, and you just want to punch somebody's lights out sometimes at their gross lack of basic understanding, that's not humility. I know better.

I've got the way. Why aren't you doing it my way? Why don't you agree with me? Anger. Humility says, if God wanted me to fix this, he would have had me go into politics.

He would have put me in a different place. I am not here to get angry at situations over which I have no control and for which I have no responsibility. I voted my conscience.

That's my duty as a citizen. If somebody asks me my opinion, I can share it, but I should do so with humility and not with anger. Be slow to speak.

I should spend much more time listening to the word of truth, to the wisdom that is God's gift, given liberally and without reproach. Anger almost always leads to trying to reproach somebody. So, receive with humility the implanted word which is able to deliver your soul.

I don't have to deliver my own soul. God's word will do it. The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, pierces to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner, a critic, a judge of the thoughts and intents of my heart.

I've got my hands full. If I want to be angry about anything, I ought to be angry at my own failures and my own failure to heed the word. Misdirected anger is often the frustration that comes from the lack of humility of looking at myself and confessing my own sins and asking for God's grace and forgiveness and his rehabilitation.

This word of truth, the implanted word, notice it isn't just sitting on the surface. James has to be thinking of the parable of the soils. This is not the seed that sits on the top and the birds come and carry it away.

It's the implanted word, able to deliver your souls. We're already saved. This is deliverance in the day, deliverance in the situation, deliverance when we're under pressure.

I want to be laying hold of righteousness by faith. I want to be tested and have the trial of my faith produce patience. I don't want it to be a temptation to go down a bad road.

All of that is in our context. That brings us to verse 22. This is where we left off.

But be doers of the word and not hearers only. The implanted word should produce action. Hearing it is not enough.

Notice, now that he has come to the crux of the matter, James is using the second person. You should lay aside filthiness and overflow of wickedness. You receive with humility, the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

It's been rare up to this point for him to say you, but this is where he now has grounds for pressing the point. You be doers of the word and not hearers only. Deceiving yourselves.

Deceiving is another one of the things that I've got circled here. Go back to verse 16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

And we think, well, I sure don't want anybody to fool me. We deceive ourselves. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, Jeremiah says.

Who can spot it? Who can know that that's what's happening? I'm deceiving myself. If you deceive yourself, how do you figure that out? There has to be some light from outside that shows us ourselves. Our self-deception, our self-delusion.

So you can be a hearer and fool yourself. I heard a good Bible class. I read a great verse.

I got a wonderful thought out of streams in the desert or my utmost for his highest, or I heard McGee on the radio or I heard somebody else and it was a great thought and I'm good to go. Deceiving ourselves. Hearers only can deceive themselves.

Being a hearer alone runs the risk of fooling ourselves. So we have to evaluate, is the word being implanted and is it making a difference? You can listen to the greatest Bible teaching. Look at the words of the Lord Jesus.

He is the greatest Bible teacher that ever lived. The words in red in the gospels, you can't go wrong. It is the distilled wisdom of God preached by the son of God, the incarnate Lord.

It doesn't get any better than that. But if you hear it and it doesn't transform, if it doesn't deliver, we pat ourselves on the back that we looked at it, we listened to it, we heard it and we fool ourselves because the loop has not been closed. You can do all of the service on your car.

You can fill the tank. You can put the key in the ignition. You can sit in the driver's seat, put your foot on the pedals, put your hands on the wheel.

But if you don't start the car, you're fooling yourself. You're not going anywhere. The purpose for which all of that preparation was done is not being accomplished.

And that is the danger of hearing the word and not applying it, putting it into practice. So what would that look like in the coming week? How about I follow the exhortation and the prayer of the psalmist? Lord, set a watch over my mouth. Keep the door of my lips.

Help me to have the humility to bridle my tongue and to instead listen and be swift to hear. And having heard, have the humility to let that word deliver me, to guide me. The father of lights gave it to me so that I could walk the path.

Let me look for the path and walk it. Our Christian faith is not a status, it is practice. Relationship is not a static thing.

Relationships are dynamic. There is give and take, there is back and forth. There is iron sharpening iron.

It is productive, it is fruitful, it results in things. Marriage is a perfect example. In the abstract, the marriage is fruitful.

People have kids. Our hearing of the word should result in something. We should see it making a difference in how quickly we resort to the word and look for the light.

How slow we are to start talking when we shouldn't and the speed with which we can suddenly become angry, frustrated, bitter. And we're going to see as this book progresses that this can lead to all sorts of horrific sins, nipping in the bud. So when James turns the corner here into the second person, this is the point, this is the purpose.

This is what ought to happen. Having read all the rest of the chapter, now we're talking second person. You got to lay aside one thing and you get to do something else.

Be impelled by the word, not by our fallen desires. Otherwise, it's like looking in the mirror and forgetting what you saw. That's where we will pick up next time.

It's wonderful to resume the study in the book of James and we will ask God's blessing on it as we prosecute it in the days ahead. But let's close with a word of prayer. Father, thank you for this wonderful word.

Thank you that we are able to hear it. Thank you for the Holy Spirit who enables us to understand it. We pray that in your grace and following the example of the Lord Jesus, we can be obedient, we can conform ourselves to your will and be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we will understand the good and acceptable and perfect will that you have for us.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.