

NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 1 (PT. 2)

LAST WEEK WE DISCOVERED JAMES' GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS. WE WERE CALLED TO BE JOYFUL BECAUSE TEMPTATIONS ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW AND MATURE IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE SHOULD ASK FOR WISDOM FROM OUR LOVING FATHER WHO LOVES TO GIVE IT TO US WHEN WE ASK HIM IN FAITH. WE WERE WARNED THAT THE END RESULT OF FALLING INTO TEMPTATION IS DEATH AND IN LIGHT OF THIS WE SHOULDN'T BE DECEIVED TO THINK THAT THESE TEMPTING CHOICES ARE GOOD CHOICES! EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT THING THAT WE WANT OR NEED COMES FROM GOD AND IS CLEAR AND OBVIOUS (AS OPPOSED TO WHAT THE EVIL ONE AND THE WORLD OFFERS). IN THE END, THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, UNDERSTAND THIS AND STAY FAITHFUL WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE!

REMEMBER, THE BOOK OF JAMES WAS A VERY EARLY CHRISTIAN LETTER/DOCUMENT CIRCULATED AMONGST THE FIRST CENTURY BELIEVERS. MUCH OF WHAT HE IS GOING TO WRITE RELATES TO MAKING PLAIN AND CLEAR HOW THESE FIRST CHRIST FOLLOWERS SHOULD LIVE, ACT AND THINK IN THEIR WORLD AND HOW TO INTERPRET THE ORAL TRADITIONS OF WHAT JESUS TAUGHT IN THEIR LIVES.

JAMES 1:18-27

JAMES 1:18 - NEW GROWTH BY NEW CREATURES

KEY TERMS: "BROUGHT US FORTH", NASB ("GAVE US NEW BIRTH" CSB, "GAVE BIRTH TO US" NLT)
"WORD OF TRUTH"
"FIRST FRUITS"

Q - WHAT DO YOU THINK JAMES IS HOPING TO BRING TO THE MIND THE READER? THINK SPECIFICALLY IN LIGHT OF HIS CONTEXT OF "ECHOING" THINGS JESUS TAUGHT

JOHN 3 - "BORN AGAIN"

JOHN 3:3 - JESUS ANSWERED AND SAID TO HIM, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN AGAIN HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD."

PARABLE OF THE SOWER (MATTHEW 13, LUKE 8, MARK 4) - WORD OF TRUTH. FIRST FRUITS.

MATTHEW 13:18-23 - "HEAR THEN THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER. 19 "WHEN ANYONE HEARS THE WORD OF THE KINGDOM AND DOES NOT UNDERSTAND IT, THE EVIL ONE COMES AND SNATCHES AWAY WHAT HAS BEEN SOWN IN HIS HEART. THIS IS THE ONE ON WHOM SEED WAS SOWN BESIDE THE ROAD. 20 "THE ONE ON WHOM SEED WAS SOWN ON THE ROCKY PLACES, THIS IS THE MAN WHO HEARS THE WORD AND IMMEDIATELY RECEIVES IT WITH JOY; 21 YET HE HAS NO FIRM ROOT IN HIMSELF, BUT IS ONLY TEMPORARY, AND WHEN AFFLICTION OR PERSECUTION ARISES BECAUSE OF THE WORD, IMMEDIATELY HE FALLS AWAY. 22 "AND THE ONE ON WHOM SEED WAS SOWN AMONG THE THORNS, THIS IS THE MAN WHO HEARS THE WORD, AND THE WORRY OF THE WORLD AND THE DECEITFULNESS OF WEALTH CHOKES THE WORD, AND IT BECOMES UNFRUITFUL. 23 "AND THE ONE ON WHOM SEED WAS SOWN ON THE GOOD SOIL, THIS IS THE MAN WHO HEARS THE WORD AND UNDERSTANDS IT; WHO INDEED BEARS FRUIT AND BRINGS FORTH, SOME A HUNDREDFOLD, SOME SIXTY, AND SOME THIRTY."

MARK 4:13-14 - AND HE SAID TO THEM, "DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THIS PARABLE? HOW WILL YOU UNDERSTAND ALL THE PARABLES? 14 "THE SOWER SOWS THE WORD.

IN ADDITION, HERE'S WHAT PETER, JESUS' LEAD DISCIPLE WILL SAY ON THIS ISSUE:

1 PETER 1:23-25 - FOR YOU HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN NOT OF SEED WHICH IS PERISHABLE BUT IMPERISHABLE, THAT IS, THROUGH THE LIVING AND ENDURING WORD OF GOD. 24 FOR, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, 25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." AND THIS IS THE WORD WHICH WAS PREACHED TO YOU.

GOD CAUSES A BELIEVER TO BE "BORN AGAIN" TO A NEW LIFE WHEN THEY HEAR, ACCEPT AND BELIEVE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE (AKA "THE WORD" OR THE "WORD OF TRUTH"). JUST LIKE A SEED BEING PLANTED IN GOOD SOIL LEADS TO GROWTH AND FRUIT, SO THE GOSPEL "SEED" PLANTED IN THE HEART OF A MAN OR WOMAN LEADS TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND FRUIT (EVIDENCES) CORRESPONDING TO THE SEED THAT WAS PLANTED.

CERTAINLY THIS DOESN'T ALL HAPPEN AT ONCE OR IMMEDIATELY, BUT IT IS THE DESIRED RESULT OF THE ONE WHO SENDS OUT THE SEED. JAMES WILL NOW HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE "FRUITS" THAT SHOULD ACCOMPANY THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED THE GOSPEL SEED.

LIVING THE NEW WAY

JAMES 1:19-20

QUICK TO HEAR
SLOW TO SPEAK
SLOW TO ANGER

Q - IS THIS A CHALLENGE FOR YOU? WHY OR WHY NOT?

PROVERBS 10:19 - WHEN THERE ARE MANY WORDS, TRANSGRESSION IS UNAVOIDABLE, BUT HE WHO RESTRAINS HIS LIPS IS WISE.

PROVERBS 17:27 - HE WHO RESTRAINS HIS WORDS HAS KNOWLEDGE, AND HE WHO HAS A COOL SPIRIT IS A MAN OF UNDERSTANDING.

PROVERBS 16:32 - HE WHO IS SLOW TO ANGER IS BETTER THAN THE MIGHTY, AND HE WHO RULES HIS SPIRIT, THAN HE WHO CAPTURES A CITY.

ECCLESIASTES 7:9 - DO NOT BE EAGER IN YOUR HEART TO BE ANGRY, FOR ANGER RESIDES IN THE BOSOM OF FOOLS.

Q - WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT THE "ANGER OF MAN DOES NOT ACHIEVE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD" AND WHY DOESN'T IT!?

JAMES 1:20 (NLT) - HUMAN ANGER DOES NOT PRODUCE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS GOD DESIRES.

JAMES BEGINS THIS CONVERSATION ON LIVING THIS NEW WAY BY CALLING US TO REVERSE THE NATURAL TENDENCIES OF HUMANITY. WE ARE BEING CALLED TO A NEW LIFE AND HOW WE LISTEN, SPEAK AND RESPOND IS A FOUNDATIONAL PART WE NEED TO GET RIGHT.

JAMES 1:21 - PUT AWAY THE OLD, RECEIVE & HOLD FAST TO THE NEW

THIS VERSE IS UNDERSTOOD IN LIGHT OF WHAT WE DISCUSSED AROUND JAMES 1:18. JAMES IS AGAIN ALLUDING TO THAT MOST IMPORTANT PARABLE, THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER IN WHICH JESUS TEACHES THAT THOSE WHO HOLD FAST TO THE GOSPEL - KEEPING IT DEEP IN THEIR HEARTS, GUARDED AGAINST THE REACH OF SATAN, THE ENTICEMENTS OF THIS WORLD AND THE PRESSURES OF THIS LIFE - WILL REAP A GREAT HARVEST IN THE END.

JAMES IS ECHOING JESUS'S CALL TO REJECT THE THINGS OF THIS LIFE AND RECEIVE THE 'WORD', WHICH HE CONCLUDES "IS ABLE TO SAVE YOUR SOULS".

YET...EVEN HEARING AND KNOWING THE "WORD" IS NOT THE END GOAL - BUT ALLOWING THIS SAVING WORD TO TRANSFORM US BY OBEYING IT! AND THAT TAKES US TO JAMES 1:22-25.

JAMES 1:22-25 - HEAR & DO

Q - WHY IS THIS SOMETHING JAMES ADDRESSES? IS THIS SOMETHING YOU HAVE STRUGGLED WITH? IF SO, WHY?

REMEMBER WHAT JESUS SAID ON THIS SUBJECT:

MATTHEW 7:21-29 (NLT) - "NOT EVERYONE WHO CALLS OUT TO ME, 'LORD! LORD!' WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. ONLY THOSE WHO ACTUALLY DO THE WILL OF MY FATHER IN HEAVEN WILL ENTER. 22 ON JUDGMENT DAY MANY WILL SAY TO ME, 'LORD! LORD! WE PROPHESED IN YOUR NAME AND CAST OUT DEMONS IN YOUR NAME AND PERFORMED MANY MIRACLES IN YOUR NAME.' 23 BUT I WILL REPLY, 'I NEVER KNEW YOU. GET AWAY FROM ME, YOU WHO BREAK GOD'S LAWS.' 24 "ANYONE WHO **LISTENS TO MY TEACHING AND FOLLOWS** IT IS WISE, LIKE A PERSON WHO BUILDS A HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK. 25 THOUGH THE RAIN COMES IN TORRENTS AND THE FLOODWATERS RISE AND THE WINDS BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE, IT WON'T COLLAPSE BECAUSE IT IS BUILT ON BEDROCK. 26 BUT ANYONE WHO **HEARS MY TEACHING AND DOESN'T OBEY IT** IS FOOLISH, LIKE A PERSON WHO BUILDS A HOUSE ON SAND. 27 WHEN THE RAINS AND FLOODS COME AND THE WINDS BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE, IT WILL COLLAPSE WITH A MIGHTY CRASH."

BE CAREFUL THAT YOU DON'T KNOW A LOT BUT DON'T "DO" WHAT YOU KNOW. JAMES ISN'T CALLING FOR SINLESS PERFECTION BUT HE IS CALLING FOR AN ACTIVE RESPONSE IN THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOR TO THE HEARD WORD OF GOD.

KNOWING THE BIBLE IS *NOT* THE SAME AS LIVING WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS. MANY PEOPLE ATTEND BIBLE STUDIES AND FELLOWSHIPS AND CHURCH SERVICES YET LIVE LIVES SO UNLIKE WHAT JESUS IS CALLING US TO LIVE. WHO THEY ARE WHEN THEY ARE WITH THEIR FAMILIES OR AT THEIR WORKPLACES, NOT TO MENTION WHEN THEY ARE ALONE WITH THEIR OWN LEISURE DO NOT REFLECT THE VERY TRUTHS THEY HEAR AND LEARN. **BE CAREFUL THAT WE DO NOT EQUATE OUR ATTENDANCE AT THE MEETING WITH OBEDIENCE TO THE MESSAGE.** BE CAREFUL THAT WE DO NOT EQUATE KNOWING AND DOING. BE CAREFUL THAT WE DON'T EQUATE "THAT'S JUST WHAT I NEEDED TO HEAR" WITH DOING JUST WHAT WE NEEDED TO DO. THAT'S NO DIFFERENT THAN LOOKING AT THE MIRROR, SEEING

SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE AND JUST WALKING AWAY AS IF LOOKING AT THE MIRROR IS THE SAME AS ADJUSTING WHAT'S WRONG BECAUSE OF WHAT WE SAW.

THIS ISN'T TO SAY WE NEED TO "WORK" TO EARN SALVATION - THAT'S NOT THE POINT JAMES IS ADDRESSING. WHAT HE IS TRYING TO TELL US IS THAT IT'S A FOOLISH AND SELF-DECEIVED PLACE TO BE WHEN WE THINK HEARING AND DOING ARE THE SAME THING. INSTEAD, WE SHOULD HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD, AND ASK HIM FOR THE GUIDANCE AND HELP TO BE DOERS OF THAT WORD.

IT IS IN THE "DOING" OF THE WORD THAT WE ARE "BLESSED" (V. 25). NOT SIMPLY BY HEARING OR KNOWING.

"THINK ABOUT IT. WESTERN CHRISTIANS TODAY ARE MASSIVELY MORE INFORMED THAN CHRISTIANS AT ANY TIME IN THE PAST. YET NO ONE WOULD DARE CLAIM THAT WE'RE GENERALLY MORE SPIRITUALLY MATURE THAN CHRISTIANS IN THE PAST. TO THE CONTRARY, ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE CORE VALUES AND LIFESTYLE OF MOST WESTERN CHRISTIANS DIFFER VERY LITTLE FROM OUR PAGAN NEIGHBORS. DESPITE ALL OUR SERMONS, BIBLE STUDIES, BOOKS, SEMINARS, AND CONFERENCES, WE ARE, TO A LARGE DEGREE, SPIRITUALLY DEAD. WE DON'T MANIFEST MUCH OF THE UNIQUELY BEAUTIFUL LIFE OF THE KINGDOM. THIS CLEARLY ISN'T A PROBLEM CREATED BY ANY LACK OF INFORMATION OR A PROBLEM THAT CAN BE SOLVED BY ACQUIRING MORE INFORMATION." (GREGORY BOYD, "PRESENT PERFECT" PG. 99)

BEING "RELIGIOUS" IN THE GOOD SENSE OF THE WORD ISN'T SO MUCH ABOUT KNOWING RIGHT AND WRONG (THOUGH THAT'S IMPORTANT), IT'S ABOUT LIVING FOR GOD IN LIGHT OF RIGHT AND WRONG. JAMES WILL CONCLUDE THIS FIRST CHAPTER WITH TWO LIVING EXAMPLES.

JAMES 1:26 - TONGUE CONTROL

"HEAR AND DO" CHECK #1: DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE "RELIGIOUS"? RELIGIOUS IN THIS CONTEXTS MEANS "FAITHFULLY DEVOTED". DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE FAITHFULLY AND DEVOTED TO GOD? DO YOU HAVE A HARD TIME KEEPING YOUR MOUTH CLOSED? ARE YOU A GOSSIP? DO YOU TALK BAD ABOUT PEOPLE BEHIND THEIR BACKS? DO YOU COMPLAIN? DO YOU LACK SELF CONTROL WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR WORDS? DO YOU NEED TO GET THE "LAST WORD"? IF THESE OR OTHER QUALITIES ARE YOURS OR YOUR REPUTATION AMONGST OTHERS (FOR IT IS POSSIBLE YOU DON'T SEE THEM), THEN YOUR "RELIGION" IS "WORTHLESS".

NO MATTER HOW "DEVOTED" YOU MIGHT BE, GOD IS LOOKING AT YOUR WORDS BECAUSE ULTIMATELY THEY SPEAK TO WHAT IS *REALLY* HAPPENING IN YOUR HEART.

HERE IS WHAT JESUS SAID:

MATTHEW 12:33-37 - "EITHER MAKE THE TREE GOOD AND ITS FRUIT GOOD, OR MAKE THE TREE BAD AND ITS FRUIT BAD: FOR THE TREE IS KNOWN BY ITS FRUIT. 34 "YOU BROOD OF VIPERS, HOW CAN YOU, BEING EVIL, SPEAK WHAT IS GOOD? FOR THE MOUTH SPEAKS OUT OF THAT WHICH FILLS THE HEART. 35 "THE GOOD MAN BRINGS OUT OF HIS GOOD TREASURE WHAT IS GOOD: AND THE EVIL MAN BRINGS OUT OF HIS EVIL TREASURE WHAT IS EVIL. 36 "BUT I TELL YOU THAT EVERY CARELESS WORD THAT PEOPLE SPEAK, THEY SHALL GIVE AN ACCOUNTING FOR IT IN THE DAY OF JUDGMENT. 37 "FOR BY YOUR WORDS YOU WILL BE JUSTIFIED, AND BY YOUR WORDS YOU WILL BE CONDEMNED."

MATTHEW 15:17-18 - "DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND THAT EVERYTHING THAT GOES INTO THE MOUTH PASSES INTO THE STOMACH, AND IS ELIMINATED? 18 "BUT THE THINGS THAT PROCEED OUT OF THE MOUTH COME FROM THE HEART, AND THOSE DEFILE THE MAN.

LUKE 6:43-46 - "FOR THERE IS NO GOOD TREE WHICH PRODUCES BAD FRUIT, NOR, ON THE OTHER HAND, A BAD TREE WHICH PRODUCES GOOD FRUIT. 44 "FOR EACH TREE IS KNOWN BY ITS OWN FRUIT. FOR MEN DO NOT GATHER FIGS FROM THORNS, NOR DO THEY PICK GRAPES FROM A BRIAR BUSH. 45 "THE GOOD MAN OUT OF THE GOOD TREASURE OF HIS HEART BRINGS FORTH WHAT IS GOOD; AND THE EVIL MAN OUT OF THE EVIL TREASURE BRINGS FORTH WHAT IS EVIL; FOR HIS MOUTH SPEAKS FROM THAT WHICH FILLS HIS HEART. 46 "WHY DO YOU CALL ME, 'LORD, LORD,' AND DO NOT DO WHAT I SAY?"

JAMES 1:27 - WHAT TRUE RELIGION LOOKS LIKE: INWARD & OUTWARD FOCUS

THIS SERVES AS "HEAR AND DO" CHECK #2. NO MATTER WHAT WE THINK IT LOOKS LIKE TO BE "RELIGIOUS" JAMES TELLS US WHAT GOD'S DEFINITION IS.

Q - WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS VERSE MEAN?

- WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "VISIT ORPHANS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR DISTRESS"
- WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "KEEP ONESELF UNSTAINED BY THE WORLD?"
- WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO VISIT WIDOWS AND ORPHANS?
- WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO KEEP YOURSELF UNSTAINED BY THE WORLD?

NOTICE THAT THIS IS A TWO SIDED UNDERSTANDING OF BEING PURELY RELIGIOUS. SOME WILL EMPHASIZE OUTWARD FOCUS - CARING FOR THOSE IN NEED - BUT WILL NOT MAINTAIN PERSONAL HOLINESS. OTHERS WILL EMPHASIZE PERSONAL HOLINESS - REMAINING PURE, HOLY AND SEPARATE FROM EVIL - BUT WILL NEGLECT CARING FOR OTHERS IN NEED. IN JESUS WE SEE THE EMBODIMENT OF HOLINESS YET WAS UNAFRAID TO GET HIS HANDS "DIRTY" BY CARING FOR OTHERS - WHETHER THE HELPLESS - OR THE SINNER. THIS IS WHAT JAMES IS CALLING US TO MODEL AS WELL.

SO AS WE CLOSE, LET'S CONSIDER THE OUTWARD AND INWARD ELEMENTS OF BEING A TRUE CHRISTIAN. IT'S ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE INSIDE AND WHAT'S COMING OUT ON THE OUTSIDE. IT'S ABOUT HEARING AND DOING THE WORD OF GOD. IT'S ABOUT LISTENING FIRST, SPEAKING SECOND AND REFRAINING FROM ANGER. IN ALL OF THIS WE'RE CALLED TO A HOLISTIC VIEW OF FOLLOWING JESUS - NOT JUST ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER OR ONLY ONE PART OF OUR LIVES. THIS GOSPEL, THIS GOOD NEWS, THE REALITIES OF THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE GREATNESS OF OUR AWESOME GOD IS SOMETHING THAT TRANSFORMS US FROM THE INSIDE OUT AND CHANGES WHO WE ARE. WE MAY START AS A SMALL SEED, BUT IN THE END, THROUGH THE LIFE-GIVING POWER OF GOD, WE WILL BLOSSOM AND GROW AND GLORIFY HIM!