

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 22 October 2023
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: Jesus' brother, challenges our hearts
Title: Look in the mirror
Passage: James 1:16-27

Look in the mirror and see:

1. **We are his because of him** 1:16-18
2. **... therefore, we are outstanding** 1:19-21
3. **... because we listen and do!** 1:22-25
4. **...e.g.: our tongue, our care, and our heart** 1:26-27

Introduction

- You know, if anyone thinks Christianity is just a nice little component on the side of our lives so we have something to do on Sundays and feel some sort of connection with God and other Christians... we are going to be SO challenged by this Epistle of James.
- Last week James began by helping us see the big picture when it comes to **trials**... that they can lead to **maturity in Christ** – which is exactly what the true Christian wants – and end with the **crown of life** – precisely what the true Christian looks **forward to**
- We saw **trials** are different to **temptation** – which can lead to **sin** and if unchecked – **death**. //
- I hope that picture helped you last **week** – even in the midst of that trial you may be facing right **now**... that the Lord will use it... to bring you to maturity in him... //
- But now that he has dealt with **trials**... we begin in **earnest**, James' **purpose** for the book – do you recall? We saw in the **last verse** of the book – what he does throughout is bring people **back** who have wandered from the **truth**...
- He wants to **wake up** those who have become **complacent**
- He wants so to **shake up** those who **say** they are **Christians** but there's simply no **evidence** of that in their **lives**...
- It seems as though he's observed loads of people identifying **as Christians** or **with Christians** – but – wow - you should hear how they **speak**, or see how quickly they get **angry**... or you should see the way they listen to the Scriptures but never do what they **say**... or should see their total lack of **care** for the **vulnerable**...
- These passages in James will be **searching**... I think we all have to honestly search our **hearts** and **lives** and listen **carefully** for how God is **speaking** to us...
- So I've called today's message "**Look in the mirror**" – and this is where we are heading

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- The Bible you see, is pictured here as a **mirror**
- As we look **into it** – **read** it – **reflect** on it – we see **ourselves** more **clearly** – we **understand ourselves** – we see ourselves for who we **really are**....

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- And as you'd be mad to look in the mirror in the morning and see your hair out of **place** and some toothpaste still on the side of your **face** and do **NOTHING**...
- ...so we'd be **mad** to look into God's word, see things that obviously need **addressing** and then walk away doing nothing... //
- So – look in the mirror and see

1. We are his because of him 1:16-18

- What do I mean by that...?
- Vv16-18 start by pointing out that every good and perfect gift if from above... **that** is what comes from God...
- In the context of last week's passage – **trials** – yes – will come and God will use them for good; but **temptations** – **NO** – these do **NOT** come from **God**.
- God is not like someone lurking in the shadows, out to get us... whose motives or actions we might **question**....
- He's up **front**... **dependable** – **reliable**... and will only 'send down' as it were, that which is **good**... that which is **FOR** our **good!** – even though we might not understand it at the time...
- And this is seen so very clearly when you consider his ultimate and **perfect** and **wonderful gift**... have a look with me at v18 - *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.*
- How is it that we have been born anew... how is it that we have been made **children of God**??
- ALL and **ONLY** his **work!**
- Our **new birth** – our **status** as his **children** – it his **choice** – his **gift**...! We are **his**, because of **him**... And him **alone!** //
- ...and notice the **purpose**... *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.*
- Well – you farmers will know about **first fruits**... if good – they set the **pattern** or **standard** of **what** is to come – they are the **promise** of what is to **come!**
- As **God's first fruits**, // we are the **promise** of his **transformed people**.... We are to **stand out** in this **world**... stand out as his **chosen, unique, called people**...
- Stand out as his **children** – showing his **character** – sharing his **love** – reflecting his **compassion**...
- And "fistfights" – also has the idea that we will see **more** – as we share Jesus for life – so there will be **more** people whom God calls to **new birth** through the **word of truth!** ///
- But let's explore that a little more the concept of us **standing out** as God's **first fruits**:

2. ... therefore, we are outstanding 1:19-21

- That is, we are to stand out in the world.
- You know when I watch TV, or a movie, or spend too much time on social media... the language, the hating, the critical spirit, the total inability to disagree with another person with patience, respect - love and understanding – simply **astonishes** me....

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- And then I actually become **disturbed** when I see the way many **Christians** – some of whom I **know** – also act **online** – with no **discernible difference from those who aren't Christians!**
- That attitude to others, **dismissing** what others are **saying**... harsh criticism... sometimes **language**... from Christians! -
- I find **distressing**...
- Contrast this with what James challenges us with here: v19 – have a look - *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*
- Someone once said we've been given two ears yet only one mouth and that is at least the ratio we should use of hearing vs speaking!
- I'm all too **quick** to jump in and say **something**... sometimes speaking **over someone else as they speak!**... because I'm simply not **listening!**
- And then what about slow to become **angry?**
- That's the very nature of God, isn't it?? Psalm 103:8 – *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love...*
- I'm all too **quick** in anger sometimes... //
- It was the USA counsellor pastor Larry Crabb who taught me years ago that anger is about **blocked goals**... there's something you've put your mind to **doing** or **having** and something's getting in the **way** of you getting what you want, so you become **angry! You lose it!**
- And of course – as James says – anger does not produce **righteousness** – or **right living** – or promote **right relationship** – with **God** or anyone **else!** //
- No – by way of complete contrast – v21 – we are to *get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*
- Our lives are to stand out... because we **listen** more than **speak**.... Because we are (after the nature of our heavenly Father) ... **slow** to become **angry**...
- ...and we are to stand totally **apart** from the moral filth and evil which is **all** around us... **everywhere** we turn... every **channel**, every movie, every **sit-com**; every **radio station**... by receiving, accepting, welcoming... the **transforming word of truth** which God has planted in us....
- ...we open **ourselves** up to **God's word** planted in us – which **transforms** and **saves**... ///
- Sound **hard? Challenging? Searching?**
- Absolutely... but the closer we **walk with our heavenly Father** – the more **open** to the Holy Spirit's **transforming work** in us we are – than we **will change**.
- There was a lady at a church I was at once who was often cranky with people and quick to criticise... people used to keep their distance from her. But the clearer she become about the **gospel** – the greater **grasp** of God's grace she **had** – the more she knew God's **character**... the **slower** to become **angry** she **became**. /
- That can be your testimony too... may **already is**... but open yourself up to God's **work** in your **heart** and see what **he will do**.... ///
- So – we stand out because:

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3. ... because we listen and do! 1:22-25

- V22 *Do not merely **listen** to the word, and so **deceive** yourselves...*
- James is so blunt isn't he!??
- For example – we've just heard that we are to be **quick** to **listen** and slow to **speak** and slow to become **angry**...
- How totally **absurd**... if we all nod our head and say 'amen' to that... and think that by listening to this sermon we've done a **great thing**... and then go home and lose the **plot** and raise our voice in **anger** at home having not listened **properly** to whatever someone has tried to **tell us**...
- **Ridiculous** – and **tragic**... and **absurd**.
- Like looking in the mirror as you left this morning – and not doing a thing about that toothpaste around your mouth or shaving cream on your ear...
- But here's the wonderful **flip side** – v25 - *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*
- Notice the **irony** - the **law** that gives **freedom**? We usually think of the law as being **restrictive**... **oppressive**... but no – the **word of God** – the **law of God** – gives **freedom** – because it shows us our we are **designed to live**.... It sets us **free** to live **God's way**....
- And when we look into it and **DO** what we **read**... put it into **practice** in our **lives**, there is actually great **blessing**... **blessing** and **joy** found in living **God's way**... the **only** way!
- ... like the story I read recently of someone who was living way **outside** of God's will... but someone shared God's love with **her** – and when she **rejected** the lifestyle she had been **sold** which had actually been full of **misery**, she actually discovered **who she was** and found a **deep and satisfying joy** living **WITHIN** God's will in a way she had never done **OUTSIDE** of **God's will!** ///
- well, finally in this chapter, James gets very **practical**... he tells us what life will be like when we **understand** we are **his**, when we live lives which **stand out**, when we **DO** what his **word** says... and does this by touching on three **examples**:

4. ...e.g.: our tongue, our care, and our heart 1:26-27

- v26 – *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.*
- Pardon **James**??
- Yes – you **heard** him... if you consider yourself **religious** and yet can't **control** your **tongue** – you're having yourself on -- your religion is **worthless**...
- Now – this is not about you letting out an occasional **rude** word when you stub your **toe**...
- This about those who speak **down** to others, always **critical** of others, those who spread **gossip** and **rumours**, those who tell **lies**; those who always talking about others behind their **backs**; those who claim their political views are the only right ones... always having an opinion about everything but never **listening to others**... that's what he's talking **about**.
- It's the **opposite** of what he put before us earlier of being slow to speak and slow to become angry. And honestly – people who are just like this **all the time** – you do **end up** wondering if they really **walk** with **Jesus**!

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- But he has two more examples: *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*
- Care for the most **vulnerable** in **society** – especially at a time in the 1st century when there was no social welfare of any kind...
- If your heart is not moved by the plight of those who have **nothing** or **next to nothing**... those who are on the **street**; those who have been **abused**; those who struggle with **addiction**, those who live in alcohol or drug fuelled desperate and abusive **circumstances**...
- **Religion** that God our Father accepts us pure and faultless.... that is, religion that is the **real deal**... religion that has made a **difference**, that is **transforming** you... from the inside **out** – cares for such **people**... ///
- **AND** – **keeps oneself** from being **polluted** by the **world**...
- I said earlier – everywhere we look is pollution – I don't mean of the environment – I mean of our world's **morals** and **values**... and **true religion** – religion that is true because it is about **relationship** – deep and personal relationship with the **Lord Jesus** – will keep a **distance** from the world's **polluted values** and **morals**...!
- James couldn't be **clearer** ////

Friends here is what we've seen in this second half of James chapter 1

1. **We are his because of him** – of all God's good gifts, the **best** is new **birth** through his **Word**
2. ... **therefore, we** stand out in this world – simply but profoundly because we are **quick** to **listen**, **slow** to **speak** or become **angry** and we take a **stand** against the evil **around us**.... And we do this because:
3. ... **because we listen and do!** We look into God's word – his law which gives **freedom** – and we find great **blessing** in **exploring** all **God** would have us **be**...
4. And by our controlled **tongue**, through our **care** for the **vulnerable**, and by guarding our heart from the **pollution** of the **world**... we show ourselves to be people of **true religion** – true **relationship** – **relationship** with **God** through Jesus, which makes a profound **difference** in our **lives**.

Doesn't mince words James, does he!

After this mirror held up to us today, let's take action... let's search our hearts, and let's find freedom and blessing in living God's way.