

- We are going through a letter. A letter written by James, the half brother of Jesus.
- James, who had grown up around Jesus and thought he was crazy, had seen his brother after he had died and risen from the dead. Once that happened, he was all in for the mission of Jesus. He not only believed that Jesus was his Savior but he ended up being a leader in the local church. He served others.
- In his position as leader, he wrote a letter.
- That is the letter we are studying. It was a letter that he wrote to people that he cared deeply for. He wanted to see them living out what they say they believed. He desired for them to live in freedom. He wanted to see them live powerful lives that mattered.
- And so he is pretty straightforward and blunt with them. But never forget, his words, which can come across as harsh, are birthed in love.

1:19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this:

- This is the second time he uses these words.
- He is not trying to shame them with what he is writing – he thinks highly of them.
- But he wants them to take note. Pay attention! Understand.
- We do the same when we use all CAPS. Lots of exclamation marks. Emojis.
- Listen to what I am about to say because it is important and I love you guys. When someone was reading this letter I picture them taking a dramatic pause.

Everyone

- This is something that should characterize everyone who claims to follow Jesus.
- This is not some people. Not leaders. Everyone

should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

- Our theme for this entire series that comes from this letter is that AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS. You cannot separate what you say you believe from how you live.
- You need faith in Jesus to live rightly and your actions will prove out whether this is true or not.
- So James makes a statement that he is going to unpack in these next few verses. It's like a thesis statement that he makes and then supports with detail.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

- This is not just about what we say. It is not primarily about anger. It includes these but is much deeper.
- Or put another way, **WE ARE TO LIVE INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY CONSISTENT.**

- What does this mean? He makes three statements that are all related.
- We are to be quick to listen. This is to make listening our first priority. Not as an afterthought. Listen with the purpose of understanding.
- To are to be slow to speak. This does mean to speak slowly, but to take your time to respond. Do not let your first instinct be what comes out of your mouth. Your conversation should be in response to what you understand.
- We are to be slow to become angry. How we act and feel are connected and we need to address both otherwise we just react wrongly to the world around us.
- There is a connection between anger and speaking too quickly.
- Just steaming and simmering and biding your time is not what we are talking about.
- This is less about an outburst and more about deeply seated wrath or rage. Anger should
- **WE ARE TO LIVE INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY CONSISTENT.**
- James then explains himself a bit more in the verses that follow.
- I told you what your life should look like, let me explain that a bit deeper.

I. How we respond to others is a constant heart indicator.

20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 Therefore, 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.

- What does James mean by human anger?
- James does not say that anger is always bad. What he does say is that human anger is counter-productive in our souls. Human anger does not reflect or produce in us any move towards righteousness or holiness.
- We live in a world of angry people. We often disguise it with terms like *irritated, annoyed, exasperated or peeved*. We use pious language that we just indignant because something is unfair and we are righteously justified in our anger.
- Human anger is always a result of an injustice done that is connected TO ME.
- God's anger is about injustice done to the defenseless TO OTHERS.
- But James raises the bar even more. He says that human anger does not bring about righteousness. Any anger that leads us to act in a way that is not loving and holy is human anger.
- God desires righteousness but when reacting in anger does not produce the kind of righteousness in the world that God wants us to be about, it reveals something about our hearts.
- Watch your responses to circumstances and people. When you get angry, what is going on? And before you too quickly justify your response as righteous, ask yourself this question:
- "If I had no personal stake in this whatsoever, would I still be angry?"
- If it wasn't my child, would I still be angry? If I didn't work here, would I still be angry? If this did not impact what I was trying to accomplish, would I still be annoyed?
- That's number one. What is really going on deep down inside? If we are honest, more of our anger comes from expectations, desires or demands that are being frustrated by someone else. And since our heart is not right, we get angry.
- Secondly, how are you responding in your anger? Is it producing righteousness? If not, it is probably human anger.
- You see this in politics all the time. Christians get upset about what this party is doing or that party is doing. They get angry. They are filled with self-righteousness. They name call. They pray for people to be punished. They run people down. They scream at others on the picket line. They run others down as morally inferior. They round the wagons and get cliquey.
- This is not the righteousness that God desires. Then we read this word:

Therefore

- It means the thought James is about to write is connected to what he just wrote previously. *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.*
- Since reacting in anger doesn't help in producing God's righteousness, we are to do two things:
 - 1) Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. The word is akin to removing clothes. Taking something off. External grime, stained or muddy.
 - That's the picture but James is talking about moral defilement, spiritual stains.
 - Anger and expressions of sin start inside. It begins with our stititudes. It begins in our hearts.
 - It can be difficult to notice because it's how the world around us operates. It's how our coworkers act. It's the way our neighbors speak. Yet we are to distance ourselves from these sinful attitudes and actions.
- 2) But this is not simply a matter of trying to act better. James says to get rid of the trappings of the worldly thinking and instead, *in humility, accept the word of God planted in us.*

- James is simply saying that when we came to follow Christ, we were freed. We were given a new life. We were made a new creation. We have Jesus in us. The Gospel of Jesus is ours. We have been saved.
- But it is so much bigger than this. We are to let this gospel soak into our lives and change us internally.
- He uses a key word here. We do this in *humility*. Humility is simply the recognition that we need help from God to make changes.
- Pride and arrogance is closely linked to human anger. When you get angry, it is so often tied to pride. To your desires and wants that are not reflective of God's righteousness. Let God change this.
- **WE ARE TO LIVE INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY CONSISTENT.**
- The logical question in my mind then is how does this happen? How do we accept with humility the word planted in us

II. Act like what God says is true and real.

- You need to let the gospel of Jesus change you. To change your desires.
 - This happens by actually doing it!
- 22 *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.*
- This is the second time we see the term deception. Last week we saw that we can deceive ourselves by thinking that God is doing harm to us.
 - We can also be deceived if we think that going to church, listening to a sermon and knowing some things about God is what will save us. Knowing alone doesn't do anything.
- Do what it says.*
- Then he uses a word picture to show what he means.
- 23 *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*
- The mirrors of the ancient world not like today – required people to really take a look. It is not necessarily a cursory look. They simply fail to deal with the flaws that the mirror reveals. They looked in the mirror, saw the things that needed attention, but then walked away and didn't do anything.
 - They are considering intently that they are looking at. They listen. They take notes. They put the bulletins in their bible. They even hear a podcast or two. They read their daily bread. They read the verse of the day. They genuinely understand it.
 - BUT, the impressions they get from God are only temporary. You see, there is a transitory nature to learning. Information does not stick. We forget 50-80% of what we learn within 24 hours! It leaves our heads.
 - What makes God's word stick such that it affects our lives is living by it.
 - It does not matter how intently you listen or read the Word of God, if you do not live it, it will not change you.
 - **WE ARE TO LIVE INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY CONSISTENT.**
 - You have heard. You even looked intently. But it did nothing and you have not changed to reflect the righteousness of God.
 - Why do we do this? It's scary. It's counter-cultural.
 - If I do what God says, my life will be worse. I will look stupid. I will have less money. Others will take advantage of me.
 - We don't know what will happen. We think it will make us more miserable. But it's not true.
- 25 *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.*

- Following God's ways brings freedom. When we let God set the agenda and we begin to live according to his agenda, we gain freedom. Less complications in our attitudes and emotions.
- Following God's ways brings blessing. James is not talking here about some future blessing (eschatological) but the promise of personal fulfillment in the very process of doing what Christ-followers know to be right.
- To drive the point home, James ups the ante a bit and gets really in our faces.
26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.
- It means religious worship in its external observances, religious exercise or discipline, is pointless and empty if that is all there is.
- Once again, we see this idea of deceiving ourselves.
- If a person thinks they are a good person because they went to church, didn't kick their dog and prayed before a meal, but still acts and talks like they always have, they are deceiving themselves.
- Jesus talked frequently that what we say reveals what is in our hearts. What is in here will always eventually be revealed by what comes out.
- Talking behind someone's back, inaccurate information, speaking with no constructive purpose (disguised as prayer requests does not count).
- **WE ARE TO LIVE INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY CONSISTENT.**

III. Real faith is always moving towards consistency.

- We are to live such that what is happening in our hearts and coming out in our actions are consistent. We may never get there, but for a person of real faith, their life is moving in that direction. James concludes his thought with this statement:
27 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.
- Remember who James is writing this letter to. Jewish Christ-followers. They had spent their entire lives trying to live according to the law. To do all the right things. To live a religious life.
- But that is NOT God's metric. There are two components to the kind of faith and life that God desires.
- A look outward: (external)
- A Christ-follower will pay attention to others and their needs. We will put others before our own. We will be looking to serve and help others.
- James uses the example of those who were a defenseless, overlooked minority in their world. These were those who needed advocates. A Christ-follower will have a heart that breaks for something or someone.
- The meeting of needs of others is not peripheral or optional, but central and obligatory to faith.
- A look inward: (internal)
- A Christ-follower is continually looking to a different metric than the world. They are not trying to adopt the ways of the world around them. They consider God's words carefully and then adjust their lives to live accordingly.
- Any person who does good to others while there is no inner transformation towards holiness will not bring people to Christ. They will simply see you as a nice, good person.

- Conversely, the most pious, moral person who refuses to help the world around them or treats them with disdain or indifference will find that their message falls on deaf ears when trying to talk about Jesus' love.
- **WE ARE TO LIVE INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY CONSISTENT.**
- Let me clarify something. It might sound like James is telling us to do more, to try harder, to help others, to be more. It sounds like we are responsible for making ourselves better.
- Remember the story of the disciples in the boat. Jesus sent them ahead, and they are crossing the sea and suddenly one of them sees someone walking across the water. They are freaked out. They think it is a ghost.
- Then someone says, "It's the boss!"
- Peter thinks it's pretty cool and asks "Can I do that?"
- Jesus says come. He does. He walks on the water.
- Whose power allowed Peter to walk on the water? God's.
- Who made the decision to get out of the boat? Peter.
- James is telling his readers, and you, get out of the boat.
- You cannot change yourself, but God can. You cannot find freedom, but God can give it. You cannot fix your relationships, but God can. But, my friends, you can't just look in the mirror, hear from God, and then ignore it. You have to get out of the boat.