

Title: James: Learning To Listen

Text: James 1:19-27

Last week I introduced you to James,
-a younger brother of Jesus himself,
-who became a leader of the Hebrew church of Jesus in Jerusalem,
-and who wrote the Letter of James in the New Testament.
-We will be preaching through his letter this summer.

Today we will be continuing with the first chapter of James.
-So if you have your Bible with you, turn to James chapter 1,
and we will be reading verses 19-27.

Chris Redford told us at the Wednesday Bible study this past week that after her mother-in-law, Helen, died,
-she took Helen's Bible home and started doing her own Bible reading using Helen's Bible.
-Helen took all kinds notes in her Bible, and wrote down thoughts and insights in the margins.

Chris said that when she opened up to the Letter of James last week, she saw that Helen had written over it:
"The New Testament book of Proverbs."

And you know, that's a pretty good description of the Letter of James.
-Like the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament, James is just packed with one wise admonition after another.
-Sentence after sentence there are exhortations on how to live in such a way that you will grow to spiritual maturity and as James said last week, so receive the crown of life God has promised to those who love him.

That's what James wanted for all his readers, and like the Book of Proverbs in the OT, he lays out two pathways:
-he says, this one is how you get there, this path is not.

Today's pathway to spiritual maturity is about learning to speak less and listen more.

"My dear brothers and sisters," James writes, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

I have to tell you that I have been sorely tempted this week to

simply read those words to all of us two or three times slowly,
and then end the sermon.

“Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”

I kind of think those words all by themselves are enough for
one day.

-I believe they are exactly the admonition that our whole
country needs at the moment.

If we could all just be quicker to listen, and slower to speak,
and slower to become angry,

-we would all of us be in a lot better place as a nation.

-And each of us would be in a lot better place as people, as
members of our individual families, as co-workers, as
teammates, as friends, as followers of Jesus.

Those words from James, all by themselves, are probably
enough for one day. Or for one week. Or the rest of our
lives.

But James embellishes those primary words of admonition
with a little more detail in the verses that follow.

-He urges us when it comes to being quick to listen:

-First to listen to what other people have to say to us.

-And second to listen to the words that God has to say to us.

-And then when it comes to being slow to speak and slow to
become angry,

-he urges us to keep a tight rein on these tongues of ours.

Let's just look at each of these exhortations for a minute.

1. First James urges us to learn to listen to other people,
-because our interactions with other people are one of the
primary arenas in which our spiritual life is lived out.

He says we are to be quick to listen, and slow to speak,

-AND slow to become angry, because our anger does not
lead us to that righteous life that God desires.”

You see, here again, like last week, James wants his readers
to keep their eyes on the prize,

-which is growing to spiritual maturity and so receiving the
crown of life.

Remember, encouraging believers toward that goal is the
whole purpose of James' letter.

-He wants his readers to be growing to spiritual maturity so

that we might receive the eternal kind of life that God has for us.

- He doesn't want us to get sidetracked or derailed.
- So this letter isn't just full of moral advice to make us nicer or better behaved people.

It's not about morality or better behavior for James.

- It's about growing up to maturity in Christ, and experiencing the eternal life that God has given us as a gift in Christ.

Last week we saw that if trials and hardships were one of God's primary ways of helping us grow up and mature,

- James said, then consider them pure joy.
- See how God is using your hard times to shape and transform and mature you, and rejoice in them.

Today James says, do the same thing in your interactions with others.

- Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.
- See your interactions with other people are the primary arena God will use to grow you and transform you and mature you into the righteous and eternal life He has for you.

And God will particularly use the interactions with others that are difficult for us to help grow us up into that life.

- The interactions with people who make us angry.
- People we don't want to listen to.
- People we'd rather give a piece of our mind to.

"Ah," says James. "That's where we see what your righteous life really looks like."

You see, he really is talking about learning to listen to others who disagree with us.

- Or perhaps people who are simply different than us, who we don't really get or understand.
- People who may be culturally different from us, or racially different from us, or religiously different from us.
- People's whose experience of life is very different from our own, and who have a different perspective on the way the world works, or should work.

You see, James is talking about learning to listen, when we don't really want to listen at all, because listening would take time and energy.

- He's talking about learning to listen when what we really want to do is speak ourselves, and straighten the other person

out.

But James says, "Do you want to grow to spiritual maturity in Christ? Do you want to experience the crown of life he has won for you?"

-Well, then learn to treat other people with respect, the way that my brother Jesus did.

-My brother Jesus is the one who said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

-So if when you speak, you want other people to actually listen to what you have to say, and you want others to understand your point of view.

-Then you do the same for them.

-And let them go first. You be the first to listen, and take the time to do so."

My friends, this flies in the face of our natural tendencies and the way our world works as a whole.

-What we love the most about social media is that we get to express ourselves to the world.

-FaceBook, Twitter, TicTok, Youtube, blog posts, texts...!

Everybody is expressing themselves all the time.

-And it's easy for us to pick and choose who we listen to and who we don't.

-We can friend all the people who think like we do,
-and unfriend all the people who don't.

-Even our newsfeeds know the news sources we like and click on, and the one's we don't like and don't click on.

-So we automatically get sent the breaking news headlines from the sources we like, from the perspective we like.

Because we don't really want to hear a different perspective.

-It would take too much time and energy to listen and try to understand someone else's point of view.

But James says, "That doesn't lead to maturity. And in the Body of Christ it doesn't lead to love and grace and acceptance and forgiveness and understanding.

-It doesn't lead to unity or community.

What it leads to is the kind of shape our world is in right now, and that our country is in right now.

-It leads to polarization, and division, and incivility.

-It leads to treating other people as the enemy.

James says we need to get rid of all that gunk, and the evil that is so prevalent.

What we need, he says, is greater humility towards one another.

-And an acceptance of the word that God has planted in us, which can save us.

2. And this brings us to James' second admonition to listen.

He calls us to not only learn to listen to other people, when they are hard to listen to,

-but to also take the time to listen to God, especially when His words might be hard to listen to.

And by listening to God, James is clear that what he means is hearing what God says, but then actually acting on it.

He uses this metaphor of a person looking in a mirror and seeing him or herself,

-and then going away and forgetting what they looked like.

And what he means is that looking in a mirror reveals to us what is there to be seen,

-and if there is something that needs to be attended to, we should attend to it:

-perhaps it's a smudge of chocolate still at the corners of our mouth from that ice cream cone we had an hour ago;

-or maybe you notice that your shirt is actually all wrinkled and needs to be ironed.

James says, "Don't just go away from the mirror and do nothing about the wrinkles or the chocolate smudge.

-Act on what the mirror revealed.

And when God speaks His word into our lives,

-it's because God is revealing something to us both about Himself and who He is,

-and He is revealing something about to us about ourselves and who we are.

-James says if we want to grow to maturity and so experience the crown of life God has for us,

-then don't just walk away from such revelations.

Be quick to listen to the word God is speaking to your heart and mind.

-And act on it in whatever way is appropriate to the word God has spoken to you.

-As you do so, you will be blessed, James says.

-You will experience a little bit of that eternal life God has

for you, and you will grow in it, and mature in it.

Learn to listen, James says, to God and to others.

- Especially when what they are saying is hard for you to hear.
- Be slow to speak, and be slow to get angry about it.
- Take the time to slow down and pay attention,
- Take time to reflect on the conviction, ponder it, and act on it.

3. And thirdly James addresses what it means for us to be slow to speak and slow to become angry:

“Keep a tight rein on your own tongue,” he writes in v.26.

He will write more on the issue of taming these tongues of ours in chapter 3 of his letter.

- But here he says quite pointedly that if we consider ourselves to be “religious people,”
- but we can’t keep our own tongues under control, then our so-called religion is worthless.

Wow, that’s quite a statement, isn’t it?

- Again, for James, our interactions with others is the primary arena in which our spiritual life is displayed.
- So if we are quick to speak, and slow to listen.
- Quick to vent, quick to get angry with those we disagree with,
 - quick to be polarizing ourselves,
 - quick to treat others as the enemy,
 - quick to prejudge people without actually listening to them,
 - quick to take words from God like these very admonitions from the Letter of James in the New Testament,
 - and let them go in one ear and out the other,
 - then James says our “so-called religion” is worthless.

He says we are not on the path towards maturity in the faith.

- In fact, he says, we are going in the complete other direction.
- and if we con

The sign of “true religion” James says, “is the way you end up treating other people.

- And especially, says James again and again throughout this letter, how you treat other people who are less fortunate than you are... like widows and orphans.”

And you see, what James is pointing out here, is that there is a direct relationship between a person’s grasp and experience of the grace of God,

- and his or her heart for other people, and particularly for those who have experienced the brokenness of the world in ways that have made their lives vulnerable.

Because you see, when we are saved by grace from our own brokenness,

- and we discover that God did not give us what we deserved, but gave us mercy and grace instead,
- we not only begin to look at ourselves differently, but we begin to look at other people differently, too.

We see our common brokenness, our common humanity, our common vulnerability.

- We see the beauty of the image of God, hidden in broken people, just like it was hidden in us.
- And we see our common need we all have for healing, and forgiveness, and for God's help and grace.

My friends, that humbles us, and we stop pointing fingers at other people like they are the problem.

- We see that we are all the problem, and so we begin to care for other people, and care about them as people.
- And maybe, just maybe, we begin to be quicker to listen to their story and their perspective,
- and slower to speak, and slower to become angry.

That's what James says is the sign of true religion.

- It's the grace of God that begins to clean out the pollution of the world in us,
- and begins to transform us into people who can be more like Jesus.
- People who when they look in the mirror and see what the reflection reveals to them,
- are more and more apt to ask for God's help to make the changes that are needed to help us mature.
- People who can control their tongue and when we speak, can speak in ways that are edifying,
- to build others up, and not tear them down.

A hunger and thirst for more of that in our lives is what draws us to the communion table.

- It's a hunger and thirst for more grace, less anger, more understanding, less division, more of God, less of us.
- We come to the table as common people, commonly in need of His healing, and acceptance, and forgiveness or truth.

Let's pray together as we come to the table together.

