

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Little Letters: James –Two Kinds of Wisdom
Pastor Dave Scherrer - March 27, 2011

Prayer

The Big Picture of this Little Letter: Transformation

Transformation is an interesting word. When you think of a person being transformed what kind of things come to your mind?

'Biggest Loser' video

I suggested last week that this book is all about transformation. That might have been a bit of an overstatement, but perhaps not too much. You see from Genesis the third chapter, everything began to fall apart. You remember when God first thought of making humankind:

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

But something went really wrong. Hearing the deceptions of the devil, Adam and Eve chose sin and began to look increasingly less like the image of God and we took on instead the image of the world and a fallen culture. So, as we participate with God in our transformation back to His image, scripture exhorts us:

1 Peter 1:14

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 8:29

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[What do you think it means to be conformed to the image of God's son?]

In order to do this study we will need wisdom. The book of James is in some ways a different kind of 'Little Letter'. It is more like an Old Testament wisdom book, like the proverbs; a series of almost poetic statements about the way we should live as Christians.

Do you remember my ending question from last week? Perhaps you thought about it some. "Do you want to be transformed?" is what I asked. James is wondering the same thing of his readers. How long has it been since you have experienced a fresh profound and compelling act of the Spirit of God that made you stand up and say to yourself - "This is a new me!" I wonder if after a while we don't really expect God to work in our lives any more. We suppose He does . . . but we just don't give it a thought. The temptation is to kind of coast in our spiritual lives. I think we figure we know most of what God is asking of us; at least we think so . . . so we don't figure there is much yet for God to do. I think legalistically that there is lots *I have to do*, there just isn't much God wants to do anymore – 'He is just waiting on me to get my act together.' This is a very wrong

and dangerous theology. And James begs to differ with this way of thinking. In this wisdom book he is giving us some secrets of living the transformed life, the new life.

It is critical we use our heads and hearts here. You see this is important. What if God really is interested, right now in having a breakthrough experience with you? I am wondering, did you come here this morning expecting to be changed? Or did you just figure on coming to church. I want to speculate that if you aren't expecting God to work on you this morning, to visit you, to transform you - you will not be ready when He addresses you. You will miss Him. I know some who have come to church for years and never experience God in any significant way. Can you believe that? So as we ask for wisdom as James tells us to, we remember that there are two kinds of wisdom:

Two kinds of Wisdom: Earthly and Heavenly

Earthly Wisdom

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man,
but its end is the way to death.

James 3:13-16

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Heavenly Wisdom

James 3:17-18

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

This Heavenly wisdom tells us there are some things to avoid:

Wise things to avoid:

Arrogance
Materialism
"Wandering"

Let's look at this first idea of arrogance, because James doesn't frame it the same as you may be thinking. For instance see how this verse gets our attention:

James 1:26

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

[Help me here; what do you suppose is a bridled tongue?]

James helps us understand this special kind of arrogance that uses the tongue as a weapon:

James 3:3-5

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

Let me give you five kinds of arrogant words that never need to be in your repertoire:

1. Name calling
2. Swearing
3. Sarcasm
4. You statements ("You make me so angry")
5. Together with . . . Words like "always" and "never" ("You always . . .")
- [6. Intimidating body language and tone of voice]

Never use these killers. There is no call in the Christian's life for any of this. It is 'earthly wisdom' and it kills. If you fail to bridle your tongue, you must repent and ask forgiveness. If you think you are getting too riled up to bridle your tongue, you better step back. I have a question for you; "Do you want to be transformed?"

Materialism: James has a lot to say about materialism too because it is another form of deadly earthly wisdom:

James 2:1-5

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

The love of money and the power and influence it can buy for you is narcotic. It distorts reality. Much of this letter of James can be found reflected in the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember how Jesus said in Matthew 6 beginning in verse 19:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Turn now to James and you will see how these thoughts are so similar:

James 5:1-3

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

Remember this little letter was written between 40 to 45, only ten years after Christ's ascension. James is still believing that Jesus will be back soon, to come down and set the world right. James just can't believe that in these 'last days' there would be anyone who would be interested in laying aside treasures on earth. It just made no sense to him. And if those were days thought to be close to the coming of Christ, do you think we are close now? Why would we be laying aside treasures now?

In the fifth century, a Christian man named Arenius determined to live a holy life. So he abandoned the comforts of society in his community in Egypt where he lived to follow an austere lifestyle in the desert. Yet whenever he visited the great city of Alexandria, he spent time wandering through its bazaars. He explained, "My heart rejoices at the sight of all the things I do not need."

Jesus said the wise man – the heavenly wise man – builds his house upon “the rock.” And you can’t buy this rock – it is a gift, but you can spend and earn your way into hell. If there is one pandemic in the 21st century church of America it is materialism. Do you want to be transformed?

Finally let’s talk about wandering . .

James 4:7-8

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Wandering as leaving what you know to be true. You can’t wander if you never got the right address. You are simply lost. But if you know the way and leave the path, now you are wandering. This book is a call back to the path. James is telling the Christian Jews in his fellowship that they are to return home. Back to what they already know to be true. I want to talk about this one more time before the end of the service. So not only are there things we must avoid there are also things that we must attend to - places of **personal discipline and public charity:**

Wise things we must attend to:

Acts of Personal Discipline: Bridling our tongue and Refraining from boasting

Acts of Public Charity: Caring for Orphans and Widows

We already talked about bridling our tongue. James is concerned about an arrogance that takes the form of boasting. Not boasting; does that seem like a personal discipline? I think it is. And boasting in James’ eyes isn’t just talking big about you; being the biggest liar. It is also as simple as making plans without including God in them:

James 4:13-16

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" — yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

Arrogance takes many forms for James in this little letter and we are to avoid them. God is prepared to take this character brokenness and heal them. We cannot find our wandering way back without Him drawing us.

And the things we must do included these **public acts** of charities as well;

James 1:27

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

So transformation as you said earlier is largely a result of ‘perseverance’ in hardship.

James 5:11

As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Perseverance in hardship, you remember from last week, trials and hardships perfect us – they help to conform us into the image of His Son.

James 1:2-5

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

Come Now Fount of Every Blessing – It is a song about a wondering heart, a wandering mind.

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

Can an entire church be transformed?

Now I am wondering if an entire church can be transformed. May it be so Lord, beginning today with my heart.

Prayer