

Worthless Religion James 1: 19-2:1

Recently archeologists found an ossuary
that stirred up quite a bit of excitement in the press.
Do you know what an ossuary is?
It is a small stone box in which they put the powderized
remains of someone important.
Last year they thought they found the ossuary
of James the brother of Jesus. Remember that.
It was all over the news.
When ever something is connected that close to Jesus
people take notice.
And that is what is so important about the book of James
too. When James speaks people listen.
James had a special connection to Jesus
so his words bear great importance.
He was the younger brother of Jesus,
the leader of the church after Jesus went back to heaven.
If anyone knew the heart of Jesus it was his brother.
Listen to what James says.
Read passage. Include 2:8-9, 12-19

The point James makes, and
one of the keys points Jesus made in his teaching is this:
living the Christian life is not
just a matter of believing something, or
saying something, or
even thinking in a certain way, or
coming to church for an hour a week, or
listening to Christian music or radio, or
reading Christian books.
It's living it out,
it's putting it into practice in your everyday life and
in your relationships 24/7.
Faith without actions is useless.
Saying you are a Christian, and then being prejudices
against blacks or Asians or women is a contradiction in
terms.
Saying you trust God and then refusing to tithe and to
share your wealth with others because you're worried
about your own life is an oxymoron.
Knowing you should love your neighbor, and then going
around cheating them, or lying to them or gossiping
about them is hypocrisy.

James says it's like looking in the mirror in the morning.
When you look in the mirror you see that the cloths you
put on do not match, your pants and shirt clash,
there is big food stain on the front of your shirt,
your hair is all messed up.
Your make-up is smudged,
there is a strong body odor about you.
There's food between you teeth.
You see it all in the mirror, you smile at yourself and go
on your way to work, and
you wonder why people look at you funny, or
avoid you by at least 20 feet.
You're surprised why you're not accepted.

Jesus said, anyone who hears my words,
anyone who knows what God desires,
anyone who has faith,
anyone who studies the word of God and
does not put it into practice is like a foolish person
who built his house on the sand.
The rains came down, the waters rose, the wind blew
and beat against that house and
it fell down with a loud crash.

The house of your life too can come crashing down into a
worthless pile of rubble by
the irresponsible use of the tongue.

If there is any thing that makes us a hypocrite, or
a Christian moron, or a screen door on a submarine,
it is not listening to others,
its being all talk and no actions,
its having faith without works,
its being motivated by anger or the values of the world,
by selfishness and greed.

James says in verse 26 **"If anyone considers himself or herself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his or her tongue, she deceives herself, he lives in a state of denial, and his or her religion is worthless.** His religion is worthless. A pretty serious charge isn't it?

Do you want your religion to be worthless?
Do you want your faith to be dead and fruitless?

What do you want your religion to be, your faith to be?
Do you want to live the life that God desires?

Do you want to be free of deception and
to get out of that state of denial?
Do you want to be able to look in the mirror and go to work
being appreciated and valued and held close?
Do you want your relationships with people to be real and
loving?
Do you want to be accepted and
live a life that makes a difference?

Then listen to this: You should be quick to listen,
slow to speak, and slow to become angry,
for your anger does not bring about
the life that God desires for you.

There once was woman who
couldn't keep a tight rein on her tongue.
She had a tendency to gossip.
She was Catholic and went to confession.
As penance the priest told this lady to go to the market
and buy an unplucked chicken.
On the way back to church she was to pull out the
feathers and scatter them one by one along the way.
When she finish she was to return to the confessional
and the priest would tell her what to do next.

On her return the priest praised her for her obedience.
“Now to complete your penance,
go back and pick up all the feathers.”
“But sir,” the lady exclaimed,
“you know that is impossible.
The wind blew them away and
I could never hope to get them all back now.”
“Quite true,” the priest said.
“Neither can you recall the damaging words you spoke
about your neighbors which by this time
have passed from mouth to mouth far beyond your reach.
From now on be quick to listen, slow to speak,
and slow to get angry. This can save you”

This is one of the most difficult challenges we face:
doing what we believe, practicing what we preach,
being quick to listen, slow to speak and
slow to get angry.

Last week I was at a meeting with a number of pastors.
We were early and one of the pastors asked the other a

question. We'll call them Paul and Peter.
As Paul was answering the question
you could tell Peter wasn't listening at all.
His eyes were elsewhere.
Halfway through the answer Peter interrupted Paul with
an other unrelated question.
Paul stopped in frustration and said to Peter,
"Are you listening, I'm answering your question."

It takes something deep inside of us to be able to listen.
Learning to listen is probably the best investment
you can make in your life,
in your relationships, and
in your faith.
Did know you can take courses in learning how to listen.

Near the end of his life my father lost much of his hearing.
He had a hearing aid but still he missed a lot.
The effect of not hearing was that he was not included in
conversations, he was isolated and
often confused about what was going on.
Being unable to listen separates us
from the community we need.
Being unable to listen shuts the channels that convey love.
It would really be worth your while to learn to listen.
James says, Be quick to listen,
make it one of your character traits.
Make it your default response.
Listening cannot only save you,
but will help you put your faith into practice.

And be slow to speak.
Did you ever notice there are people who feel
uncomfortable with silence.
They always want to be speaking or
have other people speak. They talk and talk.

Every day we are faced with things in life.
Issues, the actions of others, the words of others, events.
And often we are on automatic pilot in our responses.
We react immediately.
Like our burgers we want instant, fast response.
Most of us go to the express lane in negotiating life
and relationships.
But more often than not we need time to let things sink in.
We need to sleep on it. We need to think about things.

We need time to look at the consequences.
James says, Be slow to speak. Be slow to get angry.
Be slow to react to things.
Take some time to reflect on what would Jesus do.
What does my faith say about this?
How can I be Christian in this?
Taking time to think and wait and pray.
Taking time to control your emotions can save you and
help you in developing a religion that is pure and
faultless and according to God's desires.
And not only that you'll be so much the happier for it.

The other day

we were supposed to have our weekly pastors' meeting.
(9 pastors of HIC Wed at 1 PM)
Five minutes before the start one of the pastors
called to say he couldn't make it.
He was visiting someone that was more important.
I had prepared a great meeting and immediately
got a bit huffy with the pastor.
I reminded him of the importance of pastors meeting
together, of communication and fellowship, and
the important things on the agenda.
I unload in anger.

Five minute later

we were reading this passage from James together and
I was serious struck by the words that
anger does not bring about the right kind of life
that God desires.
Not even the right kind of pastor's meeting.
I was slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to get angry.

After confessing each of our struggles with listening,
and patience and anger the pastors talked about
how we can become people who are quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to get angry.

What do you do, what do I do to become a person of faith
who put his or her beliefs into action?
What do you do, what can I do to keep from being
prejudiced or showing favoritism.
What can we do to be merciful and less judgmental?
What can I do to be quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to get angry,
looking after the orphans and helping widows in distress?
How can we keep ourselves from being over come by

the values and the behaviors of this world?

As pastors we talked about counting to ten before we react
when we get a little upset, or
counting to a 100 when the emotions are a bit more
intense.

We talked about maybe
listening to some good music or
thinking about something else when
our children get the best of us and anger stirs in our hearts.
But we all agreed that these were only
band aid type solutions.

Being a person who is able to listen, and is slow to speak
and slow to get angry is a quality of life that
does not come about by our efforts in the
individual circumstances we encounter.

We operate and react at an instinctual level.

Becoming a listening, quiet, reflective, non judgmental
person is a matter of the heart.

If our heart is quiet and at peace and undistracted
it is so much easier to listen to another person.

It is so much easier to not speak and
take time to understand and ask questions and
reflect on what Jesus would do.

When the heart is at peace we become slow to get angry
and learn to live a worthy life that pleases God.

It's a matter of the heart.

In our conversation one of the pastors said that
becoming a person who is quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to get angry is
a person who continually is putting on
the armor of God.

Is person who is continually rejoicing in the Lord.

Focusing on God depending on God

I think that's right.

Bad things happen all the time.

We are continually being cut off on the road of life.

We are continually being tested and tried by
the actions and words of others.

How we react, how we put our faith in action
depends on what we were doing hours,
and days, and years before.

Were we putting on the armor of God,

were we rejoicing in the Lord,
was the spirit renew our heart?

James says in verse 12

Blessed is the person who perseveres under trial,
because when he or she has stood the test,
they will receive the crown of life that God
has promised to those who love him.

And in Verse 17

Every good and perfect gift,
also the gift of a quiet heart,
an undistracted and joyful heart,
is from above, it comes down from the Father in heaven
who is also quick to listen,
slow to speak and slow to get angry.
The father of Jesus chose to give us birth,
chose to give us this new heart, through the word of truth.

By humbly submitting to Jesus,
by humbly cultivating a Christ-like heart,
by humbly accepting the word planted in you,
says James in verse 21,
you can be saved from a worthless religion.
By putting on the amour of God you can saved
from having a faith that is useless and dead.

My hope and prayer for each of you, my prayer as your pastor is that you will be – you are - that person spoken about in verse 12. A blessed person who has received the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. That you are that blessed person who has received that good and perfect gift of a joyful heart from our Father in heaven. So be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry,
for this can save you.