

JAMES - SOUNDNESS OF SOUL FROM THE INSIDE OUT - Part fifteen

Teaching #1832 - Sunday, October 4th, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

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HOW TO KEEP YOUR LIFE FREE FROM THE MOST SERIOUS MISTAKES (continued)

James 4:11-17 - "Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. [12] There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? [13] 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"— [14] 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. [15] Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." [16] As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. [17] So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

The meaning of this text is indelibly linked with the verse immediately preceding - **James 4:10** - "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." As I said last week, our text today deals with two different, though related sins, that make *humble spirituality* virtually impossible. The first was evil speaking against a brother or sister. And the important word in **verse 11** is that word "against." These *aimed* words against a brother reveal a total lack of awareness of the vast undeserved grace I've received from my Lord. That's why James says these evil words against a brother reveal a heart that has totally set aside God's law. These are arrogant sins indeed.

Now we move on to the second sin which James says feed pride and remove my life from divine grace. James deals with the kind of casual *presumption* that can settle into my heart as I go about my daily agenda.

Remember, James is dealing with these two sins because, as he reminded us in **4:10**, God only exalts *humble* people - "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." We're observing two sins with the same root cause. *Evil words* against a brother can only flow from a proud heart that has forgotten its own undeserved grace. And *presumption* in daily living can only flow from a heart that has forgotten its own dependence on divine strength.

2) I AM NEVER TO ASSUME THE ROLE OF JUDGING GOD'S LAWS NOR HIS PEOPLE

James 4:12 - "There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?"

You can't help but wonder if James isn't wording this verse particularly for people like you and me. If I'm the one speaking evil - and, as James has just said, setting myself arrogantly against the law of God - I'm speaking evil *because* I feel I have the right to do so. Perhaps what I'm saying is actually true. Maybe I've been hurt or wronged. I'm not going to let this thing go. So, in speaking evil against this brother, I've convinced myself he has it coming and that overrides my breaking the law of God. That's the meaning of that difficult eleventh verse. I arrogantly put myself *above* the law.

Then James says there is only *one* judge, God Almighty. And oh, by the way, *He* is able to both *save* and *destroy* (12). He can save the one who I feel is the scum of the earth. And He can *destroy* the one who presumes to speak evil in the name of righteousness and dares to take God's role as the judge of personal affairs. Apparently James feels I always need this basic lesson on the sovereignty of God.

This is not the only place where the New Testament addresses this crazy tendency we all have to take God's job into our own hands:

Romans 14:4 - "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

It's a very humbling thing to have God tell you He can work wonders in the heart of someone you don't like. We hate being told that by God - *all* of us. We like being assured *we* are candidates for God's marvelous, restoring grace, no matter how bad we've been. We like to be told *we*, by some unbelievable miracle, are considered worthy to be His servants. But we don't like being told our *enemy* has wonderful capacity for God's marvelous, restoring grace, or that *he* has incredible potential or that this one against whom I speak is accountable as *God's* servant to *God* and not to us.

Remember, says Paul, that brother you consider your enemy, is **God's** servant. We all think of our enemies as **our** enemies - like they were somehow under the domain of our rights and our choices. But God says you can't **have** enemies. They aren't **yours**. They belong to God. And they **report** to God, not to you.

One more thing. Because of the worship of **tolerance** in our society, and because of the way this has blindly seeped into the value system of the contemporary church, we need to emphasize a necessary distinction right at this point.

When James says "**Who are you to judge your neighbor?**"(12), we need to know what he **means** and what he **doesn't** mean. James is **not** saying we are to be careless or undiscerning about either absolute truth or divine morality. We **know** this because Jesus Himself said we were to make sound judgments to keep our souls - **John 7:24** - "**Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.**"

There are all sorts of people who make their value assessments in life based on the outward show that some people can put on. But there are much bigger issues and we should all know them. Also, we know we are to be very careful and discerning when it comes to the kind of **teaching** we allow shape our minds and hearts - **Matthew 7:15-16** - "**Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?**"

There is also a time for righteous judgment in the church itself - **1 Corinthians 5:1-3** - "**It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [2] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. [3] For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing.**"

So we know from the New Testament there are all sorts of times when judgment is not only **right**, but **required**. So what does James mean when he says "**There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?**"(12)?

Remember the context of these words. James condemns these people for "**speaking evil**" against their brothers and sisters. It's this **cloaked revenge**. It's the private, **behind the scenes** vendetta of tearing my enemy down. This sin is **personal**, even if I try to convince myself it isn't. Their words are against a **brother**, not just an **issue**. This kind of bitterness and anger comes about when I've been mistreated **personally**, and I'm trying to **get even**. **Or**, it happens when my heart is filled with envy (this is much harder to admit) because someone else had their life going through the roof with blessing and seems to have the world by the tail.

If I recognize false teaching I can expose it without speaking evil against anyone. If I see a brother "**caught in a sin**" I can humbly pray and offer help, remembering my own weakness and sin. But when I **speak evil** against a brother I'm only trying to **damage** him or **elevate** myself. And neither of those is an option for the Christian. I am not the one to **pour judgment** on my enemy or **even a score** or **ruin a reputation**.

I said at the beginning of this message that we're studying **humility's opposites**. There are two forms of arrogance James warns against. This sin of "evil speaking" is the **first** form of closet arrogance James deals with. Now he moves on to the second:

3) THE SIN OF NOT PLANNING GOD INTO THE DETAILS OF OUR LIVES

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'— [14] 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. [15] Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'** [16] As it is, **you boast in your arrogance** [there's the pride]. **All such boasting is evil.**"

It's important to understand what the real sin is in these words. James pictures a typical group of Christian merchants making typical business plans. In those days extensive travel by ship would be long and slow, easily taking a year or more on occasions. Not surprisingly, great care and planning were needed to maximize time and profit. And James isn't saying there is anything wrong with that in itself. The sin James describes isn't traveling, or planning, or doing business, or making lots of

money. That's not it.

So what is it? What is the sin James feels is so deadly in these verses? It's not their brilliance in business that James is addressing. And it's not their carefulness in planning. It's their **blindness and ignorance** about their own lives that's the problem. They know how to make money. What they **don't** know is how to think about life.

Here is the life-lesson to take home from church today. **The most dangerous thing about your ordinary routine is the way it makes you forget about God.** Look at the way they make their plans - **"Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"(4:13).**

Everything is framed up as an absolute **certainty**. That's the problem. These verses aren't here just to teach Christians to recite **"the Lord willing"** before any sentence having anything to do with their future. That's just superstition and has nothing to do with James' intent.

These business people have been Christians for a while now. And they're very busy. As James sees them making their plans he notices something wrong. They're planning everything as though it were all so certain - so **secure**. They don't **think** of all their plans and all their efforts as in any way **contingent** anymore. Their future doesn't **depend** on anything or anyone but **them** anymore.

Of course, deep in their hearts they know it does. If you asked them about life they would say **"It's all in the Lord's hands. I'm just here as His servant."** They **knew** all of that. But they didn't **think** about it anymore. And they didn't think about it anymore because everything was going fine. Everything was working. And they forgot the only **reason** it was all working was the grace and goodness of the Lord.

It's very easy to do. **"In fifteen years I'll have my house paid for." "Another twenty payments and the car is mine." "If I can just get these two projects off the ground, I'll be in a position to really retire with money in the bank."**

James isn't saying there's anything wrong with any of those ideas, except that you can begin to kid yourself into thinking that's what your life is really all about. And it isn't. Or, you just project yourself into the future **as though it were already as good as accomplished**. And the net effect of that kind of mindless presumption is **it takes eternity out of your reckoning and it takes God out of your reckoning**. It's like the rich farmer in Jesus' parable who was tearing down his barns to build bigger ones. It never even entered his mind that he would be checking out that night!

Now, it's no sin to expand your farm, just as it's no sin to plan trips and work hard at your business. But it **is** wrong not to reckon the shortness of life and the reality of judgement day into your plans. That's what James is saying in **verse 14** - **"...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."**

We all tend to ignore God **most** in the areas of life where we excel with our own skills and abilities. That's James' point. People drift away from God, not in the areas of their **weakness**, but in the area of their greatest **strength**.

Consciously bring God into all of life, especially the areas where you can do a great job yourself. A simple, practical way to do this is simply to pause long enough to ask the right questions. Is it automatically God's will for me to grab every chance for advancement in this world's system? Would he want me to take a cut in pay or demotion to spend more time with my spouse? What am I doing with the prosperity He's sending my way? How do I assess and fulfill my divine calling from God in this world? If I make a lot of money I must fight the natural inclination that God gave me that wealth to spend it on my own comfort or security.

Right away, there's an automatic objection that arises in all of our minds. "I mean, nobody really **lives** like that in the real world, Pastor Don. I'm pretty much like all the other Christians I know and work with." James has one more closing comment on this subject that applies to all of us:

4) HOW TO MEEKLY RECEIVE THE IMPLANTED WORD ON THIS IMPORTANT SUBJECT

James 4:17 - **"So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."**

James knows my tendency to measure my spiritual depth by those around me. I don't know of very many people who start each day reminding themselves their life is a vapor or mist, and there's no security or certainty in the things of this world. Most of us live for all the world like everything important hinges on our doing and our getting.

James knows I use this argument to prove my life isn't *wicked*. It's *average* and *typical*. I take great comfort in this. That's why I need to hear James say, ***Don, your life isn't average. It's sinful. If you know you should view your life as short and fragile and ultimately only safe dedicated radically to me, and you don't do anything about it, that's a sin.***

So teach us to number our days. Teach us, Lord, to do this every day, not to be gloomy or morbid, but to make them count for **Your** highest glory and **our** greatest joy. And everyone said.....