

RECEIVING THE SAVING WORD JAMES 1:19-21

INTRODUCTION:

There is saving power in the Word of God. It has the power to literally transform a life from within. However, if the Word is to do its saving work in a life, then the word must be received into the life. It is only when the Word of God is implanted in the human heart by the power of the Holy Spirit that the Word does its saving work.

There is an initial saving work that comes through the Word of God. James refers to this in those words "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all He created." Every believer knows this aspect of the saving work of the word. Peter likens this aspect to a seed. The Holy Spirit implants the seed of the Word of God into the human heart, which results in a new birth into the family of God. This is an essential part of the work of the Word.

There is also a continuing saving work of the Word. It is the continuing saving work that James refers to in our text of the day - "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." The Word translated "accept" is probably better translated here "receive." It has in it the idea of welcoming the word into your life like you would welcome a friend into your home. The word has tremendous power to continue its saving work in our lives, if we receive it.

The burden of this paragraph in this practical Christian letter is that we prepare our hearts to receive the word. The danger is that the Word would be there, even the Word would be spoken, but because of the condition of our hearts, it would not be received. James brings before us in this context four very important steps in preparing your heart to receive the word. Or maybe rather than steps, we should call them conditions

He gives them to us in a series of imperatives. Let us take these imperatives one at a time and see what they have to say to our hearts.

I. AN OPEN EAR.

James states it like this: “My dear brothers, take note of this; every one should be quick to listen.”

Listen to whom? Is the Lord concerned that we be ready to listen to each other? That cannot be excluded entirely, but surely the burden of this is that we must be ready to listen God. Our inner heart must have its ears open to the voice so that the word of the Lord can be received.

Are you aware of just remarkable an organ your ear is? God did wonderful thing when He created your ear. Someone has indicated that in comparison to the human ear the most sophisticated computer of our day is as crude as a concrete mixer. Of course, what we call the ear is only the outer ear, the fleshly excrescent on the side of the head which comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. From it a initial one inch canal leads to the ear drum, behind which is the middle ear, where the body’s three tiniest bones (popularly known as the anvil, hammer and stirrup) amplify sound 22 times and pass it on to the inner ear where the real hearing takes place. The inner ear contains thousands of microscopic, hair-like cells, each of which is tuned to one particular vibration. The

vibrations are converted into electrical impulses which convey sound to the brain for decoding along 30,000 circuits of auditory nerves, enough for a sizable city's telephone service. The human ear has rightly been celebrated as a triumph of miniaturization. Yet, in spite of all the capacity God has built into the human body through the ear, we use only one fourth of its capacity.

Just as the physical ear enables the body to hear, there is a spiritual ear inside of you that can the sounds of eternity. This inner ear picks up the voice and impulses of God, conveys them to the inner spirit of the person, where decisions are then made. This is a word that says that our attitude toward God is to such that we are anxious to hear what He is saying. We have an ear ready to hear!

Someone has written, "Consciously making the effort to listen well involves three basic ground rules: respectful silence, total attention, and appropriate response." Is your heart ready to receive the Word of the Lord? Are you who can stand before Him in respectful silence, give to him total attention, and make an appropriate response to Him? This is what is involved in being swift to hear.

II. A SLOW TONGUE.

The second admonition from James is just as pointed—"slow to speak." Speak to whom? Does this mean that we are to be slow to speak to each other? There is counsel like this in Scripture. Wise men, we are told, are slow to speak. They listen and make sure that they understand before they make a response. Deep waters run quietly, someone has observed.

However, James probably has in mind our being slow to speak to God. We must keep in mind the over-all context of these words. We may be too quick in judging God. Earlier

He has reminded us that we are to be careful and not judge the Lord as not being a good and faithful God. So many times we speak too hastily about God, and maybe like Job speak too hastily to Him.

Job ought to be a warning to us at this point. After Job had given speech after speech detailing what he believed to the shortcomings and injustices of God, he finally realized that he had spoken too quickly. You may that in this conclusion of his book, Job acknowledges his foolish speech. He declares, “I am unworthy—how can I reply to you? I have my hand over my mouth. I spoke once but I have no answer—twice, but I will say no more.” (Job 40:4-5) Our attitude toward God must be one of listening. God doesn’t need information from us about how much we know. He already knows how much we do not know. He is fully cognizant of our present situation. He wants a quiet heart, one that is slow to speak to Him.

III. A CALM SPIRIT.

The third word from James is the one that probably troubles us the most—“slow to anger, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” There is progression in thought here. We move from hasty speech to anger. The word that James uses for “anger” has in it the idea of an anger that is harbored, resentful feelings that have found a home in the heart. If you are to have a heart that is responsive to the Lord, you must not allow anger to settle in and find a place in your heart. You remember the word of Paul to the Ephesians, “Let not the sin go down on your wrath.” You cannot prevent anger producing events from happening in your life, but you can keep anger from finding a home in your heart.

It is helpful to remember what James adds to this admonition. He lays down an eternal principle when he declares, “For man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” In fact, it does just the opposite. Harbored anger in the heart will produce those things in the life which are displeasing to God. It will produce broken relationships, unkind words, quick and wrong judgments, rejection, wounds in the lives of others—possibly both physical and emotional, dashed hopes, and a thousand other terrible things. We need to make sure that our motives do not flow out of anger.

Those of you who counsel others know the truth of this insight! James is addressing one of the major problems of life. It is amazing how many people walk around with a heart full of anger. In cases, they are still angry at parents, siblings, a former employer, a former marriage partner, children, a neighbor, and in some cases even God. They stand in judgment upon the ways of the Lord. This residue of anger in their spirits keeps them from hearing the word of God. If you are going to hear God speak, if He is going to minister to your life through His aving Word, then there must be a clam spirit within you.

The opposite of anger is what James refers to in the next verse when he writes, “And humbly accept the word.” The word translated “humbly” is the word usually translated meekness. The KJV so translated it. Meekness is the opposite of anger. Meekness is a teachable and submissive spirit. Meekness is strength that has been surrendered to the control of another. Anger is just the opposite of this.

How would you describe your inner spirit? Can it be characterized as calm, teachable, meek? Or would it be characterized as resentful, angry, rebellious, unteachable, troubled? Would it be characterized as having made up its mind and not being open to any more

truth from God? God wants in you and in me a clam and teachable spirit. It is essential if we are to hear God speak, and to receive His saving word.

IV. A CLEAN MIND.

The last of the admonitions says, “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and that the evil that is so prevalent.” This may actually be summary of the other three admonitions.

James introduces a new figure in these words. “Get rid” has in it the idea of taking off a dirty garment, casting it away, and putting on a clean garment.

The garment to be removed is not an outward garment, but a garment worn by the inner person, a old way of thinking, if you please. He labels it as “all moral filth”. The idea is that we are to put out of our mind, out of our heart, everything that would be considered impure in the eyes of God. If we suspect that it would be offensive to holy God, then we must put it out of our thinking, our of our lives.

“Evil that is so prevalent” is a general word for malice, an inner disposition that would do harm and hurt to others. It is a vicious disposition bent on inflicting pain on others. It is the overflow of our old sinful nature into the attitudes, words, and deeds of our lives.

James declares that we are to be able to receive the word of the Lord, and if the word is to be able to do its saving work in us, then we must be prepared to lay aside all of the malice, filth, defilement that we have allow to accumulate in us. We must bring to God a clean mind that has been cleansed of all such filth.

Are you not amazed at how we treat our minds? We keep our homes neat, clean, orderly, well-arranged, but allow all kinds of filth to gather in our minds. If we smell something

that is giving off an offensive odor in our homes, we will not rest until we have removed it, but we will live for years with an mind that is filled with foul smelling ideas and prejudices. Everyone around us can sense the presence of these foul odors in our us, but we ignore their counsel and responses. Do you need to give attention to some mind cleansing. You must have your are serious about receiving the word of the Lord with its saving power into your life.

We have before us the four imperatives for being prepared to receive the Word of God. An Open Ear! A Slow Tongue! A calm Spirit! A clean Mind! Does this uncover a point need in your life? If you have a problem with one of these it is likely that you have that you have a problem with all four. They generally travel together. When you find one of them in a life, there will be one or two of the others. A closed ear, a quick tongue, an angry spirit, and defiled mind just seem to travel together. The call of this text is for us to take immediate remedial action. The only remedial action that can be taken is repentance. We must confess to God the sin involved in a closed ear, a quick tongue, an angry spirit, and a defiled mind. When we asked God to grant us the mercy of cleansing, then we can begin to experience that inner heart condition that makes it possible for the word of gospel to come into our lives and to do its saving work.

Let us prepare our hearts to hear and receive the Word!