

"The Implanted Word"

04/29/12

James 1:19-27 & 3:13-18
Psalm 119:89-96

I. THE FIRST AREA WE DEMONSTRATE WISDOM AND JUSTICE FOR OTHERS IS AN AREA MOST OF US NEVER THINK OF, OUR SPEECH, HOW WE TALK TO EACH OTHER IN THE CHURCH.

A. Charles Osgood a few years ago remarked on the 30th anniversary of the CBS Sunday Morning News and how our world has changed since 1979.

1. Osgood said there is more communication, more contacts, but it is not necessarily more meaningful.
2. And I think of Senator Jon Tester's comment on the front page of the Gazette this past week, that his hope has been to help change how Congress does its work, but he has found it totally frustrating. He commented that too few people in Congress talk to each other, even in their own party.

B. I had not noticed this before, but Dr. Pheme Perkins' commentary on James made me look at how this entire letter addresses the best way to use words and language in our church.

1. Listen first to the other person,
1. Do not interrupt.
2. Give the person who is speaking your full attention.
3. Wait to speak.
4. Turn a critical gaze inward.
 - a. Radically reform your own life by looking at how you speak to your neighbor, how you think about them, before you talk.
5. Do not use an oath or swear, say only "Yes" or "No."
6. Pray for others.
7. Lastly, most importantly: accept the Word (with a capital "W") that has power to save lives!
8. I have to confess I am a poor example of good church communication.
 - a. I often do not give you my absolute full attention, and I sometimes interrupt.
 - b. In my conversations with Peggy I have to wait longer than I do with you to see if she is finished speaking. Or I ask permission. "If you are done, I would like to say something about that..."
 - c. And because I am an aggressive person, I like to dominate conversations.
 - d. These things have always been a problem, but I delude myself and tell myself that I have improved some during the last 41 years.

C. Says James: I may look at my natural face in the mirror, but it is so easy to forget what I saw if I am only a hearer because looks alone are deceiving. Furthermore, you and I are prone to lie to ourselves.

1. If you remember the Mirror of Erised in the second Harry Potter novel, the frame of that magical mirror has some words etched on it that when reversed, read, "I show not your face but your heart's desire." Harry Potter sees his parents and family stretching back for many generations. Harry does not really understand how the Mirror of Erised works, but he becomes obsessed with it. He returns to it night after night. Albus Dumbledore, the Schoolmaster, becomes aware of this and informs Harry that the mirror does not predict the future; nor does it reflect reality, but rather the desires of the viewer.
 - a. I asked you recently to look in the mirror when you rise from

your bed and to tell yourself, "God is going to bless me today. Do you say that, or do you say to yourself something like, "Another day! I wish I did not have to go to work?"

2. That mirror of Erised is important. In addition to reflecting your desires, it provides clues into the nature of whoever is looking into it.
3. Voldemort, the personification of evil is unable to unlock the key of the Mirror of Erised, which suggests that only the people whose very nature is good may hold the key to the Mirror.

D. Likewise the language, the words of Scripture, reveal the true picture of what we really are.

1. Not all who glimpse the truth about themselves act on what they see.
2. The pages of the Bible fully reveal the image of God more perfectly than any mirror.
 - a. That image came into being through words, God's Word spoken in our creation.
3. God's Word of truth is implanted within our beings.
4. James has a special term for this, "the implanted word."
 - a. "**emphytos logos**" in the Greek.
5. Think of that small electronic chip which parents are able to implant into the family cat or dog, or a small child, so that they may keep track of them, prevent them from getting kidnapped.
 - a. We cannot control what our child thinks and does, but with the implant we know where they are at all times.
 - b. So also God does not control us, because James says we are under "the perfect law of liberty."
 - c. Still his implant of God's Word is a perfect gift of His love.
 - (i) This is attested to in the fascinating acrostic Psalm 119, The longest chapter in the Bible, 176 verses, each section begins the verse with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
6. God's implant is also the way our Creator's Truth gives birth to the whole community of faith...
 - a. our words, our language, how we think about one another, what we write, what we hear from the pulpit.

E. God's Word is inborn within me, it is "deeply rooted" in my essence, my "stuff."

1. But it is not an innate or natural quality of the soul, not instilled when you are born.
 - a. You receive it in meekness,
 - b. as opposed to that soul or mind which is so often tossed and driven by rampant human passion.
 - c. you must have a thirst and hunger for it.
 - (i) The kind words Maxine writes on the card she sends you,
 - (ii) how Jessica answers your phone call in the church office

II. SO I WANT TO LET LOOSE THAT IMAGE OF GOD THAT BECOMES DEEPLY IMPLANTED WITHIN ME.

A. I receive the imbedded Word through God's Spirit. It is unleashed in me through the Spirit and leads me where it wills.

1. Samuel Longfellow's great hymn, says
"Holy Spirit, truth divine, Dawn upon this soul of mine;
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*Word of God, and inward light, Wake my spirit, clear my sight.
...Holy Spirit, love divine, Glow within this heart of mine;
Kindle every high desire; Perish self in Thy pure fire."*

2. This is the Wisdom of the Spirit. Wisdom is the entity which is so closely tied to the activity of God's Spirit in the Old Testament,
 - a. likewise here in James.
3. This letter sharply contrasts a Christian in whom God's deep Word is dominant and one in whom personal passions rule.
 - a. In this respect James is much like the 5th chapter of Galatians.
4. In God's person there is peace and gentleness, peacemaking, as opposed to the soul that creates an alliance with falsehood, deluded beliefs.
5. A disturbed soul is quick to react, speak too much with angry words and injustice, especially toward the poor. .
 - a. In the most recent church I served, in Russellville, Arkansas, we memorialized a church member and session member who truly had a gift with language. John Coleman had a unique vocation to counsel youngsters who were three-time failures in foster placement, Often these persons were mentally ill. Mentally ill people often have difficult thought patterns different from yours or mine. But John Coleman saw each one of these as a child of God in whom he could draw out something good.
 - b. After his untimely death in midlife, his wife Cheryl continued his work of helping another group John deeply loved, kids who lived on the street near our church and attended school, the high school. We gave them food and clothing, and we called them "John's Kids." Others in the community also reached out to John's Kids.
6. James tells us to be "*quick to hear, but slow to anger.*"
 - a. As he sees it, any Christian anger which allows itself to come out in word or action is evil, motivated solely by sin!
 - b. I might say, "I didn't mean to say it, or I didn't intend for you to be hurt by it." But I can never take back what I said.
 - c. I can never "undo" the previous email I sent in a reactionary moment.
 - d. The greatest test of God's wisdom in you or me is a bridled tongue, controlled speech.
 - e. I have on a few occasions received an email from a member who is still unhappy with the church, whose bitterness has trapped him or her in the past. "Don't take it personally," I am advised by another church member. My reply is, "But it is personal, very personal. It is anger and unhappiness that hurts the body of Christ of which you and I are a member."
 - (i) An email can be a dangerous way to communicate: you write your note and send it without a second thought. The next moment you may regret it. But you cannot "undelete."

B. ***James takes us into the harvesting of this wisdom in daily action:***

1. Be doers of the word, "*being not a doer that forgets,*" for he/she "...*shall be blessed in (their) doing.*"
2. There are 3 or 4, maybe more, who have read and "know" the Word for every "doer" of the Word in any church.
 - a. I have read that what a pastor does the first 15 minutes after

- worship is as important as anything he says from the pulpit –maybe more important. I think that includes what I do the 15 minutes immediately before the start of the service.
- b. When I did a pulpit exchange in New Zealand, 5 minutes before we would start the service, the elders gathered in the pastor’s office and they each prayed for the pastor. What a lift that was! I have tried to do that in a couple of my churches here in the USA, but we are all too busy. As I entered the sanctuary this morning, I listened to how noisy we all were.
3. Teachers and motivational speakers tell us that our retention rate of what we HEAR is less than 15%.
 - a. If we write it down after we have heard it, our retention rate goes up significantly, depending on how often we read it again.
 - b. But if we go out and practice what we have heard, the amount we remember approaches 80%.
 - c. Come back next Sunday and tell me, I made a point to practice something you said in your sermon last Sunday.
 - d. Even more daring, give your pastor feedback: How do I use words? Do I use them kindly and with love? Or do I judge too much, am I negative?
 4. This letter utilizes language that reminds us specifically of the gifts of the Spirit in the New Testament. Notice how many of those gifts are mediated through the verbal medium.
 - a. Our author identifies “*this wisdom from above*” that controls our language, that is “*full of mercy and good fruits... without uncertainty...*” as “*the harvest of righteousness.*”
 5. George Bernard Shaw was a genius with his words. He had a great wit. “My Fair Lady,” is a re-make of Shaw’s “Pygmalion,” Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering intend to turn Eliza Doolittle into a socialite, or a Hungarian Princess by working on her Cockney accent as a result of a wager. This is at the same time a struggle between two rich bachelors and a poor street girl. But there is a problem: love gets in the way!
 - a. From Eliza’s perspective it is... *Words! Words! Words!*
I'm so sick of words!
I get words all day through;
First from him, now from you!
Is that all you blighters can do?
...Tell me no dreams filled with desire.
If you're on fire, Show me!
Here we are together in the middle of the night!
Don't talk of spring! Just hold me tight!
Anyone who's ever been in love'll tell you that
This is no time for a chat!” [pause]
 5. Albert Schweitzer, renowned organist, a pioneering New Testament scholar, and a medical doctor renounced his private life in Germany, left it all “to slave at the mission hospital buried in the jungles along the Ogowe River in the Belgian Congo.” When he was interviewed, Dr. Schweitzer told the BBC correspondent, “*I cannot change my world by myself, I lack the power. But I can alter how I see others as God sees them and to start caring for them if I do one thing to help or affirm them.*”
 6. This statement is a concise summary of the wisdom of James.

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And now may all God’s children say with kindness and love: “Amen!”

