

# CONNECTING CONVERSATIONS

Sunday, August 29, 2021

## A NEW THING: New Actions

### READ JAMES 1:17-27 (NRSV)

Two James play major roles in the NT – James the son of Zebedee (Mark 5:37, 9:2) and James the brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3, 1 Cor 15:7). It is the brother of our Lord referenced in James 1:1 who played a prominent role in the debate over the conditions by which non-Jews could be admitted into the church (Acts 15:13-29; Gal 2:1-14). The Letter of James is a general letter likely circulated among the growing number of churches. It's main form is that of diatribe where questions from a fictional and unnamed person are answered concisely for the sake of ethical teaching in the Roman Greco world tying teaching to moral practice. A common example of this emphasis is James 2:26, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." James is very much interested in a lived faith.

There is a progression of concentric layers as James makes his argument for moral action. The assumption in Jas. 1:12-16 is temptation – away from God and toward our own egos and desires. "Do not be deceived, my beloved (Jas 1:16). He affirms that every grace we extend comes from God first; that is unchanging. We can count on that. We were given "birth by the word of truth" (an echo of John 1?) so that we can become a "kind of first fruits of his creatures" (Jas 1:18).

In the next logical layer then, as a creature of God, we exhibit disciplined, gracious action: "slow to speak, slow to anger," ridding selves of various ungodly behavior and filling that void instead with the implanted word (logos – again, echo of John 1, "the Word"?) that has the power to save our souls.

Once we have affirmed God's grace within us and work to rid ourselves of ungracious thought and behavior then there is room for not just hearing the word but then doing it; grace translates into positive action for the sake of others. To stay with this the hearers are exhorted to "look into the perfect love" (Jas 1:25) rather than in the mirror at self – which we forget anyway. By staying focused on the perfect law (of love), then we become doers who act on that love.

As almost a postscript, James mentions briefly the tongue which he will address later in ch. 3. Moreover, he reminds of what John Wesley would call "social religion" which always has an eye on the felt needs of those in need around us and who are disadvantaged by the unequal power of this world. The opportunity for new action on the part of the church is ever around us.

### GETTING STARTED

- When we were in Kindergarten, we learned things every day that we still use! Think about a class that you had or something that you learned that you never used after that time. What happened to that knowledge?
- What do you do when one of your friends needs your help? What do you do when someone that you may not even know needs help?
- Jesus taught us that we are to help others. If we ignore that calling, that knowledge is worthless, empty. It is our job to act on our faith, to live it out. Think about some opportunities where you can act on your faith this week and make plans to do it!

### GOING DEEPER

- What do you think of a person who does what he tells others not to do? (Like a doctor who smokes after telling his patients not to smoke.)
- How is what you say related to the credibility of your faith (review 1:26)?
- James says in Verse 1:27 that God wants us to "look after orphans and widows." Do you think he means this literally, or should we interpret it in some broader sense??

### AND DEEPER STILL

- Why do you do the good you do? What drives that? What informs and reinforces that? Discuss in pairs.
- Reflecting on your life when you "lost your way" at some point in your life, can you remember what holy habits or disciplines might have waned about that same time? What did you learn from that?
- Wesley taught as James taught to stay close to the source through "the means of grace" which included regular worship, communion, prayer, Christian fellowship, Bible reading, acts of service. These empowered.
- Share what disciplines and habits have helped you most to stay close to God and gracious to others.

### CLOSE WITH PRAYER

Dear God, help me to stay close to you. Help me to be a "doer" of your Word today and every day. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PLANO

Join us Sunday mornings in person at 10 for Connecting Conversations with the Pastor in Room 200.