

Friday, January 5, 2018

Merely

Hebrews 13 - James 1

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:22-25

James is a pointed letter. As I read through this letter I am reminded that I have been saved to be sent. I have been given salvation by grace through faith in Christ. But that faith that saves needs to make a change in my life. James makes it clear throughout the letter that talking about faith and living out faith are two different things. It does not mean that my actions save me. What it does mean is that faith that saves me reveals itself in actions that reflect the work of God in my life. My faith has changed who I am. I am now a child of God, entrusted with His mission. It causes me to be quicker to listen and slower to speak. It causes me to be slow to become angry. It allows me to resist sin. It causes me to not just listen to what God says; but to be motivated by my faith to do what God says. My faith (given to me by God) has set me free from the power of sin. James will reveal in several ways in his letter that true, living, loving faith must by its very nature reveal itself in the lives of true believers by their words and actions. I cannot merely listen; I am compelled by my love for God to put my faith into action, doing what the Word of God says.

God, I need Your help in this. I am all too quick to be merely a listener and not a doer. I let fear and selfishness stop me from doing the things that You have prepared for me to do. I seek comfort from Your words but then do not let others know of the comfort I have found and I keep it for myself. Forgive me for the times I have only listened. Move my heart to regular and radical action! Amen.

Saturday, January 6, 2018

Mouth

James 2-3

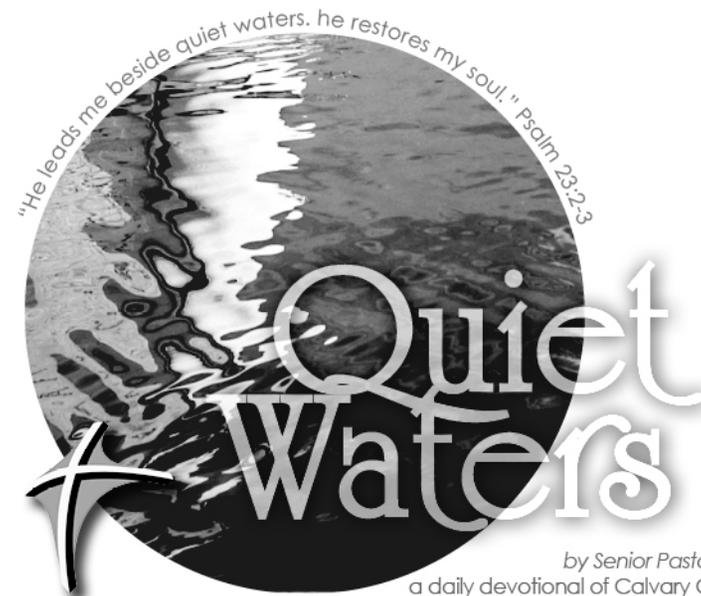
With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

James 3:9-10

I am struck with the power of these two verses. James continues to give the opportunity to examine myself. I love to praise the Lord for all that He is and all that He has done. I love to sing the songs that declare my faith. I sing songs that declare my surrender to His will. Does that keep my mouth pure? Too often I find myself tempted to speak rudely of another person or to spew juicy morsels of gossip that will cause me to look good. As I give myself over to the praises of God on my lips and as I hide His word in my heart, it is far less likely that I will speak rudely or harmfully to or about another person. I will be filled with the love of God for every person, since each has been made in the likeness of God. That fruit of God will reveal itself in me and the old fruit of my sinful nature will not be seen. I will be filled with fresh water that will wash over those I speak to or about and the words of my mouth will be pleasing to the Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer! It cannot be in my life that I would have praising and cursing coming from the same mouth. I will sing praise.

God, thank You for my mouth. Forgive the times that it bears the wrong fruit. I don't know why I am so quick to insult those who have been created in Your image instead of helping them find Your love. May Your praise always be on my lips and in my heart and may it show itself in all that I say and do. Amen.

January 1 - 6, 2018



Monday, January 1, 2018

Slow

Hebrews 5-6

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.
Hebrews 5:11-14

The author of Hebrews is speaking plainly to his audience, but he is finding it hard to teach them because they are slow to learn. They are stuck in immaturity. The immaturity that seems to have them stuck is a lack of understanding of the grace of God. Throughout the letter, the grace of God is a major theme. It is spoken of or alluded to in every chapter. The author is speaking to the Jewish people, trying to help them understand the fullness of grace that is available through a new and great high priest. This high priest is Jesus, who made a once-and-for-all sacrifice that would supersede the temple sacrifices. I realize that in my own life I can get swept into the immature thinking that somehow I can secure my own salvation and be found right in the sight of God. Salvation comes only through Jesus, the source of eternal life (5:9). The obedience that is spoken of is the obedience that comes from an overwhelming understanding of the love of God. My genuine salvation, secured for me by Jesus, reveals itself in willing and loving obedience, as shown in the example of my great high priest. I need to be quick to learn the truth of the grace my salvation reveals so that I do not keep slipping back into guilt and shame. Guilt and shame make me slow to learn and keep me living on milk.

Jesus, thank You for the forgiveness that comes through the cross and Your sacrifice. Thank You for being an example of what it means to have this grace in my life. Help me continue to move past the basic teachings and to be quick to learn all You have for me to learn! Amen.

Tuesday, January 2, 2018

Need

Hebrews 7-8

... but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.
Hebrews 7:24-27

The Jewish people understood the need for a priest. There needed to be an intercession made for sin. Someone needed to stand between righteous God and sinful man. The priest was entrusted with the responsibility of offering the necessary sacrifices. He would need to sacrifice for himself first and then for the people. This was done according to the Law. However, there is a new priesthood that has been established by God. It is a permanent priesthood found in Christ, the perfect sacrifice, who lives forever. He meets the need. It is the need for intercession. Jesus provides an eternal intercession for believers before the throne of God. He is able to do that as one who is exalted above the heavens and is absolutely holy and blameless. He is the Son of God who is also the King and the great high priest. His sacrifice of Himself is once and for all. It is the sacrifice that I need. It is the intercession that I need. He is the priest that I need. I need no other mediator than Jesus. He has saved me completely because I have come to God through Him.

Lord, "I need You. Oh, I need You. Every hour I need You." I sing the song and sometimes the melody is more gripping than the words. And yet I realize that I truly do need You for every moment of my day. I need Your salvation and I need Your intercession. Thank You for mediating for me in the heavens! Amen.

Wednesday, January 3, 2018

Shrink back

Hebrews 9-10

"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."
Hebrews 10:39

The author of Hebrews wraps up his comments to this point. Jesus is supreme and because He is, confidence is available to enter the Most Holy Place by His blood sacrifice. That should cause every believer to have a sincere heart in full assurance of faith and also should cause them to consider how they can spur one another on to love and good deeds. That is why the people of God meet together. Those who choose to live in isolation will not experience the encouragement that comes from the body assembled together. Followers of Christ should be very careful not to throw away the confidence given to them. They need to stand boldly and not shrink back and they need to be actively encouraging each other in this as well! Those who shrink back are destroyed. Those who believe are saved. I must remember how important it is to be encouraging every believer that I meet in his or her faith. I need to be spurred on and I need to be spurring others on in the mission we have received. I must be bold and not shrink back. I must realize and remind myself I am a man of faith—faith given to me as a gift of God. I must be quick to remind others as well. No shrinking back!

Father, please help me realize the importance of coming together to encourage others and to be encouraged so that I do not shrink back. Amen.

Thursday, January 4, 2018

Taken

Hebrews 11-12

By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
Hebrews 11:5-6

I love to read about Enoch and just imagine what his life was like. His story is here in Hebrews 11, in Genesis 5, and there is also a glimpse in Jude 14. Because he pleased God by his faith, he was taken by God! This amazes and fascinates me. Apparently Enoch walked so closely with God that one day God decided to take away the only barrier between them. I am not sure what that exactly means or what it exactly looked like, but I like it! I want to live my life in that way—that God would find my steps so closely in line with His, as I walk by the faith He has given me, that he takes me home to be with him. It is my passion, my prayer, and my hope. It is for each of us who have been rescued by faith in Jesus Christ the Lord. I realize that for me it will more than likely come when I breathe my last. It causes me to ponder a question. Was Enoch an exception or an example? Perhaps both. I do not get the sense that it is normative, by any means, for us to expect the miraculous event that Enoch had, but I am jealous of his faith. You understand that I mean that in a very good way. I am jealous of his faith in a way that spurs me on to great steps of faith myself, as I wait for the day God takes me into His presence and the walls of sin no longer have any place between us.

Father, increase my faith!! Let me, like Enoch, walk closely, so closely with you. Amen.