

“Unstained”

Proverbs 1:8-19; James 1:19-26

September 12, 2021

James 1:19-26 – *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”*

Introduction

- Manzetti’s story
 - On a first date. I make two mistakes. First, a nicely-pressed white button-down shirt. Second, ordering Chicken Parmesan at the restaurant.
 - Unwelcome stains always lead to issues, don’t they?
 - Yours might not have been a bright red, marinara stain on a nicely-pressed, bright white shirt, but chances are you, too, have had to exist in public with something that made you feel very exposed to the world.
- James’ epistle draws our attention to the word unstained,
 - Stands as kind of a synonym for pure and undefiled.
 - “When the New Testament speaks of “the world,” it usually means the “world system.” This is the fallen, sin-soaked attitude of humanity, which rejects God and opposes His wisdom. Later in this letter, James will describe worldly wisdom as bitter envy and selfish ambition. To be unstained by the world means that we refuse to be driven by our own appetites and desires and selfish goals. It means not compromising with a system that hates God. Just as James pointed out in James 1:5–8, the world's wisdom is not like God's.

The Epistle of James

- Rather odd book within the New Testament
 - The Gospels are, obviously, about the life of Jesus.
 - Most of the other epistles are letters, written directly to churches by Paul. There’s Revelation, then Hebrews, and, finally, James.
 - James, as I’ve likely shared with you before, is unique.
 - It is more like a class of books found in the Old Testament.
 - Called, “Wisdom Literature,” books of this genre are Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Job and Psalms.

- These books tend to spend less time focused on God’s awesomeness and more effort aimed at teaching us how to live in this world.
- Part of the problem with James in a Protestant setting, is that here, in our passage this morning, and in other places, James seems to work against an understanding of faith-alone salvation.
 - It doesn’t really.
 - BUT, in the Protestant Church we don’t hear James very much because James is all about works. His belief, if you have real faith, it isn’t just words, it’s actions.
 - We need actions in a world broken by our sin.
 - And thus, we need advice.
- We need that advice.
 - One of the things that we forget, from time to time, is that while God did create this world and He created it “GOOD,” the Christian belief is that we have corrupted it through our sin.
 - Because of our sin-nature, we are thoroughly enamored of the world when we should be quite cautious of it and in it.
 - Thus, wisdom literature, like James, gives us that info in short, pithy bursts, much like New Testament proverbs

Clear Advice

- There is, to be sure, a lot of great advice in here.
 - Taking both Proverbs and James together, one thing is perfectly clear, talk less and listen more.
 - Yesterday, at the Ladies Brunch – Russ.
 - Didn’t talk much so when he did, people listened.
 - That’s a man that knew the Wisdom literature of the Bible.
- But as wise as it is to speak less, listen and love and forgive more, I Want to focus our attention on the final verses of our reading this morning.
 - *“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”*
- What James builds to is this final, linking point.
 - Instead of talking about the Christian religion, how about you go out and do what I’m telling you to do?
 - And what is James telling us to do.
 - Well, first, to reach out to widows and orphans.
 - This is broader advice than we realize.
 - Widows and orphans were, in that society, the people living most precariously.
 - Much of God’s laws deal with protecting and providing for people in crisis and difficulty.

- His second piece of advice
 - Keep yourself unstained by the World.
 - Pure, blameless all relate to a word that should be on our lips quite a bit more often than it likely is –
 - Holiness.

Holiness

- God is Holy
 - Computers back in the day – clean rooms, chilled. Sterile environment.
 - Now, God isn't a computer, be He cannot stand in the presence of sin.
- Part of being a Christian is to adopt a sense of Holiness
 - What can I do to avoid sin?
- Avoiding sin
 - **Proverbs 8:13** – “The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.”
- Notice this
 - Evil is not only actions, its words, too.
- That is readily apparent in a world positively dominated by anti-social media.
 - They call it social, but it isn't.
 - Here's my point – Until we were provided a cloak of electronic anonymity, how many of us would've ever said aloud some of the things we've typed and posted to other people?

James Direction

- We should talk less while we care for people, especially those on the fringes of destitution and loneliness. We should also remember we worship a Holy God who calls us to remain unstained by the world.
 - Hear this now alongside some words of Jesus from the Gospel of **Matthew 22:36-40** – *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*
 - **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** – *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”*
 - **Leviticus 19:18** – “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

Conclusion

- Stains can sometimes be helpful though.
- That one I got way back at Manzetti's was.

- Because as nice as that young woman was all those many years ago, she wasn't Natalie.
- Turns out, our staining by the world can also be quite the positive thing if we'll but let it.
 - Instead of running home and hiding forever, we can come, every one of us, with our nicely-pressed, bright white shirts sullied by a crimson stain of rather large size on the front pocket.
 - Here, looking around and seeing scores of people, each wearing a nicely pressed, bright-white shirt, we can love and forgive one another until the Holy Spirit bleaches us white yet again and sends us out into the world to carry his Good News.
 - If you've been stained by the World, there's a place just for you.
 - And that's right here, in God's Holy and Everlasting Church.

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