

James 1:26-27 – ANTIOCH SUNDAY NIGHTS

Since the beginning of the year and our journey in the book of James we have seen.

1) Response to Trials - James 1:2-12

2) Response to Temptation - James 1:13-16

We are still in the section dealing with our:

3) Response to Truth (God's Word) James 1:17 onwards

- 1) Receive the Word with Purity
- 2) Receive the Word with Humility
- 3) Reaction to the Word = by being "doers" of the Word.

In Jesus' parables He also wants those who profess to be Christians to be doers of His word, but the Right DOERS!

Can I remind you of the parable of the 10 Virgins found in Matt 25:1-13 –

The foolish virgins maintained a form of religion. They are typical of a religiously deceived person. They had their religious ceremony shown by their lamps. They had maintained their quote/unquote "religious virginity." They were set apart unto religion.

They even accompanied the wise virgins – showing that they associated with those who were genuinely Christians. They were often in church, observed the ordinances. They performed all the duties.

But when the call rang out - "Behold, the bridegroom comes," and all of a sudden they realized they could not be apart of the bridegroom's arrival and celebration because they had no oil!

In other words, everything was on the outside and there was no true faith (no oil) on the inside.

We will come back to Matt 25 a little later.

Other teachings of Jesus include a cup that is only clean on the outside and dirty on the inside, a tomb that is only painted white on the outside, but filled with the bones of dead men.

Jesus addresses “religiosity” or for us today “Church-i-anity”

The NT Epistles address it, especially 1 John and James.

This is where we pick up tonight. There are those people who might think that just the doing of religious duty itself is enough.

They are into doing. I'm really gonna do this religious thing. James knows this and takes it a step further. It is more than just/merely doing!doer.

If you haven't already please turn to James 1 from verse 26.

James 1:26–27

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

1) Authentic Christianity

James is going to take our “doing” a little further, and shows it must be a doing from the heart, the attitude, the right motive that counts.

If anyone thinks himself to be religious – This is to have a subjective, mental, opinion of oneself – concluding that you are religious.

and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

Even though the ritual might be evangelical, even though the ceremony might be biblical, it's as futile as pagan idolatry unless the heart is right.

So it is not enough to just be doing, but doing with the right heart. It's a

deception to think that if you read the Bible, go to church, pray, give money, sing songs, that that is sufficient.

James helps us here by saying, “If you want to know if your doing is right? How is your speech, how is your tongue?”

If any man thinks himself to be religious and doesn't bridle his tongue, the whole thing is deceptive and useless.

Why the tongue? This is not the totality of the Christian's life, but the tongue is a great indicator of the heart.

Finish this verse, “Out of the abundance ... (of the heart the mouth speaks).”

Your lips reveal your heart.

If anyone thinks himself to be religious - *threskos* = the diligent performer of divinely ascribed duties of outward service to God. It has to do with the outward ceremony, external trappings, rituals, routines, liturgies and rites.

“Eusebeia” means godliness and that's talking about the heart. “Threskos” means religion and that's talking about the external form. So if somebody thinks himself to be religious, by just “doing with no heart”, he is deceived, and his tongue, his speech will show it. Corrupt unholy speech betrays a corrupt unholy heart.

Matt 12 - Out of a bitter fountain comes bitter water; bad tree – bad fruit.

Did you know that on average you speak 18,000 words a day? This would be a 54-page book – you will spend almost 1/5 of your waking life talking.

(3 min a page, 180min = 3 hours x 5 = 15 plus 9 for sleep)

If the tongue is not bridled (later in James – tamed), the heart is not transformed - no matter how many prayers, how much theological knowledge, how many church meetings or ministry endeavors.

In James 3 we will go into speech in more depth, but suffice to say that this speech/tongue encompasses a whole lot:

Not just angry words or cussing, but innuendos, sarcasms, discontent, grumbling, speaking about yourself too much etc.

this man's religion is worthless. Vain, empty, fruitless, aimless. It is building houses on sand, chasing the wind, shooting at stars, pursuing one's own shadow.

Interestingly this word is used in conjunction with idols.

Acts 14:15: (Talking to the crowd around the temple to Zeus)

“Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from **these vain things** to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.

So to give a paraphrase of this verse: If you are doing church, with wrong heart attitude, shown in your speech, your religion is idolatrous.

Firstly James wants to see an **Authentic Christianity**

Next

2) Generous (unselfish) Christianity

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Pure, undefiled, unstained – all synonyms to point out that this is the purest kind of worship, the purest kind of religion.

This can be summed up in one word – Love. John 13, "By this shall all men know that you're my disciples that you have love one for another"?

Genuine Faith / genuine religion, by whose standard? – look at the text – **“... in the sight of our God and Father...”**

Pure religion by God's scale, His measuring stick. Not graded on outward activity but an inward attitude and love. It doesn't matter how we measure up to someone else, or how we measure up in our own mind and opinion of ourselves. James has just said this – “You think yourself to be religious – you deceive yourself.”

James basically says, “We are only genuinely religious, when our lives are characterized by obedience and marked by love.”

“... to visit...” – This is not just to pop over and say “Hi!” This is a caring word. It conveys the idea of bringing love and bringing mercy, nurture, provision and pity.

It is from the same root as *episkopos*, which means “overseer”

Hebrews 2:6

6 But one has testified somewhere, saying,

“WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM?

OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE **CONCERNED** ABOUT HIM?

We know how Jesus “**Visited mankind**”

Luke 1:68

68 “Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

James mentions “... **orphans and widows...**” - They are only a segment of people that show a need for compassion.

Just as the tongue is not a total summation of a Christian’s walk. Orphans and widows are representative of the issue of love as the tongue is representative of the issue of a pure heart.

Through the OT in particular we clearly see that God has always been concerned with the fatherless and widows. Let me just mention some:

- Exodus 22:22 says you shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child.
- Deuteronomy 14:28-29, says that every third year demanded a special tithe to be collected from every Jew to care for the orphans and the widows in the nation.
- Deuteronomy 27:19, God demanded justice for the widow and justice for the

orphan.

- Psalm 68:5 says, "God is a Father of the fatherless and the judge of the widows."

God has a special heart for people who have great need and widows and orphans epitomize this needy people.

Helpless children are needy, they need to be fed, clothed, bathed, taught etc - they can "infringe" upon your "me time in your man cave".

Widows/widowers may also be needy and vulnerable, and require some sacrifice on your part. Just simple things can become an immense task for a widow.

Changing a light-bulb, tightening a leaky tap. Paul gives guidelines in 1 Tim 5 about who are the true widows and the port of call when a need is to be met.

Authentic Christianity displays a pure heart by the way we talk.

Authentic Christianity displays a pure religion by the way we care for those in need.

David Bosch in the book Transforming Mission calls this issue "one of the thorniest areas in the theology and practice of missions today."

Here now come **TWO** "thorns" in this issue.

I am indebted to a few books and some articles (Joel James/Brian Biederbach) for what I am about to share with you. By no means am I attempting to cover everything and answer all questions.

a) - To whom should this care be given? In the church and/or out the church?

b) - Who should be doing this? Individuals and/or the church as a whole.

I am going to shift into a slightly "Topical mode" for a while.

The context in James does say which orphans and widows. The context in James is within the church, v1 he addresses believers and look at chapter 2:2 – "For if a man comes into your assembly..." look at verse 15 "If a brother or sister is without clothing..."

A favourite verse for social justice / mercy care is found in Matthew 25:35–36

Jesus' words:

- 35 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;
- 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you **visited** Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

Listeners ask, "when did we do this?"

Matthew 25:40

- 40 "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these **brothers** of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.'

Again, a focus of ministering to believers.

Let's us look at the O.T.

I don't want to get into whether you are Dispensational – the church is not the new Israel, or if you are Covenantal.

Let's say the church is to replicate Israel and a nation. What did Israel do in regard to the socially vulnerable?

1) W&O in Israel, not the world like Moab etc. In fact, (without saying that the church and Israel are the same) the Acts church corporate did follow the pattern of OT Israel. They cared for the widows and orphans *within* the covenant community (Acts 6); in regard to widows, they did so following the narrow restrictions found in 1 Timothy 5 (only believers of a certain age and spiritual qualification were widows indeed). In other words, one's view of the relationship between the OT and the NT makes no difference to the debate.

James 1:27 should be interpreted to mean that the church was to help the widows and orphans *within* the covenant community, the church. The context supports that.

What about passages involving Solomon and Job? Remember they were *civil* leaders in their societies with corresponding social responsibilities and powers, they had a responsibility to the society, and did so as individuals within their capacity, guided by their beliefs.

2. *Strangers*. The lists of the socially vulnerable in the OT often include strangers, sojourners, or aliens. Does this mean that the covenant people were responsible to mobilise to care for the socially vulnerable outside of the covenant community? To answer this, we must answer the question, Who were these *strangers*? Clearly they were non-Jews, but it is also clear that this did not refer to people living in the Gentile nations surrounding Israel or to the ungodly Canaanites who lived in the land of Israel. In fact, God commanded Israel to kill or drive out the pagan Canaanites from the land, not to get together and relieve their social ills.

These strangers were Gentiles who had associated themselves with Israel and her God:

Ruth and Rahab are the classic examples of the *strangers* category, and Boaz's instruction to his workers not to mistreat Ruth is a great example of how to treat a stranger (and widow) who had aligned herself with the covenant community.

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What about the parable of the Good Samaritan?

Maybe I can ask a question: Is the parable of the Good Samaritan a mandate to a church like Antioch, to now organise patrols on the N1 freeway to prevent hijackings and to help stranded motorists? I suppose just asking the question answers it. That's not the purpose of the parable, nor are freeway patrols the mission of the church. The parable answers an individual question, who is **MY** neighbour?

b) - Who should be doing this?

Does that mean that individual Christians avoid extending love and mercy to socially vulnerable *unbelievers* in their lives? Of course not - Galatians 6:10

“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Would you help you unsaved neighbour who has been widowed? Of course you would. That's what Christians do. But that's not the question under debate. The question under debate is whether the church should create a line item in the budget for unbelieving widows? While Christians naturally show the love of Christ to hurting people around them, becoming a social relief agency for the world is not what the church-corporate is called to do.

So then, what is the mission of the church as a whole entity?

Tim Keller's church statement says: Quote – “Seeking to renew the city, socially, spiritually and culturally.”

To sum Keller up he answers the question – “What is the mission of the church? like this:

To a) preach the gospel and b) to do justice

He elaborates on b) (I will summarize)

The church should:

- Prosecute men who batter their wives

- Expose “loan companies” who target the poor
- Meet the needs of the handicapped and elderly in the neighbourhood
- Establish NPO’s to do this and more
- Rich Christians supporting poor public schools
- Temporary shelter for refugees
- Supply legal aid and housing
- Job creation, financial counseling

What has the church been sent in the world to do?

Explain Entity to individual and visa versa. Sum of the parts – whole.

All the parts light or heavy.

Let me illustrate: Just because the church as a whole is the bride of Christ does not make each individual a bride of Christ. And just because the Samaritan in the parable helped the man, doesn’t mean that the church as a whole should buy some ambulances and help cart people to hospital at every high-jack scene.

What did Jesus do?

What did He tell us to do?

What did the early church do?

What did Jesus do?

Jesus, not only preached repentance, He also focused on relieving the physical needs and the oppression of the economically downtrodden in Palestine. He healed their sicknesses, filled their stomachs, and dropped a coin in the outstretched hands of the poor. Which is true! Jesus did express mercy to the poor... on a personal level, but Jesus on the same hand started no orphanages, established no poverty relief funds, no low-cost housing schemes, no well-digging programs, and set no prisoners free (not even John the Baptist).

That doesn't mean that it's intrinsically wrong for Christians to be involved in such work. But it certainly makes suspect the argument that, based on Jesus' example, the church should make social action central to her mission. Personal expressions of mercy and church-organized social action programs are not the same thing: Jesus exemplified one, not the other. In fact, the purpose statements of Jesus' earthly ministry always focused on proclamation and on His substitutionary death for sinners:

"Let us go somewhere else to the towns nearby, so that I may preach there also; for that is what I came for." (Mark 1:38)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." (Luke 4:43)

In hopes of proving that Jesus' mission was equally proclamation *and* social action, social justice advocates draw attention to Isaiah 61:1-2.

Isaiah 61:1

- 1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;

What social justice advocates fail to give due weight to is the fact that the Isaiah passage focuses on preaching and proclaiming (mentioned 3x), and that the preaching to be done was clearly to the *spiritually* poor, captive, blind, and oppressed.

What did He tell us to do?

Matt 28 has to be seen clearly, these are some of Jesus' final words to his disciples. Matthew 28:19–20

- 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
- 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Teach, observe, baptize.

But wait a minute in John 20:21 Jesus says, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." – so exactly what Jesus did, is that the church should do.

Unfortunately some, like John Stott, who say gospel message and social gospel are QUOTE: "... like the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird..."

He interprets this statement to mean, "The Father sent Me to evangelize *and* to heal the sick and help the poor; therefore, I am sending you (church) to do both as well."

This is not the case. We saw from Isaiah that for the church, the proclaiming of the Gospel is the emphasis, and even for an individual who is meeting social needs, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul!" – THE GOSPEL Message must be the key.

John 20:21 means: as the Father authoritatively sent the Son (and as the Son submissively obeyed), so Jesus now authoritatively sends His disciples and we need to submissively obey. The issue is authority and obedience, not the content of the mission. In fact, much of Jesus' mission (for example: His substitutionary atonement) cannot be replicated by us.

What did the early church do?

If Jesus did mean both Social and Gospel – the apostles and early church missed that lesson.

Both Peter and Paul say they are commissioned to preach the Gospel. (Acts 10:42), (Acts 26:16-20)

Luke's summary of Paul and Barnabas' ministry in Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, and Derbe shows that evangelism for the purpose of starting a church and subsequent leadership training were unequivocally the focus of the early church's missionary labors;

"After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21-23)

What about the apostles' social action endeavors? In fact, the only church-organized relief projects mentioned in Acts and the Epistles took place *within* the church, including the various financial gifts sent by the Greek churches to

the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30; Rom 15:25-26; Gal 2:10) and widow care (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 5:3-16)

Think in history about the social injustice of much of slavery. The early church made no attempt to abolish slavery. In fact Paul taught slaves to submit. He returned Onesimus to his master Philemon.

What of William Wilberforce – am I saying that what he did was wrong – of course not, but Wilberforce was a politician not a pastor, he was a Christian, not a church.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s many churches were so hectically into this social relief that they quite clearly lost the plot, lost the church's mandated mission. (Salvation Army being a sample)

Quote: “Historically it appears that making social reform an equal partner with evangelism and theological training doesn't enliven missions; it kills it. We ardently believe that Christians can and should be involved in meaningful demonstrations of compassion everything from giving a sandwich to a homeless person to working at an orphanage.

While Jesus commanded believers to love their neighbors and to care for the poor, we don't see that the New Testament church (either by dictate or example) fulfilled that command by organizing itself to carry out social action projects directed at the general betterment of Roman society –

D. A. Carson's warning comes to mind: "I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy."

I want to be clear that we believe that there is room for legitimate, non-dominating mercy efforts by the church in the church and by Christians outside the church. However, what we are seeing today is a focus on social action that, at best, is *disproportional* to the New Testament's emphasis, and most times is something worse.

Then the gospel is moved into second place, and the social action becomes the message. And when the church puts the gospel second, the gospel has a way of staying second: eventually it disappears altogether.

ROME

(James/Biederbach) Rome was a sprawling metropolis with over a million residents, and its social woes were equivalent to or worse than those of any modern city. Poverty was rife and there was a massive gap between the elite rich and the desperate poor. Unemployment hovered at catastrophic levels, with up to two hundred thousand people in the city regularly (and all-too willingly) living off state-sponsored welfare. The living conditions in Rome's disease-ridden slums were abysmal; crime, prostitution, and slavery were a normal part of life.

To this city, Paul writes: "So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation ... "

He knew about the problem and personally cared for them, but didn't organize a church group or mission to do it.

In Summary

We as a church must keep our eye on the ball: What we *can* do and what we *must* do are not always the same.

We must train our people, then see them use their "time, gifts and talents" to serve the church.

We have a great opportunity for all of you individuals sitting here to do just this: On that Baby home. Get involved. When, God-will, He rescues more and more orphans then by all means, be a CHRISTIAN, "visit" them.

We have widows in the church too, be a Christian, "visit" them.

1) Authentic Christianity

2) Generous Christianity

VERY briefly:

3) Resolute Christianity

Back to the text in James:

"... and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

“... world.” Not the tangible matter – we drive on the highways (we pay the e-tolls 😊) we swim in the sea, we hike up the mountains – not that world, but its system, its life style, its philosophy, its culture, its mind-set, its morality and ethics, or probably its lack of ethics.

“Keep” is a present tense continuous. To continue keeping oneself. This statement is not rocket-science. It is Greek, but it is not rocket-science.

1 John 2:15 - Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

James is saying pure religion belongs to people:

- 1) who are authentic and show an inner control displayed in their speech,
- 2) who are generous and show a love for people who are in need and
- 3) who are resolute and stay away from being stained by the world’s satanic philosophies and culture.

So, the doer of the Word then is proven in three areas: The relation to self (speech); relation to others (needy); relation to the world (purity).