

THE FULL FAMILY CHURCH

DATE : 19 OCTOBER 2008

MESSAGE : JAMES (5) - The power of our words.

We are still busy with the wonderful letter of James, the younger brother of Jesus.

Last week we spent some time on faith and the words of Jesus that were echoed in this letter by James. He states it clearly that your works should flow from your faith. These kind of deeds should be those that reflect the works of Jesus. In other words obeying the Royal Law: "You should love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your energies. And the second to that is that you should love your neighbour as you love yourself."

James returns in chapter 3 to something that he already addressed briefly in the first two chapters. Let's read it.

James 3: 1 – 18.

When one reads this chapter, James seems to be busy with self control and especially the danger of our words that escape from our lips.

Do you realise how powerful the words are that you and I use towards people each day? People use words to declare their love to one another. They use words to encourage, to comfort, or persuade someone into a transaction. But people also use words to declare war, to break down someone's self esteem, to gossip, to lie and to deceive. We communicate with words. God Himself refers to the Bible, as the Word of God.

Yet, if you take a closer look at Genesis 1, you will see how God uses words. He speaks a couple of independent phrases and by doing that He creates the heavens and the earth and everything that are in it. We read "And God SAID, let there be light." And it happened! Through His use of words, He creates. Those were physical words that came out of His mouth. He thought about it, and then He uttered the words, and then it happened. It came about.

And because we were created in the image of God, we now also have the ability to create. In this way we create our own future. Through words. Our tongues become the pen by which we write down our own history. Because the things that we ponder upon in our hearts [our thoughts], bubble up and flow over our tongues to the outside in words and through that we create consequences. We create things or destroy things that already exist. That is the power of creating: building and breaking down!

Think about what happens when someone says something positive. You often create friendship. Yet on the other hand, think of what happens when you say something negative to someone. It usually has nasty side effects and often destroys relationships.

James uses the great image of the bridle in a horse's mouth to steer it. Also the rudder of a ship. That small rudder changes the direction of the entire ship when it is turned. And when the ship has turned, it has an unchangeable effect on the ship's route. The ship does not all of a sudden change direction. It happens gradually. But it has a great effect on the ship's navigation and route.

James also refers to a small flame that can set a whole forest on fire. This is our tongue. There are many examples of this kind of disasters.

And then he speaks about people's tongues that appear like chameleons. We change what comes out of our mouths as the occasion arises. With that same tongue we praise and worship our Lord. And yet, with that same tongue we destroy people, who were created in the likeness of God.

Then James says that we should consider this carefully, because when we look at trees bearing fruit in nature, a vineyard cannot bear olives, and an olive tree cannot bear grapes. In the same way a fountain cannot produce sweet water and brackish water. We have to act consequentially.

When we take an alcoholic beverage and we realise that it changes our personalities in a way that things that do not correspond with our natural traits exit our mouths, we have to realise that liquor does not do us good. We have to refrain from anything that brings about inconsequence. In the same way when we get involved in a steamy debate, we have to act in a consequent way. We cannot then all of a sudden change into dragons breathing flames and consume people. Especially not if we refer to ourselves as Christians. We have to be consequent.

But now we have to return to see who James is addressing in this chapter. We find it right at the beginning of the chapter. He says: "My brothers and sisters, you must not all strive to be teachers, because you should know that we, who are teachers, will be judged more severe." He does not say we will be punished more severely. He says, "judged". This refers to Godly judgement once we get to heaven. Then everything that we did here on earth will have to stand against the truth. And if it was not the truth, it will be burned away.

In the first place James speaks with the people that stand in a position of teaching. If we have to apply this here, then he says that those would be people like me as pastor, our Care Group leaders; in fact everyone that stand in a position where other people have to learn from us.

James states in this letter that we, who fulfil these positions, have to realise that we will be judged in a more critical way.

Why does he say that? Is he trying to introduce a new law? Is he busy putting us under the old law once more?

No. He is busy reflecting on the words of Jesus. Have a look with me at what Jesus says in Luke 17:1 & 2. Jesus had just finished a discussion with His disciples on the salvation of man, as well as man's conversion from things that will lead to death. Then Jesus says, "It is unavoidable that things will happen that will bring people to a fall. But hardship awaits a person that causes that. It is better for such a person to attach a mill stone around his neck and be cast into the sea, than to mislead one of these little ones [*a new convert or believer*]. Therefore be on guard."

Can you see? James deals here with those among us who have to bring the truth. We who stand in a responsible position to spread the truth about God and the living words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You might now think. But wait a bit, Anton. The Lord Jesus gave the great commandment prior to His ascension. And although He addressed His disciples at this occasion, the implication of this commandment applies to all of us. We who are His followers. We who call ourselves Christians.

You are absolutely correct. If you regard yourself as a Christian, in other words if you are reborn (you cannot be a Christian if you are not reborn) then you, in accordance to the command of Jesus, should also spread the Good News. Then it also makes you a teacher who has to teach another person. Then you are also a teacher of the little ones, Jesus refers to.

You now have to understand that Jesus instated the offices of the church, or the five-fold ministry. Paul quotes the words of Jesus directly in Ephesians 4:11,12 & 13, when he says: "En these are the gifts that He [*the Lord Jesus*] gave: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. His aim in this was to equip believers for service and for the building of the Body of Christ. In this way we will eventually all come to true unity in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God."

And how can we be sure that those are the words of the Lord Jesus? Because they do not feature in the four Gospels Paul says in Galatians 1:17 & 18, that the Lord Jesus Himself taught him in Arabia for three years, after his conversion, before he [Paul] returned to Damascus where the Lord Jesus called him in a wonderful moment to follow Him. After that Paul returned to Jerusalem. In this way we know that the Lord Jesus taught Paul in His great commandment to bring the Word to the nations.

It is as a result of this authority that Paul conveys the desires of the Lord Jesus and the church.

These five positions or offices: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are meant for the officials of the church. The leaders. But indirectly all of us who are Christians, are also standing in these offices as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. It is where we have an influence in our community when we represent Jesus and our faith through our works which James refers to previously.

James now goes further and define our responsibilities that are directly and indirectly in this function. Have a look at verses 13-18.

Can you see what James says here? Again he is busy to reflect on Jesus' words in His Beatitudes" "Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is right. Blessed are those that are merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers." These words appear in Matthew 5 from verse 3 in Jesus' own words.

It also hooks up will the nine fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22: love, joy, peace, patience, friendliness, goodness, faithfulness, humbleness and self control.

James warns us. He says that we are to understand that we are only humans and that humans can make mistakes. He warns that we should keep our jealousy and selfishness under control. We should counter it, because it does not come from God. This the way of the Evil One: to distract us from Jesus' good intentions with us and to lead us away from Him.

How often does it not happen that we say things to one another; things that are meant to bring division? We can so often use our infinite wisdom in a moment of absolute pride to try and compete to appear more wise and cute than someone else. We fling this blindly into a discussion to bring about division and pain.

And if you temporarily feel good about it and know that you have deeply hurt that person, you have to realise that you have belittled someone whom the Lord Jesus also loves dearly. You have uncovered that person's nakedness by not loving and respecting him/her the way you love yourself.

No, let us strive to cover one another's nakedness. Let us do it in a loving way. Let's not expose our brothers and sisters in public. If you, however, do differ in opinion and you stand in a position of authority, then go to that person in private and discuss the matter in love without judgment or from a gushing high and mighty arrogant position, speaking down on him/her.

If you want to call yourself a Christian, you first and foremost have to be reborn. Then you have to realise that you have a holy obligation to spread the Good

News. And when you do that, you have to do in love, having pity on those you deal with. With humbleness and total unselfishness.

How will the world now that you are My disciples, asks the Lord Jesus?

In that they will see that you love one another.

How will we act when we love one another? The way we deal with one another when we are supposed to love one another?

No. We will do as Jesus did: in love.

How are we to show this love?

Through the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, friendliness, goodness, faithfulness, humbleness and self control.

How are we to accomplish that?

By keeping our minds and tongues under control. By considering what will exit our mouths, because it is what escapes through our mouths that will inevitably change our futures as well as those whom we speak to. We will have to give account of that one day.

Amen.

Pastor Anton Smith