

Good News Daily

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Sunday, August 29

John 8:47-59 *Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."* (v.58 NRSV)

Jesus is in the midst of controversy, as he often was. He did not run from adversity, especially when there would be an opportunity to help those who challenged him understand who he really was. He held the greatest gift that anyone could give, and he wanted to give it to all.

Here we have one of the most important statements ever made by Jesus. If Jesus had simply wanted to imply that he existed before Abraham, he could have said, "Before Abraham was, I was." But "I am" was a title for God (Exodus 3:14), which means that Jesus was clearly proclaiming his divinity.

This was a claim that demanded a response. It could not be ignored. The Jewish leaders therefore attempted to stone him for blasphemy because he claimed identity with God. But Jesus is God.

Jesus' bold claim confronts us all. If we have considered Jesus less than God—perhaps someone second only to God, but less than God Himself—he is confronting us as well. He has a gift to give us; we have a choice to make.

1 Kings 8:22-30; Psalms 148, 149, 150; 1 Timothy 4:7b-16

Monday, August 30

James 2:1-13 *My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?* (v.1)

We tend, I suspect, to let ourselves "off the hook" by saying it is only natural for us to be more open to the affluent than to the poor. Perhaps we're impressed by those who have wealth and influence, and, by comparison, disappointed with those who have failed to "make it" in this world. We feel sorry for those who are shabbily dressed, but we show more personal interest in those who are clean, neat, successful, etc. Perhaps we feel that they can do more for us, or want to think they are more like us.

The words of James make us squirm. We are probably all at least a little guilty of showing favoritism to one group of people over another. He causes us to question our motives.

A footnote in my Life Application Bible sums it up pretty well: "The royal law (v.8) is the law of our great King Jesus Christ, who said, 'Love each other as I have loved you' (John 15:12). This law, originally summarized in Leviticus 19:18, is the basis for all the laws of how people should relate to one another."

2 Chronicles 6:32—7:7; Psalm 25; Mark 14:53-65

Tuesday, August 31

James 2:14-26 *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.* (v.17)

It is faith alone that saves us. Paul wrote, in Romans (3:28), "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works..." What, then, is James saying? Is he giving us a new gospel?

James is talking about how our faith is tested. Anyone can say they have faith, but saying it proves nothing. Although it is true that our good deeds can never earn us salvation, real faith results in a changed life that produces good deeds. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts.

James gives a couple of illustrations to make his point. Abraham was regarded by all Jews as the ideal man of faith, being willing to sacrifice his only son because he thought God had told him to do so. But James points out that it was in the doing that Abraham proved his faith. Likewise, Rahab proved her faith not by what she said but by what she did (Joshua 2).

Perhaps James makes us squirm once again as we consider whether our faith is evident in our good deeds.

1 Kings 8:65—9:9; Psalms 26, 28; Mark 14:66-72

Wednesday, September 1

James 3:1-12 *And the tongue is a fire.* (v.6a)

This time, James really makes us squirm! His teaching concerning the tongue reminds one of that old Southern expression, “Now he’s quit preaching and gone to meddling.”

James uses illustrations of how certain small things can have power far exceeding their size (the bridle in a horse’s mouth, the rudder of a ship). “So also is the tongue a small member, yet it boasts great exploits” (v.5).

And then there is that remark about fire. When I was a small boy, we had a large field of sage grass next to our house. I had tried to trample down the grass in the middle of the field to make myself a hideout, but I was having trouble getting the grass to cooperate. Then I had a great idea; all I had to do was burn away a small section of the grass for my hideout. Of course, the fire spread rapidly in all directions. By the time help came, the whole field had burned!

So it is with those nasty little things we say to another in secret. Maybe we don’t even mean any harm. But before we know it, our words have spread like wildfire.

1 Kings 9:24—10:13; Psalm 38; Mark 15:1-11

Thursday, September 2

James 3:13—4:12 *Who is wise and understanding among you?* (v.13a)

Is there no place we can hide from these scorching words of James? Now he questions our ambitious desires. He speaks of “selfish ambition” and the “bitter envy” that may have led us to the ambition in the first place. We thought we were just trying to “get ahead.”

If the television ads don’t get us, perhaps what our neighbors and friends have will. It’s easy to be led astray by the pressures of society and even sometimes by well-meaning Christian friends. We are told to “go for it,” “assert yourself,” “grab the brass ring.” In the world in which we live today, we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness before we realize what has happened to us.

But in today’s passage, James gives us some comfort as well. He tells us that there is a “wisdom from above” (v.17) that we Christians can have. It isn’t worldly cunning that can bring us material success; it is godly wisdom that we can acquire by being in relationship with God and studying Scripture. That has eternal consequences. James also notes that Satan can lead us astray. And, again, he gives comfort by reminding us that we can resist the devil and he will flee (v.7).

1 Kings 11:1-13; Psalm 37:1-18; Mark 15:12-21

Friday, September 3

James 4:13—5:6 *Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring.* (v.14a)

There is a saying that yesterday is a cancelled check and tomorrow is just a promissory note. The only day we have is today. People who are in Twelve Step programs (like Alcoholics Anonymous) know that they have to live “one day at a time.” James says, “If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.”

It doesn’t seem to me that James is telling us to forget about planning ahead. There is nothing wrong with having goals in life. What I get out of this is that we really can only count on today, and we should live every “today” in accordance with God’s will for us instead of being locked into long term plans of our own devising. Life is short. We shouldn’t be deceived into thinking that we will ultimately get around to doing the things God wants us doing today.

If our planning and our goal setting has been for the purpose of making us rich, James has an added warning for us. Instead of building up treasures for ourselves on earth, we need to be building treasures in heaven (sacrificing on behalf of others and thereby building eternally beneficial qualities into our lives).

1 Kings 11:26-43; Psalm 31; Mark 15:22-32

Saturday, September 4

James 5:7-12, 19-20 *Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord.* (v.7a)

James ends his letter with several other pieces of advice. Using the farmer as an example, he encourages patience on our part. The farmer has to be patient; he can’t force the crops to grow, but has to

depend on God for the right kind of weather. We should stand firm in our beliefs, and continue to depend on the Lord.

And, we shouldn't grumble. The Christian life is no guarantee against the problems that life brings. As a matter of fact, as we become increasingly sensitive to the things God would have us do and to the needs of others, life can become much more demanding. We should rejoice in being God's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) instead of taking it out on others when problems surround us.

Finally, don't neglect to bring one who has wandered from the faith back into relationship with God. That is what being ambassadors for Christ is all about. It can require a lot of tact in showing "tough love" to one who has gone astray, but God will give us the words if we'll give Him our will.

1 Kings 12:1-20; Psalms 30, 32; Mark 15:33-39

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