

Sermon by Canon Jim Holbeck at the Healing Service in St Andrew's Cathedral on Wed June 7, 2006

Reading: James 1:19-27. Topic: "Healthy Christian Living."

It isn't easy living in today's world with all its pressures and tensions.

The people to whom James wrote, were in a much more difficult world than the one we live in.

In this letter James writes to tell them how they could live healthy Christian lives in the midst of our adversity and even persecution. He spelt out for them how they could win victory in spite of all the pressures around them.

He reminds his readers that they had to take control of their lives and submit their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. GOD REQUIRES THAT WE BE IN CONTROL OF OUR LIVES. 1:19-20

Jas 1:19 *Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.*

a). In Listening And Speaking.

- When he talks about being *quick to hear*, he means being eager to hear, ready to receive helpful input.
- He uses the terms to be *slow to speak* and *slow to anger*. This is used in a negative sense in Lk 24:25, where Jesus said to the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, "*Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!* They should have heard and believed His message.
- To be slow to speak doesn't mean that one has to speak with a pronounced drawl. Rather it means that we watch carefully what we say.
- The passage here is similar to Eph 4:20-32, where Paul says about our speech that we should speak the truth (25), not giving way to prolonged anger and thus giving the devil a foothold in our lives (27).
- It means not to say anything that could corrupt another person but to say only the things that met these three criteria. i) it has to edify, ii) it has to be appropriate and iii) it must impart grace to the hearers. (29). Otherwise it would grieve the indwelling Holy Spirit (30).
- It means not letting inner feelings (*bitterness and wrath and anger*) give way to damaging speech (*clamour... slander... malice*). Kindness and forgiveness prevent such damaging speech (32).
- What damage has been done to you by people who didn't watch what they said to you or about you?
- The older ones among us might remember the notice in World War 2, "*Loose lips sink ships*."
- Inappropriate speech can be used by the enemy to bring hurt, pain, division and destruction.

b). In Controlling Anger. *20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.*

- We don't help the cause of Christ by giving way to angry speech.
- It can be a way of intimidating someone or bringing them under our control.
- But the Christian way is the way of love and bringing release into people's lives not binding them or destroying them.
- We need God's wisdom and His righteousness to have victory over our tongues for as James wrote later, *Jas 3:5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*
- Do you need to repent before God for the things that you said in anger that have damaged the person you said it to, and damaged you as well?
- If you have been guilty, then you need to confess it before God and ask for God's forgiveness in Jesus.
- Then you need to pray that they might be healed of the damage you caused them.
- You might need to ask their forgiveness as well.
- Or you might have been the recipient of evil, angry, poisonous, hateful words and you feel contaminated, hurt, angry, bitter and terribly sad.
- You need to do some forgiving and asking God to forgive you of the bitterness and to heal you of the damage of those words because words have power.
- *Prov: Life and death are in the power of the tongue*

2. THE ATTITUDES REQUIRED TO RECEIVE THE WORD OF GOD. 1:21

a). Ceasing from evil. *1:21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

- To be removed are *filthiness* (rhubaria) and *rampant wickedness kakia*. These are the things that God sees as deliberate and ongoing evil. Things that He sees as repugnant, and contrary to what He wants.
- If our minds are filled with evil or bitter thoughts we are not receptive to the word of God.
- If our hearts are not right with God and with one another we cannot receive what God would say to us through His word.
- If what we are doing or saying in practice is deliberate evil, we are not open to God's correction or blessing.

b). Receiving it in humility. 21. *receive with meekness the implanted word....*

- "Meekness" is a strong word. It was used of the breaking in of wild animals. It is strength under control.
- It is submissive strength. The strong person is the humble person who learns to receive the word of God in their hearts and lets it bear fruit in their lives.
- We need to get rid of all the rubbish in our lives so that God's word can take root and bring changes to our lives.
- We need to be good soil as seen in the parable of the Sower as Jesus said, *Mark 4:20 But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.*" Hear, accept, bear fruit.

3. OBEYING THE RECEIVED WORD OF GOD

a). Hearing AND doing. (22-25). (The word as a mirror into which we look.)

The word as a mirror. Two ways of looking into a mirror.

i). A quick glance which brings no change. (Glancing /hearing)

1:23 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. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like

- Like when we go out and have a last look in a mirror to see if we put on all the clothing we meant to put on and whether our hair if we have any, looks respectable. Just a brief intense glance but no more.
- You can do that with God's word. Just read it briefly and by the time you've closed the Bible you have forgotten what you read.

ii). A deep search to see what is there and how to act on it in obedience. (Searching/ obeying).

1:25 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.

- The word to look here can mean to stoop to have a good look at something. Eg., Peter and John and Mary Magdalene stooped to look into the tomb. *Luke 24:12, John 20:5, 11.*
- Eg., used of the angels not understanding the message of the gospel, longing to stoop down and to work out the answer to the question, "What on earth is God doing?" *1 Pet 1:12.*
- We are meant to be those who delve deeply into God's word and who then put it into practice.

b). Pure religion means self-control. (26-27).

i). In speech. *26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless).* We saw before that the mark of a mature believer is that he can control his tongue. The tongue of the person out of step with God is an unbridled tongue, a restless evil spreading poison.

ii). In concerned action towards others.

- True religion is not just focussed on oneself but in humility is focussed on the needs of others. *27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction,*
- The supreme example of humility was seen in Jesus. *Phil 2: 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, **he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

iii). In separating from evil. *and to keep oneself unstained from the world.* We have to be squeaky clean! No stains, no spots, no mixed or hidden motives, but open before God as we seek to love and obey Him.

As Peter wrote in getting believers ready for the coming of Jesus, *2 Pet 3:14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*