

## 'Not so among you: How then?'

---

*Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ*

*Stand firm in the faith; be valiant, be strong. Let everything you do be done in love. – 1 Cor.16,13-14*

---

Collect:

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people, that richly bearing the fruit of good works, we may by you be richly rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

**There is none holy as the Lord,**

there is none beside Thee;

neither is there any rock like our God,

there is none holy as the Lord.

Gary Garrett © 1976 Scripture in Song

Reading: **James 1, 19-27**

Sermon:

Dear friends, brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ

When the disciples argued among themselves about who of them was the greatest, Jesus stopped them and said something to this effect: "The greatest? That would be *the kings of the Gentiles*. But what of their greatness? Is it not that they '*lord it over them*'? And who are they who consider themselves most to be *benefactors* – that is, great as you want to be great -, are they not the people who *exercise authority over those around them*, who yield over them the force of power?" And then

he continues by saying: “Not so among you. *‘But you are not to be like that.’*”

Not so among the community of those who know and confess the Lordship of Christ; not so within the community of the redeemed, the place where reconciliation rules and the will to serve, where greatness is measured by the power to reflect the goodness of God revealed in the self-giving of Jesus Christ.

This ‘Not so among you’ is sounded here by James with regard to the ever so basic matter of speaking and listening and of becoming angry. What is common and widespread currency in the world in these matters ought not to be so in and among the community which belongs to the risen Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, another principle applies.

It should not be that we are slow to listen, like the world is, getting impatient with the viewpoints of others when they differ from our own and presume to be right to dismiss those who hold them.

Do we not need to hear, we who are still too often inclined to do just that? Who cannot, for instance, recall a time when they responded in anger or frustration to someone for failing to do or know something, only to learn *after* listening, fully and properly, that their reaction was unjust, unfair, unhelpful and probably deeply hurtful? And how, perhaps, the decision was then made to somehow try to justify the reaction, because *pride* wouldn’t let you say: “I’m sorry; I was wrong to say what I did, please forgive me.”

But we should be *quick to listen* and eager to hear what the other has or wants to say. Indeed, it is a grave failing if what we communicate to one another is that we don’t really care to hear what either is saying nor care whether we are listened to. Why? Because listening, that is, giving a sympathetic ear to the other desiring the truth whatever it be, is a space-creating device for sharing, for relationship to take place. Being slow to listen is destructive of such space and prevents it, it turns it into a combat zone of competing powers.

Let us be quick to listen, and not shy from the effort that this might require of us: If we listen but all the while think that we know better anyway, we are not listening.

It should not be that we are quick to speak, that we judge where it is not for us to judge (!) and condemn where it is not for us to condemn. Let us be slow to speak, because we know how to be thoughtful, having in the truth of our faith the means and the freedom to be thoughtful. This the world does not know. The world’s thoughtfulness in the last analysis suffers from having no beginning, rejecting as it does the fear of God, it is neglected and its absence is covered by quick speak – *words without knowledge*. Appropriate to faith is a certain process of thought: thinking in terms of what is true and what is not. And when this process of thoughtfulness goes before the act of speaking, it slows it right down, gives it the quality of being salt, and saves it from the foolishness of being found to darken things while believing to be enlightening them (as Job, to whom God spoke ‘*out of the storm*’: “*Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge?*” (Job 38)).

It should not be that we are quick to become angry. But such we do when ‘we’ is what matters most and insists on being served, when self-regard is central and demands its way. We think ourselves justified to be angry with another: But are we really? Becoming slow to speak begins here, by asking: What justifies our anger, towards other people or towards God, when at the bottom of it lies an injury to our ego, a demand that our will be done, that all things work together for good for ‘me’? The answer is: nothing, because it would have to make things truly right and it doesn’t; it *‘does not produce the righteousness that God desires.’*

Let us be slow to become angry, learn to sit on it when anger stirs, and wait with venting it; let us consider the patience and mercy of God towards us and what He has let it cost Him to redeem us

from sin and fear so that our responses may express the righteousness He desires (that we feel His anger and respond to what is not right in God-like ways).

Dear friends, the principle that ought to be at large in the new community is brought about by Christ through the Spirit's power. It involves us in saying 'Not so' to those principles that embody a different spirit, because if we don't reject them, they will keep feeding us with the spirit that is at work in them. We cannot grow in the right way if we feed on the wrong food: if we endorse, that is, principles that affirm what is morally wrong and justify evil, even though that evil may be so prevalent it is no longer seen to be evil but good.

Therefore, and to that end, we ought to do what James counsels: "*humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*" That is, recognise the food by which alone the new community lives, and eat *it!*

This hint to the '*word which can save you*' is crucial, because that is what enables us to walk: And we need to know how to walk and have the ability to walk before we can run. Before we can run with the new principle and reject the principles of moral iniquity and evil, we need to walk by the Word and the Spirit. Our attempt to run shall be as successful as our ability and strength to walk is developed. But this ability and strength to walk comes by the Word of Christ through the power of the Spirit.

That is why James, for the sake of living authentic Christian lives, says, 'Accept in all humility the word which has been planted in you – it has the power to save you! In a way he brings things full circle here, because it is with regard to the word of Christ in dependence upon the Spirit of God that we most need to, and most learn to (!), be quick to listen, slow to speak and even slower to become angry or irritable (scandalized!). When we are slow to listen to this word, smother what it says to us with our own intemperate words *without knowledge*, fail in our own words and works to respond to what we have heard, and when, dismissing God's anger at unrighteousness we indulge our own at what He says ( - when we are slow to listen HERE, when we are quick to speak HERE and when we are quick to become angry HERE - ), then we shall be Christians of the sort that attempt to run before they can walk.

The image that James uses is that of a person who looks into a mirror, seeing things perfectly accurately, but then '*after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*' This may seem like a strange image, because we can't imagine that anyone would actually use a mirror in this way. But that is exactly why it is a good image, because it is what we actually do when we are slow to listen to the word of Christ, when we hear on a Sunday morning only to forget immediately and for the rest of the week; it is what we actually do when we are quick to speak, that is sit in judgement over this word and rule in favour of our own wisdom against the wisdom of God; it is what we actually do when we are quick to become angry, when we take offense at God's anger towards unrighteousness and also therefore at God's remedy through Christ the Mediator, in judgment and grace.

Dear friends, let this not be true of us. Let us, rather, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. Then by the grace of God, seeing just how far we are from being perfect, that is Christ-like, we will instead of forgetting immediately turn to Christ in true penitence over our sins and seek by way of his grace and love for sinners the strength to live by his principles, so that we may prove the word that can save us in worship that is (will be) pure and faultless. AMEN

Lord God, we thank you that redemption through Jesus is true and sure and that through Word and Spirit you provide the means of salvation. Guard us from pollution by the world and from the opinion that we have true religion when we disregard what would show for it. Let your mercy and your grace free our wills to listen, speak and express anger in ways that make things right. Amen

- time of prayer / intercession – [ what concerns we have on our heart we pour out before God and seek in thanksgiving the gifts of His blessings;

we ask to discern His judgments and for a spirit of understanding and repentance, for mercy and an end to the spiritual ignorance whereby we fail to reject and abhor sin and wickedness;

we plead for the lost, the broken, the lonely, the abandoned, the persecuted, the suffering...;

we pray for the authorities and those in leadership, for our communities;

we thank God for His guiding and keeping, for all the ways in which we discern his helping hand;

we pray:]

***'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen***

---

*Now may the peace of God which passes all our understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

*And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN*

---