

The Fading Flower and Eternal Word

Isaiah 40:1-8

John 1:1-14

James 1:19-27

This past week while we were visiting in Illinois we went to a cemetery to try to find the grave site of one of Vic's relatives. As we were walking through, looking at the graves, many of them dating back to the early 1800's, and some even as far back as the late 1700's what James wrote here in this book came to mind.

James 1:11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass, its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

It is not just the rich man that James mentions here that will fade away. It happens to everyone, the cemetery is full of people who have passed, of people who are forgotten, who's memory has been reduced to a large gravestone with a name and some dates on it.

As we walked through the cemetery there were many grave sites that the family had brought flowers to, one such grave was completely surrounded by cans of beer, cowboy boots, arrows and deer antlers. Friends and family visit cemetery sites to honor the loved ones who have passed, they are not forgotten and had an impact on these peoples lives who are still feeling the emptiness their death had caused. But even these will one day be like the grave sites we saw dating back to the 1700's. They will be faded, obscure, hidden in a mass of new ones and forgotten in the corner as the generations pass on.

It makes one think about life itself, how fleeting, how fast it really is and how final is the end. We don't take anything with us, all we do is leave behind a memory to those who were around us, but even that too will fade as the generations pass and those who knew us die, we too will be forgotten into history, only being remembered by a few disconnected photo's and a series of dates on the family tree.

That may sound depressing, and to the world it is. For so many the grave is the end, we as humans try very hard to keep the memory of the passed loved ones alive because that is all that we have left of them.

But, those of us who have faith in Christ can go beyond that! Not only do we have our memories here in this life, we also have hope of being reunited at the end of the age to worship and praise God our Father together once again.

James 1:12 says Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Our hope isn't here on this earth, that we will leave a legacy that generations will remember. Our hope is on Christ, and the crown of eternal life he promises.

As we walked through the cemetery and looked through the newer graves a trend became apparent. The older gravestones would include the usual date of birth, and death but many of them included a quote from the bible, or if not a direct quote some phrase noting how the deceased is now with his heavenly father. The newer ones rarely had such, they had pictures of motorcycles, or deer, or airplanes etched into the stone. Celebrating the life that was passed, but no apparent hope for the future.

Our society doesn't want to face death, we have managed to clean it up I think. The older graves sites

were surrounded by nameless children, these people faced death constantly, it stared them in the face. Today we tend to not think of it, we have sanitized ourselves from it, we don't have time to think upon our lives, how quickly they pass and soon we to like the withering grass, or fading flower are passed. When we are faced with our own mortality, fear and depression can settle in. I think that is why we have tried so hard to sanitize the death experience, instead of thinking about what happens after death we focus on what happened during life. We believe that the person who passed went to a better place, without really thinking about it. No one wants to think of their loved one as suffering in the eternal fires of hell, but the reality is when we die there is only 2 places that we can go.

Death is real, death is certain, and all of this we have in life will fade and pass away. I think that it is actually healthy to think upon these things, visiting grave sites brings the finality of death to our thoughts. Seeing the forgotten graves reminds us how fleeting and temporary this life is, it is a sobering thought that should drive us to Christ. For He is the only thing that offers us hope that there is more to this life than motorcycles, beer, and arrows.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:24. Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefor run thus; not with uncertainty.

Live your life, and run this race in such a way that you would obtain the prize, the crown of life. James is a really good book for it is very practical in it's teaching about how one runs the race and what the life of that person should look like.

Continuing in verse 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights. With whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. He promises to give us the crown of life, he will not go back on his promise. This is our hope in death, this is what we strive to achieve. So that we may be the first fruits of His creatures brought forth of his own will through the word of truth.

Verse 19, So then, my beloved brethren, if all these things be true, if we are to be the first fruits of Christ, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

James is not putting forth a new idea here. This very thing is echoed throughout all of scripture, mainly in proverbs and psalms. I am just going to quote a few quickly here.

Psalms 37:8 Cease from anger and forsake wrath, do not fret it only causes harm

Proverbs 10:18-19 Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 14:17 A quick-tempered man acts foolishly and a man of wicked intentions is hated.

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Proverbs 17:27 He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.

We are to guard ourselves that we do not conduct ourselves like the world. Far to often people speak swiftly, react without thought, and let their emotions rule them. James is calling us Christians to react differently. Listen intently, patiently, and learn. React thoughtfully, making sure what you say is right,

and do not resort to anger for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God, which is actually our Goal. In our communication we should seek to glorify God, we should be seeking for his righteousness to shine through us, we need to guard ourselves that we conduct our lives in such a way.

If we turn over to Colossians 3, starting in verse 2 we see Paul also teaching us how we are to conduct our ourselves in this life. Starting in verse 1.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. In which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now, you yourselves are to put off all these, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

Verse 21 James tells us the same thing that Paul does, he says to Lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. We are to be swift to hear Gods word and lay aside anger, malice, foul language, lying and deceitfulness and conduct ourselves in such a way that we not only receive the teaching of God in our own lives but we live it out and produce it in our conduct.

Another thing to notice in this verse is that the implanted word is powerful, it has the power to save our souls. Things of this world will fade and pass away but God's word is eternal. Peter uses the same language that James did when talking about the rich man, but Peter equates it to all flesh and the powerful word of the lord is eternal. If we go to 1 Peter 1:22

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, And here Peter quotes Isaiah saying. because All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

The word of God is the power unto salvation. It is the eternal word implanted in our hearts. The word of God also drives us forward in our sanctification. Jesus in his prayer recorded in John tells us this. John 17:14 he says I have given them your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by your truth, your word is truth.

God's word is truth, it is powerful, it is necessary for our salvation, and for our sanctification. We must cast aside our sin, and our pride, and study God's word so that it may be implanted in our lives. We are not to read scripture just to read it out of some sort of empty requirement, we are to study, absorb, and make it a part of our lives. This very word has the power to save your soul, and to work in you sanctification.

James says in verse 22, be doers of the word, and not hearers only deceiving yourself. If we are in Christ, we should set our mind on things above, on Christ. Far too often people are hearers of the word

only and not doers. Our churches are full of people who put on a christian front on Sunday, and then revert back to who they really are on Monday. These people are deceiving themselves. The word of God is not implanted in their hearts, it just has a surface meaning and has not taken root. Paul said that if we are Christs we have died to self and live for Christ. This will be apparent not just when we gather on Sundays but in our life and conduct Monday- Saturday. We should check ourselves to see if this be true, or if we like so many others are deceiving ourselves. James describes this person in the following verses when he says in verse 23. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. This is the man who comes to church on Sunday, makes the outward appearance of someone walking in Christ, but when he leaves he does not retain that. He does not retain the word that was preached, he does not apply it to his life, he is a double minded man and unstable in all of his ways as James said earlier.

Reversely in Verse 25 we see a man who does not forget who he is, a man who applies God's word to his life. Jame says, but he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. This one will persevere, will continue in the faith, will have the word implanted on his heart and as Jame says back in verse 12. Blessed Is the man who endures temptation for when he has been approved he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.

It truly is only ourselves that we are deceiving. God can not be deceived, living a moral good life without faith and repentance will not deceive God into believing that you are worthy of the crown of life. He says that only his children will inherit the promises, and his children will continue in faith no matter the trials and persecution that arises. Continuing verse 27, James says that pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: To visit orphans and windows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. This is our faith working, compassion, love, and care for our brethren, and our neighbors, it is God's love working through us. If you do not have this love, then God is not in you and your religion is false.

Going back to what Paul said in Galatians, The fruit of the spirit is Love, Joy, peace, longsuffereing, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires, if we live in he Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

James is just saying the exact same thing in a very practical and easy to understand way. He is not saying that doing these good deeds will justify you before God, he is not saying that your religion should be built upon doing moral, right and doing good things only. But rather it is the outflow of those who are walking in the spirit, it is what your life should look like because you are Christ's not that you are Christ's because you do these things.

So in closing a few things that I want to make sure that we take way from this study today. First, is the reality of how fleeting life is. We must be about the work of God, spreading his word for it is the only hope that mankind has. Our lives are like the fading flower, and withering grass, all things pass away except God's eternal word. We need to be diligent in pursuing that which will last, focusing our lives on the only thing that can save souls and work in us for sanctification.

Second, is James exhortation for true saving faith. Not a type of faith that just that puts forth a front of Christianity, but a true, inward, implanting of the word of scripture, A life walking in the spirit. I challenge you to examine your own life and as Peter says be diligent to make your call and election sure. Do not be like the man who looks in the mirror and walks away forgetting who he is. The life of the believer is a life of faith, not just on Sunday but every day. To summarize quickly what Jame's whole point in this book is, you say you have religion, you say you have faith, then live like it, act like it, prove it.