

(PP1) Becoming human- giving glory x 39 Sunday 30 September_2018.

Background: show video link “Life’s First Cry” – BMS World Mission. (Afghanistan)

<https://www.bmsworldmission.org/product/subtitled-feature-video-lifes-first-cry/>

Text READ **James 1: 19 – 27. PURE and genuine religion as God sees it.**

JAMES the early church leader writes to God’s people scattered all over the known world. They are facing all sorts of trials and difficulties, but James still has a challenge to bring to them. He talks about attitudes and behaviour. His letter emphasises the importance of actions as well as faith in Jesus.

Verses 26 and 27 which we focus in on today – talks about the sort of “religion” that God the Father considers pure and clean, authentic and real. James gives **3 marks of true religion** and he is talking here using the word **THRESKEIA** or religion to mean worship/ spirituality – the external expression of what is in the heart.

- To have control of our speech (See 3)
- To visit widows and orphans – the poor/ powerless
- To keep ourselves unspotted from the world (See 4:4)

James is very clear that faith without actions is dead or as JESUS put it (Beatitudes – *by their fruits you will know them*). James is also clear that all too often we deceive ourselves about what is really going on in our hearts. “*God cares for orphans and protects widows – Psalm 68: 5* and we too should share this nature and practice.

Any worship we offer God with our lips is worthless and empty if we are not pure in heart, caring for the poor and powerless in practice and also in control of our tongues. (Not to be silent but reined in by Spirit).

James encourages God’s people to look into the mirror of God’s word and see ourselves as God sees us. We should go away to make changes. We are not to compare ourselves with anyone else (*Teresa of Avila: Never compare one person with another. Comparisons are odious*) but with the grace of discernment look at ourselves.

Do not fool ourselves (v21): the following does not mean a genuine godliness of heart:-

- Buildings that are wonderful and vestments that are amazing
- Reputations of high status and political power
- Talking about how wonderful we are and what we have done

James is clear that we should not judge one another or show prejudice but God the Father does know what is in our hearts – our inner spirituality.

2: 18 What difference does our “belief in God make”? James says we should love neighbours as we love ourselves (v*) and be merciful (v13) because God has shown us mercy.

FOUNDATIONAL VERSE in the whole letter (according to *Alec Motyer*) is ***1:18 By his own will he brought us into being through the word of truth, so that we should have first place among all his creation.***

God’s word is clear, and James exhorts God’s people to take it into their/ our hearts and change us. It is from the human heart that we show our true nature and our understanding of what pleases God. God knows our worship, our inner spirituality to be true and genuine if with his grace we:-

- Have controlled tongues not moving from anger, selfishness and jealousy
- Visit the poor and powerless in their difficulty and
- Keep ourselves unstained by the world’s values and practices.

The video we saw of our brothers and sisters work in Afghanistan challenged us – I hope – to show these marks of true heart relationship with God. Their love and words are on the ground with powerless people. They have not built large magnificent buildings or sought to be powerful in dress and behaviour. They have displayed God’s love.