

be at ease, can my soul be satisfied with the decisions that I have made; the things that I have done, the things that I have left undone in my life that day. I may be able to fool others into thinking that I am better than I am. I may be able to put up a good front. I may be able to display the appearance of propriety to others. But it is much harder to fool myself, because I know what happened in the inside. I know my heart. I know the thoughts that I said. I know the words that I muttered under my breath and nobody else heard. I must examine my life by the word of truth.

This can be an unpleasant thing. This can be a difficult and uncomfortable task. But the apostle James today encourages us to do this. He calls on us as believers to **examine ourselves by the word of truth, to see truthfully how sinful we are, to understand how gracious our God is, and to welcome his guidance into our lives.**

James wrote his letter to some 1st generation Christians who had lost their way, had become lazy and apathetic in their faith. He writes to Christians who weren't taking a honest look at how they were living out their faith. And so he writes in such a way to give them a spiritual reality check. He challenges them to examine their lives, and to live their faith.. The apostle James calls Christians to take a good hard look in the mirror of the law continually, to truly examine their lives, and not just hear what God's Word has to say, but we must do what the law says.

How do you measure up? We like to think we do pretty well. We like to think that we are good people. After all, we got to church today; we got the kids here for Sunday School; we even took in Bible Study. On the outside, we may look pretty good this morning. But as we examine the law more closely we are reminded of how spotted and stained by sin we actually are. The image that we have in our minds sometimes doesn't match what is actually reflected by the law. Just a quick look at a few verses from this first chapter of James and we have a better idea of just how covered with sin we are. ***19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent...*** As sinful human being living in a sinful world, we are constantly wading through the moral filth of this world. Sinful sexuality, selfishness, greed, vulgar language, drunkenness, anger, violence, hatred, are just some of the sins that we wake up to each morning. And they form this moral quagmire that we must trudge through each day and at the end of the day sin is just caked on us like a thick film of mud.

But of course it is not just this world's fault. By nature we are sinful inside. Each day this filth comes out of our own hearts, so filled with sin it seeps out of our pores like sweat and makes its way to the surface. In our sinfulness we are slow to listen, we are quick to speak. And our words are too often harsh or crude. The evil inside of us produces sinful thoughts, which often produce sinful words, and sinful actions. And as the shadows lengthen as the days go on our bodies and minds grow weary under the burden of the day and sin piles up upon sin. We become irritable, moody, we easily snap, we become frustrated and angry. We yell. We are rude. We are vulgar, mean, dishonest, and cruel.

How can we ever look in the mirror and like what we see? It is only because of our gracious God. He gives us his law to show us how dreadful we are without him. He gives us his law so that we may clearly see that we cannot save ourselves. The filth that covers us, the filth that comes out of us should result in him just giving up and discarding us into hell. But in his goodness he sent his only Son to trudge through this life and take away our sins, to pick us up out of the filth of this world and cleanse us completely, to wipe us clean in the waters of baptism, to make us his own forgive us and save us. He puts our hearts at ease. He calms our troubled soul and leads us through this life to undeserved glory.

In steadfast mercy and compassion our Lord deals so kindly with us. For unlike us sinful human beings our God is slow to anger and abounding with love. He does not change like shifting shadows. He does not wake up on the wrong side of the bed and get irritable with us as the day goes on, but he is steadfast in his love and care. Every good and perfect gift comes down from heaven as he takes care of us. And the greatest gift that he has given to us, besides his Son, is his word of truth. His Word is perfect and holy. It is complete and wonderful. Nothing needs to be added or subtracted. Thousands of years old, but God's Word does not need to be updated or changed. In it the Lord tells us everything we need to know about our salvation. He speaks of his law that rightfully condemns us and he speaks of his mercy and grace, which inexplicably saves us. And then he guides us with his unchanging will for our lives.

In his love for us our gracious God implants that word within us. He drives out the darkness and the filth that lies deep in our hearts with his word of light and life. This Word saves us, and changes us, and sets us apart. It creates the faith that we need, enlightens our hearts so that we may know and crave what is good and avoid and reject what is evil. And as that word of truth works in our hearts, as we grow in this faith that he so graciously gives to us, more and more we are enabled to scrape of that

film of moral filth that clings to us and with humility and thankfulness welcome the guidance that our God gives to us in his word.

How richly blessed we are. And yet sometimes we take this for granted. We become comfortable. We walk away from that mirror of the law and we forget what we looked like before God took hold of us. Filled with pride we grow careless and lazy. We still hear his word, but we don't take care to apply it. We hear and read his Word, but we fail to do what it says. We take advantage of his goodness and we abuse his grace. Knowing that he will forgive us many times we reach for the filth of this world and wallow in it. Instead of welcoming his Word, his guidance, we do nothing and again are bogged down in the sins of this world that so easily entangle.

My dear friends, the Lord has given us his holy precious Word. He has saved us. This is not because of things that we have done, but it is only because of our God's steadfast love and his undeserved grace. For despite our sinfulness and our disobedience he has rescued us, and cleansed us, and set us apart as his own. And he has given us words of guidance and counsel that free us from the sinful trappings of this world and lead to a life of satisfaction and freedom.

And so let us not only be hearers of this word of truth, but doers. Let us go back to the mirror of the law, daily confess our sins, and then gladly follow his will because we understand how good he has been to us. Let us be cleansed by his gospel and delight in his laws. Let us heed our Savior's call through the words of the apostle James and daily welcome his words of guidance. ***The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.***

At the end of the day, after we have trudged through this sinful world we can look into the mirror and know that though we are imperfect sinners, we have been made perfect in Christ Jesus. We can look in the mirror and be pleased with what we see because we know that we are covered by the blood of Christ. We have been cleansed and forgiven. When God looks at us he sees his son. When God looks at us we are holy and blameless and righteous, spotless and clean. We can rest with a peaceful soul and wake the next morning with hearts renewed and ready to live for our gracious God. Amen.

Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

September 9, 2012

St. Matthew's Danube & St. Matthew Flora Twp. MN (WELS)

Pastor Mike Kuschel

James 1:17-27. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. ¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Examine ourselves by the word of truth

- I. See truthfully how sinful we are
- II. Understand how gracious our God is
- III. Welcome his guidance into our lives.

How many of you looked in the mirror this morning? Probably all of us did. Some of us spent more time in front of the mirror than others. We stood in front of the mirror to fix our hair, to brush our teeth, to make sure that our outfit looked alright. How many of you forgot what you look like? Well today in the book of James the Lord directs us to look into a mirror of a different sorts and he tells us not to forget what kind of person we see when we look into the mirror of his law.

“At the end of the day I am the one who is going to have to look at myself in the mirror.” This is a phrase that is often used when a person is faced with a moral decision. And of course this phrase really has nothing to do with outward appearance. It has to do with the heart. Can my heart