

The World According to Jim “Beyond Anger Management” James 1:19-20

Introduction

- This past Wednesday the manager of the Double-A baseball team, the Wichita Wingnuts, blew his top over a called third strike. It was a first rate baseball tirade as far as tirades go. The manager Kash Beauchamp raced from the dugout, got right in the ump's face and began yelling and screaming. A few minutes go by and he pulls off his cleat and sticks it in the ump's face, I guess to let the ump know how much he stinks. Apparently Beauchamp didn't get the reaction he wanted so he then pulled his right sleeve down exposing his armpit, sticking it right in the ump's face. He pulled out his chewing tobacco and threw it at the ump's feet. Beauchamp then picked up his second cleat and slammed it to the ground. Dancing around without his cleats and in his red stockings he made his way to the dugout where he found two batting doughnuts and mockingly put them up to his eyes like glasses then slammed them down. He was beyond angry. It was a complete and total meltdown. I went to the team web site this week. Just to check it out since the story was all over the news. Ironically, the blog on the site is called The Nuthouse. The manager belongs in the nuthouse.
- Look at James. At face value that's all James 1:19-20 seems to be about. How to avoid angry tirades and meltdowns. Advice for angry baseball managers. *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* In other words, in your relationships with others be quick to listen. Do more listening than talking. Be slow to speak. Don't let your tongue run ahead of you and get the best of you. Be slow to become angry. Don't blow your fuse. Don't lose your cool. *Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger.*¹ By the way, all that is good advice. Sound advice. Biblical advice. Verses 19 and 20 are in some sense plucked straight from Proverbs. Do what James says here and your relationships will be a lot better. When you're tempted to stick your foot in your mouth. James 1:19. When someone's talking don't just think of what you're going to say next, listen. James 1:19. When the kids are driving you nuts. Step back. Don't lose your cool. James 1:19.
- But there's more than just tips for anger management and how to speak and listen. Hopefully you've learned by now that what the text says and what it means are two different things. Jesus says if your eye causes you to sin pluck it out. That's what he says but we all know that's not what he means. What does James mean when he says what he says? Why these words here? How do these words fit in with what James has already said and what he is going to say? Are James' words here nothing more than the Christianized version of an anger management class? Are these words just good advice for baseball managers and other angry people?

Transition

¹ Eugene Peterson, *The Message*.

I think **James 1:19-20** goes beyond anger management. Why? Because James' discussion of speech and anger is bookended by his mention of the Word of God. James' point? [Slide #2]

Proposition

- **Don't shut God's Word out of your life**

Transition

[Slide #3] I think that James has outlined for us here...

Organizational Sentence

- **Three behaviors that keep the Word of God from doing its intended work**
- In other words, don't let poor listening skills, don't let unrestrained speech, don't let unrestrained anger screw up the Word's work in your life. Three behaviors that keep the Word of God from doing its intended work. Three behaviors that shut God's Word out of our lives.

Transition

For the moment it's important you see I'm not just magically conjuring this from the text. If you leave here thinking "boy, how'd he get that out of those verses," that's not good. Remember, context is king. Context determines meaning.

Background

- In **verse 18** James concludes all of the stuff about trials and temptations by telling us that God is the giver of good gifts and not the giver of temptation. The greatest gift, the proof of God's goodness, is the gift of salvation. *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.* God gave new birth. Salvation. Which begs the question, how did that new birth come about? James says by the *word of truth*. Same thing that 1 Peter 1:23 says. *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.* So James ends verse 18 with this thought focusing on the Word of God.
- **Verse 19** starts a new topic of discussion. We're beyond trials and temptations. No more when the you know what hits the fan. *My dear brothers, take note of this* James says. Something new. But even though there's a change of subject there's not a complete and wholesale change of ideas. **Verse 19** picks up the theme of the Word of Truth, the Word, the Bible, and carries it on all the way through verse 25. Verses 19 and 20 fall within and so would seem to fit into that discussion of the Word of Truth as well.
- Look at **verse 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.* Notice it. The Word. In fact, James goes on to say in **verse 22** *do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*
- What James seems to be saying is something like this. The Word of God saves; verse 18. God gave you new birth through it. It's so incredibly important. Don't shut it out of your life. You can and do shut it out when you act these three ways, verses 19-20. Therefore, verse 21, get rid of all the stuff that keeps the Word from doing its intended work in your life and humbly accept it. And don't just listen to the Word, verse 22. Do what it says. Do you see how the line of thought goes?

Transition

[Slide #4] Let's zero in on verse 19. The **first behavior** that keeps the Word of God from doing its intended work. **Not listening.** James, I think, is concerned that Christians aren't giving God's word its proper place in their lives. The Word is everything. God will change your life through it. One of the hardest battles I have as a Pastor is getting people to crack open their bibles. Are you reading God's word? Are you spending time meditating on God's word? The Word can't do its work if you don't listen to it. And you can't listen to it if you aren't reading.

Main Points

- James says *my dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen.* James says for all of us to take note. Everyone take note. That's a command. Be quick, be fast, be swift to listen. Listen to what? Listen to whom? James doesn't say. No object is supplied. The implied object is the Word of Truth from verse 18. Sure it's good to listen to people. It's wise to listen to people. We don't listen to people enough. But the focus here seems to be on the Word of Truth. Christian should be quick to listen to the Word of Truth. In other words, poor listening will close your ears to the Word of Truth.
- How do you know if you are quick to listen? How do you know if you are a good listener? Chances are, if you are a good listener to people then you'll listen to God when he speaks. Listen to what **James Motyer** says. He says, "If we do not have an attentive ear in the ordinary circumstances of life, we do not become different people when we shut the door and open the Bible."² Or as **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** put it, "He who can no longer listen to his brother will soon no longer be listening to God, either."³ If you have a hard time listening to people what makes you think you'll be quick to listen to God when you read the bible?
- Very simply James' point seems to be that reception of God's Word demands a readiness to listen.⁴ When we open God's word we have to put our rabbit ears on. We have to expect that God will speak. We have to wait on God and we have to be teachable. There's a difference between reading for information or reading for pleasure and reading to listen. Without a readiness to listen, without waiting for God to speak we won't be able to hear the word of truth for our life. If the bible seems irrelevant the obvious question is are you really listening? Or maybe the better question is can you hear?
- Do you know what "white" noise is? White noise consists of all audible frequencies that we can hear, just as white light consists of all the colors of the rainbow.⁵ We are constantly bombarded by white noise; sounds of every kind that drone on in our heads. The hum of lights on rheostat. The whirl of the CD-Rom drive. The din of radio or television in the background. The sound of our breath whistling through our nostrils. Outside noises—tires on pavement. Inside noises—furnace fans. Technological noises—iPods and game boys. People noises like crying, whining children. Nature noises. Did you know that even the stars make noise that must be filtered out by astronomers? Multiply all the hisses, all the distortion, all the static by 10,000 and that's our world. For most of us silence is virtually impossible and unbearable. Have you ever been in a place of absolute silence? It's

² Motyer, p. 65.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 4.

⁴ Burdick, *Expositor's Commentary*, James.

⁵"Noise," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

disturbing. The pregnant pause in the conversation. The silent car ride. They're intolerable. And yet, if we were to take all of those noises away we still wouldn't be in complete silence. Maybe the most deafening noise of all is our thoughts. Sometimes I can't sleep at night because of the noise in my noggin.

- The cumulative effect of all this noise is that it makes us hard of hearing. We are slow to listen. One of the greatest challenges you face is the deafening noises of life that make you spiritually hard of hearing, that drown out the whispers of God.
- Jeremiah 6. *This is what the LORD Almighty says: To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it. 17 I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.' 18 Therefore hear, O nations; observe, O witnesses, what will happen to them. 19 Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.*⁶ He's speaking. Are you listening? Can you hear him?
- My challenge to you this week is to take thirty minutes three times this next week and just wait on God in silence. Open the word. Read a few verses and just listen. When was the last time you did that? Poor listening will close your ears to the Word of Truth.

Transition

[Slide #5] James also says *be slow to speak*. James has a lot more to say about speech in chapter 3. He's just introducing the idea here. The **second behavior** that keeps the Word of God from doing its intended work? **Unrestrained speech**.

- "The tribute was once paid to a great linguist that he could be silent in seven different languages."⁷ Some of us, we speak just one and our traps never shut up. And because of our unrestrained speech we lack understanding.
- In the Old Testament there is a connection between unrestrained speech and a lack of knowledge, or lack of understanding. The Old Testament Fool is a person who can't keep his pie hole shut and therefore lacks wisdom. So you find verses like Proverbs 10:19. *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.* And Proverbs 17:27. *A man of knowledge uses words with restraint.* There's this connection between few words, restrained words, and wisdom, understanding.
- I think that's what James is driving at when he says *be slow to speak*. Incessant talking implies we've got everything figured out. That we're through with learning. That we're not teachable. In James' mind understanding the Word of Truth is at stake. A continual talker, constantly running your motor, makes it difficult to hear what anyone else says and makes it that much harder to hear when God speaks.⁸ **Unrestrained speech closes your mind to the Word of Truth.**
- The question we need to ask ourselves is "are we doing more talking to God than listening?" Are we so busy telling God what we need and what we want and what's wrong that he can't get a word in edge wise? We want God to speak to us but often times we're too busy running our mouths to hear what he has to say.

⁶ Jeremiah 6:9-10, 17-19

⁷ Barclay, *The Letters . . .*, p. 65.

⁸ Burdick, *Expositor's Commentary*, James.

- Again, the challenge. Take thirty minutes three times this week and come to God and just wait on him. Don't presume you've got everything figured out; that you understand what he says or even what he wants you to do. Open the word. Maybe it's Psalm 119. *May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word. The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.*⁹ And be slow to speak.
Unrestrained speech closes your mind to the Word of Truth.

Transition

[Slide #6] The **third behavior** that keeps the Word of God from doing its intended work, according to Jim, is **unrestrained anger**. *Be slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* If baseball is our national pastime anger is a close second.

- Date. Aug. 21, 1990. Place. Riverfront Stadium, Cincinnati, Ohio. Umpire **Dutch Rennert** calls **Barry Larkin** out at first base to end the fifth inning. Reds manager Lou Piniella storms out of the dugout to argue the call. Piniella throws his hat down. He gets his angry face on and goes nose to nose with Rennert. Rennert ejects him almost immediately. And then, in a stunning display of anger, in my mind the most unbelievable display of anger in the history of base tirades, Piniella demonstrates why he's nicknamed Sweet Lou. Sweet Lou just loses it. He goes ballistic. Piniella pulls up first base and throws it. Up to that point, I don't think anything like that had ever been done before. Piniella goes back, argues some more. And then, not happy with his first toss, he walks back over the bag, now in short right field, picks the bag up and throws it again.
- Few of us visibly, on the outside, lose it like Sweet Lou. But every single one of us in this room has been just as angry on the inside. We freak out when the person ahead of us doesn't accelerate right away at a green light. We yell at the kids for the most trivial things. We're angry with the stupid customers. Out of anger we say things we know we'll regret. We lose our self-control. We throw things. We break things. And sometimes we go even further. We strike our kids, our spouse, our siblings, out of anger. We're just angry. And James says *be slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*
- James' point seems to be that the Word's work in our life, its work of producing righteousness in us, can't flourish in an atmosphere of anger. **Unrestrained anger closes the heart to the Word of Truth.** *Be slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.* It's the Word of Truth's work to produce righteousness in us not anger. "Human anger doesn't produce behavior that is pleasing to God."¹⁰ James wants to remind us the Word of Truth can't work in us if our hearts are closed off and shut down by our anger. Like rock hard soil an angry heart can't receive the Word. It'll bounce off and the seed won't produce anything. An angry spirit can never be attentive to what God's word says.¹¹ Proverbs 14:29. *Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.*
- And yet some of you are just angry and yet you wonder where God is in your life. You are seething over words said to you. Grievances done to you. Wrongs committed against you.

⁹ Psalm 119:130

¹⁰ Moo, p. 84.

¹¹ Motyer, p. 66.

And God is silent. And the anger is devouring you. [Frederick Buechner](#) writes, “Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”¹² James says **unrestrained anger closes the heart to the Word of Truth**. You’ll never hear God when you’re shouting at others. Even if the shouting is just in your head.

Conclusion

- All of us want to see the hand of God working in our lives. I believe there is a deep hunger, a deep longing to see God just do something, anything in our lives. God wants that too. James wants that. Sometimes we grow lax and we let patterns of behavior slip in that shut God out and keep Him from working. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry.

¹² Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (Harper, 1993); www.preachingtoday.com