



James 5:12 An Exhortation to Truthfulness! Palm Sunday, 2016

Text: James 5:12

- At first glance, this may seem a bit of an odd Text to work through on a Palm Sunday. :) But there is, I believe, a useful connection we can observe, and prayerfully learn from.
- Throughout James' epistle, a major concern was the sinfulness of speech, and therefore a key theme has been the Christian's duty to speak wisely, truthfully, and biblically:
 1. *Jam 1:19 - Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;*
 2. *Jam 1:26 - If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.*
 3. *Jam 3:5-6 - So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.*
 4. *Jam 4:11 - Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.*
 5. *Jam 4:13 - Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*
- The Christ follower is exhorted, by the Holy Spirit, to achieve some control over the body-staining, hellish, fire-starting tongue!
- In verse 12, the exhortation continues but this time the issue of swearing (or oaths) is dealt with.

James 5:12: What does it mean?

1. First, it should be noted how similar James' words are to those of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount:
 - *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:33-37)*
2. On this passage in Matthew, William MacDonald writes:

“The Mosaic law contain several prohibitions against swearing falsely by the name of God.

- **Lev 19:12** *You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.*
- **Num 30:2** *If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*
- **Deu 23:21** *"If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin.*

To swear by God's name meant that he was your witness and that you were telling the truth. The Jews sought to avoid the impropriety of swearing falsely by God's name by substituting heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or their head as that by which they swore.

Jesus condemns such circumvention of the law as sheer hypocrisy and forbids any form of swearing or oaths in ordinary conversation. Not only was it hypocritical, it was useless to try to avoid swearing by God's Name by merely substituting another noun for his Name. To swear by heaven is to swear by God's throne. To swear by the earth is to swear by his footstool. To swear by Jerusalem is to swear by the royal capital. Even to swear by one's on head involves God because he is the Creator of all.

For the Christian, an oath is unnecessary. His *yes* should mean *yes* and his *no* should mean *no*. To use stronger language is to admit that Satan-the evil one-rules our lives. There are no circumstances under which it is proper for a Christian to lie."
(Emphasis mine)

3. James's exhortation makes sense with this understanding.
 - "Impatience in times of trial is also manifested in swearing. Here it is not a question of profanity, or cursing, primarily. Neither is it a matter of taking an oath in a court of law. The practice forbidden is the thoughtless use of the Lord's Name or some other name to attest to the truthfulness of one's speech." -MacDonald
 - **Exo 20:7** *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.*
4. The whole point of swearing (or needing to take an oath) is to admit that we are **sinful**.
 - We are dishonest word-breakers, quick to lie, hedge, shade, or misrepresent, and therefore we need to bind ourselves via oath to someone or something greater to compel us to do what we said we'd do! THIS SHOULD NOT BE!
5. Although legal oaths (like in a court of law) aren't being condemned, the practice of **casually** using the Lord's Name (or that which He created) in an oath (swearing) due to our dishonest sin-nature is what is in view here.
 - *Note: Using profane language isn't in view here either. Scripture does condemn cursing however, some of which is blasphemous. Eph 5:4, Col 3:8*

Now, what does all this have to do with Palm Sunday you ask? :)

1. We see a connection, not so much to Palm Sunday, but to our general posture towards Christ in Western church culture. The events of “Palm Sunday” are as good as any to demonstrate what we mean...
2. About a week before His Resurrection, our Lord entered Jerusalem with great fanfare:

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt 21:1-9)

3. Historically, many if not most of the people in the city at this time have said “**yes**” to Jesus.
 - Undoubtedly, many in the crowd had seen His great works. They had heard Him preach. Some may have even tasted the miraculous bread and fish. (John 6)
 - They saw Him as a great prophet. Many saw Him as Messiah and coming King, and thus used kingly titles as “the Son of David” for Him. (Ps 118:25-26)
4. However, in the space of about four to five days, things changed...

*Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" **They all said, "Let him be crucified!" And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"** (Matt 27:15-23) (Emphasis mine)*

5. **Now all of a sudden, except for a SMALL handful of people, their “yes” had become a virulent, vicious, violent, “NO!”**
 - And here one can vividly see our **sin-nature** at its most sinful...willing to acknowledge the Son of God one day, consumed with prideful lusts and deceptions the next, to the point of denying the master, if not in word, in deed!
 - Jesus taught on this proclivity:

The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” (Mar 4:14-20)

Some Take-aways from James 5:12

1. Let us consider the words used: “But above all.”
 - Again, this verse speaks of our nature as people who are all too comfortable with **falsehood**. We must seek the opposite: the truth and nothing but the truth.
 - It can be said this way: “Above all, let us be **truthful**...let us be faithful.” This fits the overall context of James very well.
 - For if we are true, first to God and then to one another, swearing is not needed and the other sins and issues dealt with in James are gone! And if we are faithful, first to God and then to one another, then there would be no need to try to convince others of our veracity!
 - As John Gill wrote, “...Whenever there is an occasion for affirming, or denying anything, let it be done nakedly, simply, and absolutely, without any form of oath annexed to it; for whatever addition of that kind is made comes from evil, and tends to it, and is evil.”
 - **When the Christian speaks, so he or she will do or be...that should be our goal.**
2. Let us be careful not to swear falsely or flippantly by our Lord or anything He has made.
 - We are not God. We do not have the authority or power of God. Swearing by God in an unlawful manner yields us nothing but condemnation, or the **consequences** of sin.
 - Unlike the Apostles who said at times, “For God is my witness” (Rom 1:9), we speak no Scripture.
 - For us, let us simply say “yes” or “no.”
3. Let us be people of our **word**, especially when it comes to being faithful to Christ and His church.
 - **Beginning with Christ, let us do what we’ve said we will do. If we cry out “Hosanna,” then let us follow Him! If we declare “Jesus is Lord and King,” then let us obey Him!**
 - When we fail, let us repent quickly, and then follow through.
4. Let us consider the ramifications if we are unfaithful; to swear unlawfully is **sin**.
 - During the Triumphal Entry the people declared Jesus was the Messiah. They went on to unlawfully and sinfully condemn Him.
 - May we never be guilty of such sin, saying “yes” but denying Him by our **works**...
 - *To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. (Titus 1:15-16)*

Condemnation and Repentance

James, addressing Christians, warns them of falling under condemnation. This, in my view, isn't about salvation. Rather, this is about consequences.

Even among believers, sin has consequences. Being a person of falsehood will bring with it all sorts of drama and pain:

- *Prov 10:8-9 - The wise of heart will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin. Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.*
- *Prov 12:13 - An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, but the righteous escapes from trouble.*
- *Prov 28:18 - Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall.*

Let us be people of resolve and perseverance. Let us, regardless of circumstances, walk in integrity and faithfulness to Christ and one another!

And may our Lord, Jesus Christ, forgive our iniquity in this area. In Jesus' Name.

Amen.