**Religion that God Our Father Accepts**

**The Word**

Read together Jams 1:19-27

**The Big Idea**

James gives us a litmus test by which we can examine the authenticity of our “religion” before God. At the core, we are invited into God’s family and we are called to imitate our father in speech, care for the vulnerable, and purity of life.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. On Sunday we were invited into a time of self-examination. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul says: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.” What role should self-examination play in the Christian life? What habits of self-examination do you have in your own life, and what has been the fruit of that?

2. Discuss James’ statement in verse 20: “man’s anger does not produce the righteousness of God.” What role should anger play in a healthy spiritual life? Are there times when you’ve actually seen anger produce good fruit?

3. In the context of James mentioning orphans and widows in v. 27, we discussed some of the various forms that “the vulnerable” takes in today’s world. Is there a particular form of vulnerability (or a specific vulnerable person) that your heart is being drawn to in this season of life? If so, what might the specific call be for you?

4. It was suggested that one of the factors keeping us from pursuing greater purity is a church culture where we want to be thought of as “cool Christians” who are sophisticated and a little edgy and a desire to avoid being thought of as simple, naïve, or in any way legalistic. How do you respond to those comments?

**Neighborhood Question of the Week**

Sunday’s message mentioned going on a prayer walk and considering some of the needs or vulnerable people on your street. What needs or vulnerabilities are you aware of on your street/apartment complex?

**Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

 A. James 1:26-27 is a litmus test for measuring our “religion” (= faith in action)

1. It’s possible to be “deceiving ourselves” about our faith, but there is a true life that the Father accepts as pure and faultless.

2. So there is an importance in examining ourselves

 B. James gives us three litmus tests

 1. How we speak to others

 2. How we care for the vulnerable

 3. How we keep ourselves pure for God

C. It’s important to notice the family language in this passage (see v. 19 and 27)

 1. We are not simply being called to implement a set of behaviors in our own

strength.

2. We have been invited into God’s family as his beloved children. Our central goal is to look to our Father, experience his love and love him in return, and then grow to imitate him more and more. So the goal is simply to see the heart of our Father and become more and more like him.

I. Considering our speech

A. Consider how our heavenly Father speaks

 1. His word gave us birth (v. 18) and leads to freedom (v. 25)

 2. His words are always true, pure, good, right

 B. Consider how Jesus speaks exactly like his heavenly Father

1. “I don’t speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commands me what to say and how to say it.” - John 12:49

2. “No one speaks the way this man speaks” – John 7:46

 C. Do we speak like our Father speaks?

1. James’ focus is on restraining harmful speech

a. he uses the image of a bit and bridle (v. 26)

b. “Our tongues possess within themselves all the untamed vigor of a wild beast”

2. James is especially concerned with angry speech (v. 19-20)

 a. We should listen more than we speak

 b. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God

1) Anger is powerful and it can produce lots of results and get things done, but it doesn’t produce God’s righteousness in us or others

2) Consider Captain Miller’s restrained speech that diffused a chaotic situation in Saving Private Ryan

 3. “It's God’s kindness (not his anger) that leads us to repentance” (Ro 2:4)

III. Considering our care for the vulnerable (v. 27)

 A. Consider God’s care for the vulnerable (Psalm 146:6-9, 68:5-6)

Unlike other ancient gods who identified with kinds and mighty warriors, YHWH identifies with the lowly

 B. Consider Jesus’ life spent caring for the vulnerable

C. Do our hearts reflect God’s compassionate heart for the vulnerable?

1. It’s easy to spend our lives surrounded entirely by people of comfort, wealth, and privilege rather than spending our time with the kinds of people Jesus spent his time with.

2. Vulnerability takes so many different forms

3. Care for the vulnerable can take so many different forms (programmatic and structured ways and also organic and impromptu ways)

IV. Considering our purity in this world

 A. Consider our heavenly father’s purity

He is pure goodness with no trace of evil

B. Do we imitate our Father in this way?

 1. James uses strong language (Polluted in v. 27 and moral filth in v. 21)

2. Imagine the ocean polluted with all the runoff and bacteria after the rain

3. We can be polluted by sexual immorality, crude/crass language, materialism, triviality, etc.

4. Why don’t we pursue purity with greater passion and commitment?

a. One observation: We like the idea of being cool Christians who are sophisticated, nuanced, in the know, and we want to avoid any form of legalism or looking naïve, simple, and unsophisticated. So perhaps we engage too deeply in things we should avoid.

b. But what might we be missing out on spiritually by playing this both-and game?