**What Kind of First Fruit Are We?**

**James 1:19-21**

**Bro. Ricky Cunningham**

Let me just say publicly that I am so thankful that my son, Kory, and my daughter-in-law, Katie, have kids. Wow! What a blessing those kids are to me and Memish. I don’t think that Crider, Finley, Garnet, and Evie Kate understand this principle yet, but they owe their existence to their parents. Without Kory and Katie deciding to have kids, there would not be a Crider, Finley, Garnet, and Evie Kate. In other words, those four kids, my grandkids, had nothing to do with their birth. They are blessed kids that their parents are Kory and Katie. I can't tell you how many times they have been over to our house and one of them will do something (especially Crider) and Celisa will look at me and say that is just like Kory. Every once in a while, he will do something and she look at me and say, “Don’t say anything; he is just like you.” Little Evie Kate, God bless her, she is just in that stage now where she is turning flip after flip, cartwheel after cartwheel, all through our house. Many times, when I see her do that and see that little grin, I can't help but believe that is probably what Katie did when she was a little girl too. It is so neat to see Kory and Katie trying to parent them, stepping into their lives with their word, with their example because I believe it is dawning on Kory and Katie that those kids of theirs are actually a reflection of them as parents. I just want to publicly say I am so thankful Kory and Katie decided to have kids.

Let me also follow that up by saying I am thankful God decided to have kids. What we are going to talk about this morning ties in to who God is. As we begin verse 19, we can't forget verse 18, “Of His own will [talking about God] He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.” I know this is hard for a lot of us to grasp, but James believes what the rest of Scripture teaches, and that is ultimately you and I were not birthed into the family of God because of our will; we were birthed into God’s family because of His will. He wanted you and me to be a part of His family, and He brought us into existence just as He spoke the word when there was nothing and brought everything into being. Without Him speaking, there wouldn’t have been anything made that was made. By the same way, He spoke into our lives through the gospel and transformed us from a sinner to a saint for the very purpose that we would be a kind of first fruit of His creation.

I want you to remember that first fruit was very meaningful in the biblical world. When a crop was ready to be harvested, there would just be some of the crop that would be ready to harvest first, so the harvesters would go into the harvest and they would harvest that first fruit. When they saw that first fruit, it gave them an indication of what the rest of the harvest was going to be like. Do you realize that? God brought you into the family so that you and I would be first fruits. In other words, the people who are going to come to know Christ in the future, the community can look at us and know what the rest of the harvest of God is going to be like. Can I ask you this question? What kind of first fruit are you? If someone moved into our area, knew nothing about a Christian, and found out you were a Christian, what would they be like if they believed you were an example of what their life could be if they come to know Christ?

Throughout this whole message, I want you to understand the premise. What James is going to say next is so that we will understand we are a first fruit of God’s creation. Someone is going to see you and ultimately believe that is what their life could be like because they are part of the same family you are a part of. Let’s read James 1:19-21, keeping in mind the larger context goes through the end of this chapter. Because of time, we are going to just do three verses this morning.

**Scripture**

***“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”***

We are going to do a different format this morning than we normally do. Normally, we open up a book of the Bible, read a text, and we just dive into it, word for word, verse by verse. This morning, I think it is so important that we get the big picture, so I am going to give you the big picture before we start looking at the details. The reason I am telling you about it is because I don’t want you to look down at your watch in about ten minutes and think I did the whole three verses in ten minutes!

**First Fruits of His Creatures**

Based on the truth that you and I were brought into the family by the Word of God, according to God’s will, so that we would be a kind of first fruit, James wants us to know this. Who is he speaking to? He is speaking to brothers and sisters in Christ. He is speaking to the family of God. If you are part of the family of God, James wants you to know that every one of the family members should listen more, talk less, and stay calm. Why? Because the anger in you does not produce the righteousness of God. God wants you and I to understand that every situation we are in, every situation we face, whether it is a trial that is testing our faith or a temptation to sin, is an opportunity for us to respond with the same kind of action God would respond with, God-kind of righteousness. Because as a family member you and I have been made right with God, God wants us to know that every action we have, every reaction we have, should be a right behavior. It should mirror the righteousness of God that He has bestowed upon us. Because He is made us right with Him, we can be right with others. Therefore, knowing this is true, you and I should put away everything that is within us that contributes to moral pollution, moral filth that makes us dirty on the inside. We should get rid of it, put it away, and get it out of our lives. Anything externally that we are involved in that is any way related to wickedness or evil or sin, we should put it all away, and then receive with meekness. The picture of strength under control is the picture of a horse that is been bridled so we receive with meekness the Word that is been implanted in us. Why? Because the Word that is being implanted in us is able to rescue our souls, to save our souls, to move us further and further away from the image of Adam, and more and more into the image of Christ. That is the big picture.

**Doers of the Word, Not Hearers Only**

So that you and I understand how important hearing is, the next paragraph is going to say be a doer of the Word, not a hearer only. If you hear the Word and don’t do the Word, you deceive yourself if you are part of the family of God. Then, he is going to get us here next…James is going to say if you think you are religious and you can't bridle your tongue, you have deceived yourself. Your religion is useless; it is not doing you any good. Whoa! Are you ready for the details? This English phrase, ‘know this,’ translated into our ESV Bible literally means to take note of. It means to write down. It is the opposite of letting words pass in one ear and out the other. To be a first fruit of God’s creation, he wants us to take note. He wants us write this down. He wants you to let this sink in! Has it sunk in on you that God wants to use you as an example of His creation? Just as when He spoke everything into existence and when He examined it, He said this is good, God spoke your spiritual life into existence through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants others to see that what He did in your life is good. You need to listen more, talk less, and stay calm. Why? Because when anger is controlling you instead of you controlling it, James promises that what you are getting ready to say, or to do, is not going to picture or produce a God-kind of righteousness. I think if we examine this and turn it over and look inside it, James is saying if you are slow to listen and quick to talk, quick to get angry, you are going to sin every time. What kind of first fruit are you going to be? What kind of example are you going to be in your home, in your place of business, in the schools, in the community, and places of recreation? So, James says write this down. You need to listen more, talk less, and stay calm.

**Listen More**

How do you do when it comes to listening? I want to make sure you understand this. Because God birthed you by His Word, you have an ability that many people do not have, and that is the ability to spiritually hear from Him. You have the ability to spiritually discern spiritual things. That is why when Jesus was teaching in parables and He gave the parable of the soils, they come to Jesus and want to know why He is speaking in parables (by the way, there are four soil types and only one of those soil types is a believer, and that is the fourth one that brings forth the good harvest––the rest of those soil types that never bring fruit are not Christians, they are not believers). Now, this will be contrary to what some of us have been taught. Some of us have been taught that Jesus spoke in parables because He wanted to make it easy for us to understand spiritual things. But what Jesus said was that He spoke in parables because to some of you it has been given to hear, and to some of you it is not been given. Whoa, that is a shock! That makes you stop, but it also makes you realize that if we have been born of God, we have this ability to understand spiritual things. We have this ability to understand the things of God. This is why when Jesus gave that revelation of Himself to those seven churches in Asia Minor, He ends every one of His personal remarks to the seven churches with this: “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.” Right now I pray that you and I have the ability to hear and the ability to listen because, ultimately, what James wants us to understand is the same Word of God that brought our birth is the same Word by which God parents us, bringing us more and more into the image of Christ and further and further away from the image of Adam. Therefore, if I am going to look more like Christ, I have got to listen more. It has to be my first default in relationships. My default in my relationship with God is not for me to talk to God; my first default is for me to listen to God. What would happen if from this relationship that I have with God where I listen more to Him, I brought that into my relationship with my wife, my children, my friends, and my church members? Being in the community, what if I listened more? Why do I not listen more?

I am not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but here is what I think. I think every time I am at home, Celisa has to say, “Did you hear me?” Sometimes she says, “Are you listening to me?” Most of the time being under the control of the Spirit, she doesn’t say it that way, she will say, “Did you not hear me?” Why would Celisa believe I didn’t hear her? Why would she assume I wasn’t listening? In our relationship, when Celisa asks me to do something, if I do it she thinks I heard her. If I don’t do it, she thinks I didn’t hear her. She completely believes that I should not be a hearer only, but I should be a doer of her word. There is nothing wrong with that. Why do I sometimes not listen? It is because I am selfish. I am mean, overall, I am not selfish, but there are times in my life when I am consumed with whatever I am doing. And then she says something, and because I am doing whatever I am doing, I don’t really hear her, I don’t really listen. Does that make sense?

Was Christ selfish? How many times do we read in the gospel where He was wanting to go here, and then someone comes into His life and He drops everything for that person? That is what Christians do. You and I have the ability to not look at life from our own perspective, but to have a desire to want to see life from someone else’s perspective––first God’s, and then our spouses, our children, the people we work with, the people we work for, and our friends. It starts by listening, so here is what I have learned to do with Celisa. To make sure I get out of my world into her world, when she starts to talk I try to be a mirror that is not going to reflect my views onto her in the conversation. I am going to mirror back her views, or her beliefs on whatever she is talking about. So, if I am in a conversation with my wife, I am the mirror so from time to time, I have to stop and say, “Honey, it seems to me that you…” I don’t repeat it back word for word, but I paraphrase in Dexter language what she just said. Then I watch her, and she nods. I am not just listening; I am watching because when we talk, she doesn’t just talk verbally, she talks nonverbally. This is why I don’t have big conversations with her or anyone by text because words do not always say what they mean; therefore, I have to be a mirror.

Now, as I mirror back what Celisa is saying, she is getting a reflection of what she is saying and why she is saying it. It is a safe environment, she isn’t being critiqued, she isn’t being ridiculed, she isn’t being made fun of. I am not interrupting. The only time I interrupt is to ask a question, “Am I understanding?” Once I have been that mirror, I start validating. I start saying, “Honey, I see what you are saying. I understand how you feel.” I am now validating. She now knows I am listening; she has my attention. This is not about me; this is all about her. Then I move from validation to empathizing. Now, here is where it gets hard. When it comes to me and God, I should do everything He says, but when it comes to my wife telling me to do something, I do not always have to do nor should I always do what she wants me to do. Do you guys understand that? Here is what is important––I have come to discover that in conversation when I am listening, Celisa is not necessarily wanting me to do everything she wants me to do, she just wants to know I understand why she is asking. She wants to know where the 'what’ is coming from and why she is expressing it. It is so important for me not to just validate, but to empathize. Sometimes I will say this, “Honey, if I were you I think I would believe exactly what you believe and feel like you feel,” but then I always have to come back and say, “…but honey, I am not you.”

If I can be honest, and I think this is true in most marriages, the reason I have to listen more to Celisa is because I make assumptions based on the way I was raised and she makes assumptions based on the way she was raised. She was not raised the way I was raised and I was not raised the way she was raised. Does that make sense? In my marriage with her and in her marriage to me, we want to move away from our Adamic tendencies, from those tendencies that I have as a Cunningham. I do not want her to ever look at me and say, “Bobby,” because we know what the Bobby tendency is, what the Garnet tendency is, and every tendency in the Cunningham family. As a first fruit of God’s family, I can now be an example, and she can be an example of how we are moving away from Adam and more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. It starts by listening more because if we are not listening to the people we are living with and doing life with it is probably true that we are not listening to God, because when we learn to listen to God, we learn to listen to those around us. James says if you don’t want to come to a place of anger, where that anger takes control, if you want to live in such a way that you produce the righteousness of Christ in every situation, you have to listen more and talk less. That is hard for some of us. Some of us immediately talk. We don’t want to listen, we don’t want to understand the person we are talking with, we want them to understand us; therefore, we override them. Instead of building them up, we tear them down and that is not what James wants in the family. He wants the family coming together, listening more to each other, and talking less.

**Talk Less**

How do we do that? How do we do this slow to talk, slow to speak? He is not saying be silent. He is saying before you engage your mouth think about what you are going to say. That is the problem. Most of us don’t think, we just speak and then we say something and we wish we could take it back––but you can never take it back. That saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That is a LIE, LIE, LIE. Here is what I want to challenge every one of us Christians to do. Let’s think before we speak.

When I was at Saddleback, California, at Rick Warren’s church, I heard him say, “T.H.I.N.K. before you speak. Here is the first thing you need to ask yourself.”

**T**rue

Is it true? Is what I am about to say really true, because in the heat of the moment, some of us say things that are not true and we defend lies.

**H**elpful

Is what I am about to say helpful or is it hurtful? If it is going to be hurtful, do I really want to say it in this moment because in this moment I have just been listening to whoever poured out their heart before me? If I say something hurtful here, is that really what I want to do?

**I**nspiring

Is what I am about to say inspiring?

**N**ecessary

Is it what I am going to say necessary?

**K**ind

Will what I say be kind?

I had freshman agriculture class under Mr. Chaney. I don’t remember a farming principle he taught us, but I remember this proverb and I am so thankful I took ag class to learn it. Mr. Chaney, from time to time, would say to us freshman, “It is better to be thought a fool, than to open one’s mouth and remove all doubt.” I cannot tell you how many times you look foolish and I look foolish by the things we say because we do not think before we speak. The book of Proverbs says, “Where words are many, there is transgression.” The more you open your mouth, the more likely you are to say something you should not say. Please think before you speak. Then, stay calm. Stay calm. Stay calm! If in a conversation someone says to you, “Calm down,” don’t say, “I am not mad!” because you are mad. Oh, you may not be screaming, yelling, and throwing pots and pans, but you are mad. Sometimes, Celisa does not have to say a word, sometimes I don’t have to say a word for the other one to know we are mad. One of us will say, “What’s wrong?” … “Nothing!” Just the way you say “nothing,” just your eyes, gives it all away. I believe with all my heart that if I focus on her, and I focus on others and those around me, and I listen more and I talk less, I can usually stay calm.

**Stay Calm**

Anger is a human emotion. It is real. I have done a lot of study about anger this week, and what I understand about anger is that anger usually arises in us when we feel threatened. Whether for our personal safety, or something we believe in, for something we like to do, for something that is important to us––when those things start to be threatened we get angry. Sin takes place when the anger has control over us instead of us having control of the anger. This is why Paul tells us in Ephesians to be angry and sin not. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath; neither give opportunity to the devil. In anger, you defend yourself and you defend what is important to you. Many times, in defending what is important to you, you destroy the ones around you that you say you love. In that relationship, whether it is your spouse, your son, your daughter, your boss, coworker, a teacher, the parent of a team that you coach, a referee, the governor, the president, stay calm and think before you speak. It is our characteristic as God’s child to listen more because we understand life is not about us, but life is about Him and about others.

I know what you are going to say. You are going to say that Jesus got angry. Yes, Jesus got angry. It is in Mark chapter 3, verse 5. Remember when we preached through the gospel of Mark? Mark said Jesus was angry, grieved at the hardness of the Pharisees’ hearts, but read the passage. He did not unleash on them. He just healed a man. He did not let their hardness of heart keep Him from doing the right thing, which was healing the person who needed His help. Satan would like you to get sidetracked because of your anger. Yes, Jesus threw a lot of people out of the temple, but again, let me remind you of Mark. Mark said it was late in the day when Jesus got to Jerusalem. When He got to Jerusalem He went to the temple, looked around, and saw everything. What did He do? He went back to Bethany with His disciples. He slept all night, and then got up the next morning. How would things would be different if you learned to follow the example of Jesus and not do something in the heat of the moment, but calmed down? Stay calm. Think about your actions and weigh out if your action toward this person is going to reveal a right behavior because you are right with your God. Amen?

Next, James gives us a “therefore.” Can I be honest with you? My heart’s desire is to listen more, think less, and stay calm, so here is what James tells me to do, “Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.” The imagery here is agriculture. I am supposed to be a first fruit showing what the rest of the harvest is going to look like. So, if I want there to be this bountiful harvest of Christlikeness in my life, here is what I have to do––I have to clean the field. In our modern day, a farmer can plant the seed and let all the weeds come up, and then spray the field with herbicides and it will kill all the weeds. They didn’t have herbicides in the biblical day. If you knew you were going to go into the field and you knew it was going to be really bad, you would pull the weeds before you planted the seed. Does that make sense? We have some farmers who have farmed so long that some of the weeds have decided they were going to become resistant to that herbicide. You can see farmers out in their field in June and July hand picking weeds with their workers because they don’t want that weed to produce seed. If that weed produces seeds, then next year, they are going to have a problem. James is saying so that you can listen more, talk less, and stay calm, pull all of the weeds of filthiness and rampant wickedness out of your soul!

**Clean Your Souls**

We need to look inside of ourselves and deal with what we know is an area of moral filth. We are dirty on the inside. We are involved in things on the outside that are absolutely wicked, evil, sinful, and wrong, and then we wonder why we are more like Adam than we are Christ. It is because we won’t clean up our lives! James says to clean your soul, and then accept with meekness the implanted Word. Please hear me. What this means is there was a time that you and I were sinners doing our own thing. Then, maybe through the testimony of a friend, or an evangelistic presentation, or maybe we were in church service or a revival, we heard the Word of God, and the Word of God brought to us regeneration and new life and we responded to that new life by putting our faith and trust in Christ. That Word that God birthed us by didn’t leave us; it stayed in us. Here is what James is trying to say –– accept, yield to, the Word of God, because God didn’t just use His Word to birth you, he is using His Word to parent you because He wants others to see the reflection of Himself in you! This happens when you are in a trial or temptation, and those are the golden opportunities for Christ to reveal who you really are!

The reason James wants us to respond to God’s Word is because God’s Word is able to save our souls. If you have cut your teeth on the Apostle Paul, you are going to struggle with the book of James because James focuses more on what happens after you get saved. James talks more about sanctification and glorification. See, Paul, because of the Jewish threat to the church and because of people believing they could justify themselves with the law, Paul hammered that the only way a sinner could be made right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ alone by God’s grace. He talked about the moment of justification and knowing you are saved –– so that we in the Baptist church can confidently say, “I have been saved.” We can even take you back to that place and day! James does not do that. James does not want to go back to the moment of faith. James wants you to look at your life and realize that the very Word that brought you into a right relationship with God, that same Word is molding you into sanctification where you become more and more like Christ everyday and less and less like Adam. One day you can look to the future confidently knowing that one day you are going to be like Christ.

Therefore, I am going to listen to God more and I am going to talk less. In every trial and every temptation, I am going to stay calm, because I don’t ever want for a threat to me where I defend myself cause me to have a behavior that is not in line with who I am in Christ. If I just hear this, but don’t do it, I have deceived myself. James is going to bring this all together by saying if you can’t control your tongue (and many of us can’t) you just think you are religious; you are really not, because a true religion is useful and your religion is useless. See, I think James is trying to say what Jesus alluded to when He talked about getting to the heart of the mouth problem…it is a matter of the heart. James understands that our mouth ultimately reveals our heart, not whether or not we are right in the situation, but whether or not we are right with Him. Many times, when we are not right it is because we are not right with Him. In your relationships, you cannot be right with her until you are right with Him. You can’t be right with him until you are right with Him. You can’t be right with them until you are right with Him.