

07/01/2017
More Cities And Towns

I think this is the 3rd week in a row that we have answered questions about cities and towns. If we knew what maps were anymore, we could sure use one for help....

- _____ 1. What city was Zacchaeus from? (a) Bethany, (b) Bethlehem, (c) Jericho, (d) it doesn't say.
- _____ 2. Peter was in what city when an angel told Cornelius send for him? (a) Damascus, (b) Philippi, (c) Joppa, (d) it doesn't say.
- _____ 3. In what city was Cornelius when he sent for Peter? (a) Caesarea, (b) Corinth, (c) Thessalonica, (d) it doesn't say.
- _____ 4a. What city was the home of Rahab the harlot who helped the spies. (too easy for choices)
- _____ 4b. What city was the home to Philemon and Onesimus? (a) Philippi, (b) Caesarea, (c) Thessalonica, (d) Clydetown.
- _____ 5. In what town did king Saul massacre 85 priests? (a) Gath, (b) Gaza, (c) Bethel, (d) Nob.
- _____ 6. What was king Saul's hometown? (a) Gibeah, (b) Jabesh, (c) Bezek, (d) Gilgal.
- _____ 7. What prophet hailed from the town of Tekoa? (a) Hosea, (b) Amos, (c) Habakuk, (d) Micah.
- _____ 8. What was the site of Moses burial place? (a) Paran, (b) Jericho, (c) Beth-peor, (d) Ai.
- _____ 9. In what town was the witch that Samuel consulted? (a) Jezreel, (b) Conshohocken, (c) Gilgal, (d) Endor.
- _____ 10. What place did Jacob and Laban part company? (a) Mizpah, (b) Seir, (c) Bethel, (d) Succoth.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark
Phil.4:11

07/03/2017

No Playing Favorites

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism" (Jas.2:1).

Did you grow up hearing the term, "teacher's pet?" If you were in a family with several siblings, did you think that one brother or sister got preferential treatment? I am sure that as parents, we did all within our powers to see that we treated all of our children equally. I used these examples because showing favoritism seems to have been a problem within various segments of society forever. Just to make the point clear, it has always been a problem that has been addressed in the scriptures... Check this out from the book of Exodus; "You shall not show partiality (favoritism) to a poor man in his dispute" (23:3) A few verses later this is written; "You shall not pervert the justice to your needy brother in his dispute" (Vs 6). The Mosaic Law insisted that justice be blind and that there be no favoritism when a judge settled a dispute between a rich man and a poor man. Unfortunately, judges were sometimes less honest, as they were prone to take bribes from those who could afford to offer them.. Those folks were always the rich ones...

As we come into the Christian age, the gospel often attracted the poor, helpless people who many times lived on the margins of society. Within this framework, James devotes the 1st thirteen (13) verses of chapter two (2) to this very topic. Large numbers of Christians were poor, making them more vulnerable, so the problem had to be faced. There is also a certain amount of irony in all of this.... It wasn't just all about the rich who took advantage of the poor, but the poor showing deference to the rich. James saw this as unreasonable..."Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes walks in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (2:3-4). For a few days, we will look at how favoritism sometimes rears its ugly head. Hopefully, we will see that there is no space for favoritism in the Lord's church....

Have a great start to your week... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/04/2017

Choosing To Be Impartial

"Listen, my brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?" (Jas.2:5).

As we continue with this theme of partiality and favoritism, the words of James echo those of Peter and Paul. Peter, when he was at the home of Cornelius said and wrote this; "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism." (Acts 10:34). Paul said essentially the same thing in his letter to the Romans with this statement; "For God does not show favoritism" (1:11).

It would seem that Peter and Paul's writings were about ethnic (Jew/Gentile) partiality, while James' is based upon the amount of money that one possessed.... It was sad to note that James felt the need to write what he did, because though most of his readers were poor, they favored the rich. They deferred to them, gave them the best seats in their assemblies, and admired their fine clothes. As far as James could see, his Jewish Christians were acting irrationally. One of the traits that I admired about my parents was their impartiality when it came to race or national origin. I remember that in the 50s and 60s, my mom would drive many miles out of her way to pick up Spanish families for church services. My dad always talked favorably about our wealthy family doctor, and when he visited with him, they would go out in the garden and chat for a time like they were old buddies.... If the poor in James' churches expected favors from the rich, just because they were rich, they were "judges with evil thoughts..." (2:4). The poor need to consider that God had chosen them to be rich in faith. If the rich exploited the poor by dragging them into courts, are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of Him to whom all Christians belong? (Vs 7) For Christians to show favoritism or partiality on any level, especially riches, is to choose the honor of man over the honor of God. The choice to be impartial is ours...

Have a wonderful day... Do good and give God the credit... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/05/2017
The Royal Law

"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,' you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (Jas.2:8-9).

In Mk 12:29-31, Jesus said that there were two (2) laws that served as the underpinning of all God revealed through Moses... I am sure that you can quote those scriptures, but in paraphrasing them they say we are to love God 1st and then love our neighbor as ourselves. It was a citation from Lev.19:18. In addition to its appearance in the epistle of James, it comes up in other places in the NT... (Rom.13:9, Gal.5:14). In perhaps Jesus' most well known parable, the good Samaritan, this teaching illustrates and confirms the importance of treating a neighbor well, even if he is a stranger who is injured along the side of the road... As you see in today's scripture, James adds his endorsement to the mix for the practicing of Christian morality by calling it the royal law. He clearly stated that no Christian could practice the royal law while showing partiality, as in James' case, mostly over rich vs. poor. To be partial meant you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors... If that sounds like pretty strong

talk, it is! Maybe James meant for Christians to obey this royal law because it came from the king himself... No one forces a king to obey. He obeys willingly because he has decreed the law himself. Here is our real lesson of the day.... Christians are to love their neighbors as themselves because they have inhaled the teaching into their lungs and made it a part of their own hearts. No one needs to force them to obey... They obey because they love. The law simply prescribes what a believer already wants to do. We do, don't we?

Have a great day... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/06/2017

The Law Of Liberty... A Wonderful Paradox

"So speak and so act like those who are to be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas.2:13).

First of all, lets get something straight about laws... Simply by their nature, laws restrict what a person is allowed or able to do. The law of gravity certainly has a restrictive nature on man's behavior. The government has imposed laws that restrict everything from how fast we can drive a car in certain areas, to thievery, murder and other stuff... God's laws restrict romance to just one's spouse, and speaking truth and kindness. By their very nature, laws prescribe behavior. If we take that at pure face value, prescribed behavior is the exact opposite of freedom, therefore, "law of liberty" or "law of freedom" as described in today's verse has a built-in contradiction... Ladies and gentlemen, we have a oxymoron here... While James previously used the "royal law" to describe love for one's neighbor, he now uses "Law of liberty" to entail all that God wills for His people to be and do. This being said, how can James consider God's will to be a law of freedom? Here's where the paradox that I used in today's title comes into play. James expresses in paradoxical form what is maybe the most basic truth that governs life, and the paradox is this: freedom can only be truly experienced within the context of restraint... Confused? Jesus addressed that same paradox in a little bit different form when He said, "he who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to eternal life" (Jn.12:25). To be quite honest and frank, the quest for unrestrained freedom is at the very core of the misery in the world today. God is completely free, but in His freedom, He chose to send His Son to us, to redeem for Himself a people of His choosing. God's freedom and His love for humankind are of one complete piece. When we obey and behave under God's laws, we are in essence, "partnering up" with Him... How wonderful is this.... I'll complete these thoughts tomorrow

Have a great day.... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/07/2017
A Law For Embracing

"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the scripture, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF, you are doing well... So speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas.2:8 & 12).

In his epistle, James introduces two (2) laws.... The royal law in 2:8, and the law of liberty in 2:12. Both of these laws were and are designed to help us to live a better life. When people embrace these laws, God's laws, they are not chaffing restraints. They are the stuff that gives color, goodness and joy to everyday living. They make our lives better here, and set us up for the next life... The law of liberty needs to be an embraced law. It has to be embraced because it is prescribed by a wonderful, loving and gracious God who desires that all have life, both in this world and for eternity. In the Mosaic law, when God said, "Thou shalt not," He meant, "do yourself no harm..." In Moses' own words, God's laws and statutes are "for our good always..." (Deut.6:24). As weird as this may sound, obeying and embracing God's laws actually make people free. I am presently reading a book entitled 1776 by David McCullough. It is a wonderfully written account of how the thirteen (13) colonies planned and fought the war that gained us our freedom from Great Britain. It was all about freeing ourselves from the restraints of another country, and living as an independent and free country. Once we won the war, we were able to write and enact our own set of laws that insured this freedom. When James explains the royal law and the law of liberty to us, they are laws of freedom. Both of them call upon Christians to be partners with God through obedience, and here's the point we should not miss... Being partners with God in obedience, it is to embrace God's law, not simply obey it. In the hymn, "His Eye Is On The Sparrow" (Mrs.C.D Martin & Charles H. Gabriel 1905) I am reminded of the refrain....

"I sing because I'm happy
I sing because I'm free,
for his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me"

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/08/2017

When You Die At The Palace....

Today's quiz is about some famous palaces in the Bible. Home sweet home was pretty gaudy for some folks in the Bible... As always, have fun...

- _____ 1. Whose palace had a hand that wrote on the wall? (a) Nebuchadnezzar, (b) Belshazzar, (c) Cyrus, (d) Clydeous
- _____ 2. What king of Tyre sent materials for David's palace? (a) Joab, (b) Abinadab, (c) Hiram, (d) Ahio.
- _____ 3. Who burned the royal palace of Israel with himself in it? (a) Zimri, (b) Baasha, (c) Nadab, (d) Abijam.
- _____ 4. What king went mad while walking on the roof of his palace? (a) Nebuchadnezzar, (b) Belshazzar, (c) Cyrus, (d) Darius.
- _____ 5. What nation's envoys were taken on a tour of Hezekiah's palace? (a) Persia, (b) Babylon, (c) Greece, (d) Philistine.
- _____ 6. Who took 13 years to build his palace? (a) Solomon, (b) David, (c) Nebuchadnezzar, (d) I made this up
- _____ 7. Who had a coveted a vineyard close to Israel's royal palace? (a) Mordecai, (b) Uriah, (c) Michael, (d) Naboth.
- _____ 8. Who served as a cupbearer in Persia's royal palace? (a) Joseph, (b) Daniel, (c) Nehemiah, (d) Ezra.
- _____ 9. What king was assassinated in his own palace by Pekah? (a) Pekahiah, (b) Amaziah, (c) Menahem, (d) Jotham.
- _____ 10. Who had a palace with marble pillars and couches of gold and silver? (a) Solomon, (b) Ahasuerus, (c) Cyrus, (d) Darius.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day... Love mark
Phil.4:11

07/10/2017

That Faith And Works Thing

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?' " (Jas.2:14-16).

That old "bugaboo" about the value of both faith and works (deeds) has been echoing through the halls of time since Christianity had its genesis... Previously in this short letter from James, he proclaimed the necessity of faith being followed by works. No doubt, he had remembered his brother Jesus' parable about the two (2) builders ----- one wise and one foolish. The wise builder was like one who heard the teachings of the Lord and did them... The foolish builder heard, but did not obey, and we all know the result shown in the parable of what happened when the storm hit. Salvation by grace through faith did not preclude doing what Jesus commanded... James has already told his audience in the letter to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers, (1:22) because to be only a hearer was to deceive yourself. If you remember, the teaching said that the one who only heard was like a man who looked at himself in the mirror, then went on his way and forgot what he looked like. (Vs 1:23-24). James insisted on this! The hearer who forgets, who fails to do, is like a person of faith that has no works to his or her name.... At the risk of being insistent, James said that faith, if it is the faith that saves, will be followed by doing what God has told his people to do. He puts a cap on it by writing, he will be blessed in what he does... (1:25). Although I did not reinvent the wheel with today's devotional, sometimes we forget that God's teachings are sometimes starkly simple... We can be assured that the Lord blesses those who do the work He has commanded them to do... Though the wheel will not be reinvented, faith and works will be examined a bit more closely tomorrow.

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/11/2017

You Can't Have One Without The Other

"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (Jas.2:17-18).

I found it interesting that the epistle of James used the word "grace" only once (4:6) in the whole book. Nevertheless, he was thoroughly committed to the doctrine that salvation was the result of grace through faith. James also knew the same things that the apostle Paul did, and that was

the necessity that obedience to God is not erased when someone places his or her faith in Jesus Christ... For Christians then, the two doctrines ---- salvation by faith and the necessity of works ---- exist side by side... A Christian neither earns salvation by the works he does, nor does he or she dismiss the responsibility of putting faith into action. In essence, both of these things are true. Salvation is by grace through faith, and salvation is by the sinner's response to God in obedience. James faced a mindset that justification had nothing to do with works and rejected it saying and appealing to the inseparability of faith and works. They are so close that it is literally impossible to speak of one without the other. Paul and James both deferred to Jesus' teaching in Matt.7:17. "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit." James amplified on this by writing, "Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?" (3:12). Lastly, the practicality of James shines though to make his teachings viable and important. He appeals to the practical part of the issue when he speaks about the matters of caring for those in need. Do we say, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," or do something about their physical dilemma and come to their aid? We would love for them to come to Christ in obedience, but they certainly will not if we leave them hungry and cold. James' word ring true and clear in today's verses... "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do..." Faith without works when compared to faith shown by works is a pale imitation of the faith that saves....

Have a great day.... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/12/2017

Abraham As The Role Model

"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did" (Jas.2:21-22).

Advertisers have been using celebrities to shill for their products for many years.... The logic here is that they figure we will use the product if it is endorsed by someone who has become a icon of sorts to us. Abraham was such an icon to the Jewish people, so James becomes a great advertiser for his teachings about the relationship between faith and works. Knowing their reverence for Abraham, considered to be their ancestral father, James makes his point loud and clear. It took plenty of faith in God for Abraham to even consider taking his son Isaac up to the alter on Mt. Moriah to be sacrificed. The offering of human sacrifice was practiced among the people of the earth in those days, so perhaps God's demand on Abraham was not quite as outlandish as it may seem today, but it was his son. We must remember that in their old age, Sarah bore a child, "the son of promise," and it was through him the Patriarch's name would be preserved and God's promises would be accomplished. It was another thing to actually go through with it, which Abraham did, bringing the wood for the fire and his knife... James question for us is to know how faith asserts itself in the life of a believer. His answer is that for faith to be pleasing to God, it must express itself in good behavior. Faith naturally flows forth in good

works. His reasoning goes something like this; "Try to imagine God's commending Abraham for his faith had Abraham refused to offer up his son..." Abraham was called "the friend of God" not just because of his faith, but because of his obedience. I think that most of us figure that it is a "no-brainer" to want to please God through our actions. After all, our obedience through good works is based solely on our faith in the Lord.... We get one more example tomorrow, and if you're reading along in the epistle of James, you'll know who she is.... Ooops....

Have a wonderful day.... Make your little part of the world better... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/13/2017
Unlikely Heroine

"In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (Jas.2:25-26).

Every major sport has its special "Hall of Fame" in which they enshrine their best players because of their accomplishments. Though not enshrined, the 11th chapter of the book of Hebrews has its own hall of fame. I usually refer to it as the hall of fame of faithful people of the Bible. Starting in verse five (5), it includes Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Rahab. The writer goes on to say this; "I do not have time to tell you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets..." (Vs. 32). James certainly takes a quantum leap when he goes from Abraham, who the people consider to be their ethnic father, to Rahab, a prostitute... Now make no mistake, Rahab is a legit member of the faith hall of fame as she is mentioned three (3) times in the New Testament. In Matt.1:5, she is actually listed in the genealogy of Jesus. The linkage between the two, Abraham and Rahab, is that their great faith was evidenced by the good things they did... Rahab was one of those "minor" characters who played an unexpected and crucial role in the future of God's people. When the spies came to Jericho and found safety with her, Rahab said this; "For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below" (Josh.2:11). It is without surprise that Rahab figured prominently in Jewish lore. These unexpected figures often appear in the biblical story and enthrall us.... It is of little wonder that we identify with tax-collectors and Samaritans rather than Pharisees, Sadducees and Levites... It is against this backdrop that James reinforces his teachings of the importance of good deeds in a Christian's life. An inactive faith is of no use in the kingdom of God...

Have a great day Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/14/2017
The Bringers

"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph.4:15-16).

Isn't it interesting how easily that we as Christians relate to metaphors that use the human body to make their point? Maybe its because we all know how the body works that makes this so, but we always seem to get it... Within the church, many find their particular niche when it comes to the little jobs that must be done that sometimes get overlooked. Things like preparing The Lord's

Supper, greeting people, lawn care, building cleaning, picking someone up for services and relevant bulletin boards, just to mention a few. We all have these small talents that contribute to the well-being of our church group and are willing to take a bit of our time to help out. So.....

What do we do when it comes to evangelism? "Therefore go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt.28:19).How about that evangelism thing.... Do we get into that as easily as straightening out the hymnbooks behind the pews, or is it easier to lay that task at somebody else's feet? I find it most interesting that there are not many scriptures about making sure the lawn is mowed properly compared to those related to bringing others to the Lord. Maybe there is some simple truth to all of this. We won't feel like a failure if a spot is missed when vacuuming the carpet, but somehow the fear of rejection has doused the evangelistic fire of many Christians. Nobody wants to be a reject....I believe that this is one of Satan's most powerful tools. If we fail once or twice in our efforts to bring someone to the Lord, he tells us that we are failures, leading us to believe we shouldn't try this again. Next Friday, we'll look into this with a bit more detail... By the way, Satan is wrong!

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/15/2017
Against The Wall

I found it surprising that there are a great number of times in the Bible that walls are a part of the narrative. Today's quiz is about walls... Don't get driven up one trying to find the answers. As always, have fun...

_____ 1. What perfectly square city has walls described as jasper? (a) Jericho, (b) Damascus, (c) the new Jerusalem, (d) Rome.

_____ 2. What prophet was trapped against a wall by an angel with a drawn sword, crushing his foot? (a) Isaiah, (b) Hosea, (c) Amos, (d) Balaam.

_____ 3. Who escaped through the wall of Damascus by being let down in a basket? (a) the spies, (b) Paul, (c) Peter, (d) Clydeous.

_____ 4. Whose body was fastened to the wall of Beth-shan by the Philistines? (a) Samson, (b) Saul, (c) Joab, (d) Abner.

_____ 5. What prophet measured the wall of the temple district? (a) Ezekiel, (b) Ezra, (c) Nehemiah, (d) Daniel.

_____ 6. Who actually had the walls of Jerusalem built? (a) Nehemiah, (b) Solomon, (c) David, (d) Alexander.

_____ 7. What OT foreign invader tore down the walls of Jerusalem? (a) Beltshazzer, (b) Cyrus, (c) Darius, (d) Nebuchadnezzar.

_____ 8. What warrior, the victim of a king's scheming, was killed when stuck by arrows from the wall of Rabbah? (a) Jonathon, (b) Uriah the Hittite, (c) Abner, (d) Philip of Macedonia.

_____ 9. In what besieged city did the king, walking on the city wall, meet a woman who told him she had eaten her son for dinner? (a) Samaria, (b) Damascus, (c) Nineveh, (d) There's no such city.

_____ 10. What wine steward sat down and cried when he learned that the walls of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt? (a) Ezekiel, (b) Ezra, (c) Nehemiah, (d) Daniel.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and I glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark
Phil.4:11

07/17/2017
Loose Lips Sink Ships

"But no man can tame the tongue. It has become an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." - James
3:8.

My title this morning comes from an idiom that became popular during WWII. The most famous poster regarding this was produced by the Seagrams distillery and depicted a sinking ship with the saying imposed upon it. Seymour R. Goff was the designer/artist and he went by the

pseudonym, "Ess-ar-gee" The saying literally meant for people to beware of unguarded talk that might aid the enemy. All countries had some variation of the saying, even the Germans. There's said; "Sham Dich Swatzer." which in translation said, "Same on You, Blabbermouth." James touched on the misuse of the tongue in earlier chapters (1:26) of his epistle. As with such matters, after an initial mention, James went on to other things, but returned to the scene of the potential crime for a fuller treatment in chapter three (3). In his writings on the subject, James gets closer to the book of Proverbs than any other NT author on this very important subject. It is certainly no surprise that he reserved some of his most powerful admonitions for those who "dice and slice" others with careless speech... James' sentiments and those of wise men in the OT were alike in that they understood both the blessings and curses that emanate from the tongue. Words like these; "Rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing" (Prov.12:18). With the power of google, I'll bet you can find numerous sayings in the Proverbs about the use of wise and unwise words... I believe that when James previously taught on faith and works, that he firmly thought that words were a work... Words can be used either to build up or destroy; To either encourage or humiliate. Words as deeds, have a power for good or evil, as they can build bonds of affection and trust, or build walls and give birth to suspicion. James sets some very important guidelines for us as he impresses on his readers to measure their words carefully.... Lets all keep our ships afloat....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/18/2017
The Rein And Rudder

"When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and driven by strong winds, they are steered by a small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go" (Jas.3:3-4).

James begins chapter three (3) with talk about those who would be teachers. Since words are a teacher's tools, he begins his admonition on speech with a warning. "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (Vs.1). It kind of gives one second thoughts before becoming a teacher, doesn't it...

James knew that a poorly prepared teacher, through his words, can do more damage than good. In order to counteract the tendency to dismiss mere words as being of little consequence compared to deeds or works, James goes on to talk about one's speech. In doing so, he uses the tongue to represent what a person says. James presumes, and rightly so, that a person who can control his tongue should be able to control his or her own body... Because the tongue is so small when compared to other important parts of the body, no one should suppose that words are ineffective. There is a saying out there that folks have used as far back as I can remember that says, talk is cheap... Is it? In today's 2 verses, James uses the examples of relatively small things controlling bigger things, vis-a-vis the bridle of a horse and the rudder of a ship. A person

riding a very large horse can control its movement through the use of a small bit placed in its mouth. Likewise, a comparatively small rudder can be used by a pilot to steer a very large ship.

The tongue, like the rudder or rein, is small by comparison to the body, but its effects are enormous.... I believe it is why James puts such a responsibility upon those that would teach others about the Lord. There is a premium on being able to choose the proper words when it comes to teaching... Though the tongue is small, its effect is gigantic....

Have a wonderful day.... Do good and give God the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/19/2017
Fire, Fire, Fire

"Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider how a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire...."
(Jas.3:5-6).

While the bridle on a horse and the rudder on a ship pointed out yesterday that the impact of the tongue is out of proportion to its size, it does not preclude that it can certainly have beneficial effects. A fire is different.... When it is under control, a fire can be warm, comforting and inviting; when out of control, it can consume large forests and cities. Some of the greatest disasters in human history were caused by fires that became uncontrollable. Just like a controlled fire, the tongue can produce words that comfort, teach and encourage... With the right words, folks comfort one another in times of hardship, and teach others about the importance of knowing Jesus. When out of control, however, words can stir up strife and hatred among people. With the wrong words, relationships are torn apart, and even the peace that should be present within a church dissipates... When James wrote the tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body, he declared in powerful terms that when folks harm one another, the tongue is often the universal offender... I find James' words to be sobering. I find them to be that way because I talk a lot. It is so important to measure our words so that do not turn into a conflagration that is completely out of control. There is also an importance here, because we still under the heading (Vs. 1-2) concerning those who desire to become teachers. The responsibility of teaching cannot be underestimated, and we want our words to be those of comfort, edification and enlightenment. We do not want our words to stir up strife and hatred like an uncontrolled fire. James' wonderful words of advice ought to be read and meditated upon for their full effect to be experienced.....

Have a great day.... Make your little part of the world better.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/20/2017
The Evil Beast

"All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison"
(Jas.3:7-8).

As we complete this series about how the words that we say must be controlled, James comes full cycle and writes about the animals (see Gen.9:2) that have in some way been brought under man's dominion. Paradoxically, James contends that the animals that have not in some way been domesticated are themselves ---- symbolized by a lack of control over the tongue. He calls it a restless evil, full of deadly poison. Perhaps you've watched some nature shows on TV that categorize snakes by the deadliness of their poison. We can draw a great comparison from that when it comes to the damage that an out-of-control tongue can wreak... Up until this point, James has written in generalities of the destructive potential of the tongue and the difficulty by which it is brought under control, but lets make this crystal clear. The tongue should not be considered to be a universal evil. Though verse seven (7) today tells us no one can control the tongue, even in its lawlessness, it can be a blessing... By the use of words. good folks can bless the Lord and bring about beneficial effects for those within their sphere. This being said, James, the practical one, could not let the damage brought about by an uncontrolled tongue to be left unnoticed... Whenever both good and evil can emanate from the same opening, we must examine the issue very closely. Finally, lets remember that this section began with whether or not one would choose to become a teacher, and to be a good one, wise words must be used....

Have a great day.... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/21/2017
Bringers... Part Two

"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt.7:7).

When the song leader in our services announces that # 555 (Seek Ye First) will be the next hymn, many people don't even open their books because they've committed the song to memory. Of course the words are catchy and the music is upbeat, but the verse is certainly more than a nifty little tune. It is a promise from God, which He is sure to follow through with if we ask in faith. Every time an attempt is made to bring a soul to the Lord, there are at least three (3) parties involved; God, me, and the hearer. It might be a good idea to mentally draw a thick line between each of those entities, which acts as a caution strip of sorts. Each line represents a separation of accountability and responsibility which shouldn't be crossed when

trying to bring someone to Christ. Lets start with God, because there is little to explain. Why you ask? Because He fulfills His role in evangelism perfectly and without fail. He is the constant, because He never changes... Lets look at a few characteristics of God, and how they inform our soul-winning efforts: (1) "Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality' " (Acts 10:34). God does not care what walk of life someone comes from, their ethnic background, their race, or their financial situation. He is no respecter of persons.... (2) "He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber or sleep" (Psa.121:3-4). We can have assurance in this; God never misses a seeking soul. (3) "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth" (1 Tim.2:3-4). God lets us know in very clear terms that He wants all to be saved. (4) "So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth" (1 Cor.3:7). Through whatever effort is made, God is always the one who grants the increase.... When we just think that God has done all the hard and given us His Word too, it should give us a great confidence to reach out to others. We will continue these thoughts next Friday.

Have a great day... T G I F Today God Is First.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/22/2017
Opening Windows

There are quite a few instances in the Bible that involve windows, so that's what today's quiz will be about. Answering the questions should clear things up....

- _____ 1. After listening to one of Paul's very long sermons, he died after falling out of a window. (a) Demas, (b) Sopater, (c) Eutychus, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. This prophet ordered a king to shoot arrows out of a window. (a) Elisha, (b) Elijah, (c) Amos, (d) Ezekiel.
- _____ 3. Who looked out of a window, and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah? (a) Zophar, (b) Laban, (c) Jetur, (d) Abimelech.
- _____ 4. What wicked queen was thrown from a window by her servants?
- _____ 5. Who knelt toward Jerusalem and prayed out of a window while in in Babylon?
- _____ 6. Who let birds fly out of his ship's window?

_____ 7. She despised her important husband when she looked out the window saw him dancing in in the street? (a) Martha, (b) Michael, (c) Vandela, (d) Bathsheba.

_____ 8. In what city did Paul escape a plot by going through a window in the city wall? (a) Athens, (b) Ephesus, (c) Damascus, (d) Troas.

_____ 9. According to Malachi, what windows would be opened to those who tithed? (a) clear ones, (b) informative ones, (c) windows of heaven, (d) I made this up.

_____ 10. Who looked out of a window and saw a young man being enticed by a prostitute? (a) Solomon, (b) David, (c) Paul, (d) Peter.

* Extra Credit... _____ Name the king in # 2 (a) Jehoash, (b) Amaziah, (c) Jehoahaz, (d) Joash.

Have a great weekend and an uplifting and glorifying day of worship on His day.... Love mark
Phil.4:11

07/23/2017

Wisdom From Above

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom" (Jas.3:13).

As we continue on in the epistle of James, we see the very practical issues he has covered. He cracked the door for considering the equal worth of the rich and the poor within the church, showing that showing favoritism was not the way that God had intended for it to be. James moved on to the issue of faith and works, and then taught about how failing to bridle the tongue while professing to belong to God is self-deception... James is now ready to move into a new and very important arena. As his epistle is sometimes compared to the OT book of Proverbs, he clearly wants his readers to suck in wisdom as the author of the book of Proverbs did... How a person uses his words is closely related to wisdom. In a Spirit inspired way, James slides effortlessly from the use of the tongue to the behavior of wise men and women. He actually forces his readers to see that discord among themselves was often caused by careless speech. Sound familiar? With unwise use of words, people were exhibiting worldly wisdom rather than wisdom from above... Wisdom of the world is full of envy and greed. James assured his readers that godliness and peace are fruits of wisdom from God. Over 1,000 years before James wrote any of this, Solomon, the probable writer of most of the Proverbs, observed this; "A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit" (Prov.15:4). This week we will take

an in depth look at wisdom from above.... We all want to be wiser in the eyes of the Lord, and James has some very good ideas on the subject....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/25/2017
Nature Speaks

"Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh."
(Jas.3:11-12).

Here in NJ along the coast, the rivers feed into the bays and ocean. As you travel upstream from the ocean along a river, the salinity of the river changes. The further up river you go, the less salty the water becomes and we refer to this "semi-salty" water as brackish. Eventually, if you go far enough inland, the water becomes totally fresh. It is against a backdrop like this that James teaches us about wisdom, allowing nature to speak...Wisdom has parted company with those who are content to spew out words of bitterness and strife (fresh and bitter water?) instead of those of thoughtfulness and praise. A great lesson is imparted here that all of us must heed. The people I just talked about are like a spring that sends out wonderful fresh water, while at the same time producing a salty brine. If this is not a classic contradiction of terms. we may never have seen one. It is just as contradictory when a man or woman speaks kindly one moment, and with anger the next. Wisdom is just not compatible with with a double-minded person like this... James turns from this lesson of nature to one that an agrarian society would surely understand. Figs, grapes and olives were important farm products in this area, and James was quick to point out that a fig tree produces figs, and a vine produces grapes. He makes the same point that his brother Jesus made when He said this; "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit" (Matt.7:17). Later Jesus said this; "You brood of vipers. How can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matt.12:34). James summarizes this teaching with this clear assertion; "Nor can salt water produce fresh..." A person who slices and dices with their tongue, will have a difficult time convincing those around him that he is a Christian with pure values and motives. He'll be like a fig tree producing grapes, or a spring putting out both salt and fresh water... Nature speaks, we listen....

Have a great day... Do good and give God all the credit.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/26/2017

Beware Of Earthly Wisdom

"Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing" (Jas.3:13-16).

Earlier in the chapter, (3:5) James says that the tongue boasts great things, but now by way of contrast, he points out that wisdom flows from gentleness and meekness. Having begun chapter three (3) warning those who are not qualified to teach that there are inherent dangers involved, (Vs.1) James turns to practical advice for the more able and gifted teachers. "Who among you is wise and understanding?" A teacher needs to be wise and understanding... The question that ought to be asked here is this; Just how does true wisdom make evidence of itself? I threw that in here because James, in a very succinct manner, answers the question in an irrefutable way...

Wisdom is virtually inseparable from one's way of life.... It is equal to goodness, but a very special kind of goodness. In this goodness, a wise person makes no self-conscious effort to impress others with his superiority. He is good because his heart is good! As a good tree produces good fruit, wisdom has an inherent kind of meekness. Forever, folks have looked at a person who had a quick retort for everything as one who is clever and in control. In old times or today, meekness is not a trait that tries to garner admiration. It has absolutely nothing in common with self-assertive control, but on the contrary, to be meek is to be non-assertive, helpful, gentle and abounding in kindness, To be meek is to be wise. Finally, James points out that self-serving wisdom dishes out bitter jealousies and strife... It is earthly, sensual and demonic. James asserts that clever behavior masquerading as wisdom is not what we want because it appeals to the basest cravings of human nature. With this "fake wisdom," a person's way of life is compromised. A steady diet of spiritually unhealthy competition will tear relationships apart. We must beware of earthy wisdom, and tomorrow we'll look at wisdom from above...

Have a great day.... Make your little part of the world better... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/27/2017

Heavenly Wisdom... The Real Stuff

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jas.3:17-18).

In the very beginning of his letter, (1:5) James tells us this; "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." He adds that the wisdom God gives is the meekness (humility) of wisdom. It certainly seems as though true wisdom is a central theme of his epistle, and in the end James makes a stark contrast between earthly and heavenly wisdom... He implies something with a further question: Have your thoughts, words and deeds been resulting in strife or peace? If it is the former, some introspection is necessary, as one must look to the type of wisdom that is guiding him. When our learning comes from God and our wisdom is from above and it flows out in the words and behavior that James lists for us. Lets get to the seven (7) adjectives that he uses to describe godly wisdom. He says that godly wisdom is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.... WOW! Is this the complete package, or what? The wisdom that James commends follows closely on the heels of really knowing God and behaving in ways that we know will please Him. Because a better, more peaceful, satisfying and enjoyable life ensues, one would be foolish to not follow this pattern. It makes the equation for wisdom with goodness even more striking. Finally, James leaves us with one manifestation of wisdom which he gives special emphasis to in verse eighteen (18). In the end, we can gauge the degree to which godly wisdom has impacted our lives by the peace it produces within us and others around us. The REV translates verse eighteen (18) this way; "Peace is the seed-bed of righteousness, and peacemakers will reap its harvest." It kind of captures the idea, doesn't it.... We all must seek heavenly wisdom... Its the REAL STUFF....

Have a wonderful day.... Let His light shine through you.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/28/2017
Bringers... Part 3

"Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I commanded you.... " (Matt.28:19-20).

Last Friday, I suggested that when it comes to bringing the lost to Christ, three (3) parties are involved; God, me and the hearer. Lets continue to zero in on God's part today and first realize that He has done all of the hard work. Not only that, He has given us the Word, the sword of the Spirit, (Eph.6:17) as a guide. When we think about his promises and His all powerful ability, it ought to give us a limitless measure of confidence to reach out to others... First, lets make sure that we do not cross over the boundary and inadvertently assume the responsibility of God when it comes to bringing others to the Him. Often, when a person refuses to hear the gospel of Christ, we look at it as a failure on our part. Maybe there was something more powerful, eloquent or moving that could have been said or done. I think there is an inherent problem with this type of thinking, because we have forgotten who actually grants the increase. If a person is truly seeking, and we, in kindness, offer them the opportunity to study or worship, they will make

the effort to to learn more. When Jesus sent out the twelve (12) on what we like to call "the limited commission", He let them know that all would not receive the teachings.... He said this; "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out to that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet" (Matt.10:14). If they are not truly seeking, we must accept their "no" and move on to someone else without feeling guilty. I can't help but to think about The Rich Young Ruler of Matt.19: 16-26. Though he had lived an exemplary life under the law, when Jesus pointed out to him what was the missing part of his obtaining eternal life, it says "he went away grieving..." (Vs.22). Remember this: Jesus let him walk away. The power of the gospel does not always depend on exactly how we may present it, as long as we speak with kindness and humility. The power is in the Word, which God promises will transform those who diligently seek Him....

Have a great day... T G I F Thank God I'm Forgiven.... Love mark Phil.4:11

07/29/2017

Gates, Doors And Other Openings

This morning's quiz will concern just what the title indicates.... Gates, doors and other openings in the Bible... I hope that you can get into this quiz what you have gotten out of the Bible. As always, have fun...

- _____ 1. God asked this OT man about whether he had been shown "the gates of death." (a) Job, (b) Elijah, (c) Hosea, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. This gate of Jerusalem was built under Nehemiah's leadership. (a) the Love Gate, (b) the Sheep's Gate, (c) the Beautiful Gate, (d) I made this up.
- _____ 3. This faithful soldier, on furlough, chose to sleep at the king's gate rather than with his wife in his own home. (a) Uzziah, (b) Uriah, (c) Urimia, (d) U da man.
- _____ 4. He removed the massive doors from the gate of Gaza, and carried them to a mountain near Hebron. (a) Ezra, (b) Elisha, (c) Samson, (d) Saul.
- _____ 5. He told Israel that the words of the Lord were to be written on their doorposts and gates. (a) Daniel, (b) Ezra, (c) Ezekiel, (d) Moses
- _____ 6. Who shut up the door of Noah's ark at flood time? (a) Noah, (b) Shem, (c) God, (d) a hippo
- _____ 7. This king removed the gold from the doors of the temple and gave it to the king of Assyria. (a) Ahaz, (b) Azariah, (c) Hezekiah, (d) Jeroboam.

_____ 8. At the 1st Passover, what were the people to put on their doorposts? (a) lamb blood, (b) goat blood, (c) blood of the 1st born, (d) unleavened bread.

_____ 9. Who healed the lame man at the temple's Beautiful Gate? (a) Jesus, (b) Paul, (c) Peter and John, (d) The Holy Spirit.

_____ 10. In John's vision of the New Jerusalem, how many gates does the city have, and what were they made of? (a) 12/gold, (b) 12/pearl, (c) 7/silver, (d) 7/ pearl.

Have a wonderful weekend and a glorifying and uplifting day of worship on His day.... Love
mark Phil.4:11

07/31/2017
Pride And Humility

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (Jas.4:1-3).

Whew! To this point in the epistle of James, he has included praise, rebuke, blessings and curses. Nothing a reader has encountered until the 4th chapter can prepare him or her for the severe denunciations found here. If you have already read the chapter, you might think that James' language is "over the top," and how readers are to understand it might be puzzling. Let's remember that after reading the first three chapters, without oversimplifying the starkness of James' words, that he has developed a penchant for hyperbolic language. For example, he wrote this; "Has God not chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" (2:5). Surely, James did not mean that every poor person is rich in faith. The use of hyperbole is a conscious exaggeration used to emphasize a point, so we cannot dismiss lightly the case being made as he addresses severe problems that continue to infect churches.

Today's verses (4:1-3) draw a stark contrast to what James wrote previously in 3:17-18. In 3:17-18, he says this; "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." Much of the problem that James is addressing stems from the favoritism shown to the rich by the poor (2:2-3) Hoping to receive a few crumbs, contrasted with sharp words of bitterness they reserved for one another.

So James writes in chapter 4 about quarrels and fights that come from your desires that battle within you.... In essence he is saying that they were sycophants before the rich, hoping to get stuff for nothing and be granted favors. Most of James' readers lacked both material and spiritual prosperity because they failed to ask God in the right way... We must be careful so that we do not fall into that same trap. God is always there for us but we must ask in love and humility, not with the wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (4:3) Sometimes the bitter language that James uses is necessary so that we are jolted back into reality and stay on the right path... Pride can lead us to desire pleasures that can only hurt us and those around us....

Have a great start to your week.... Begin it with a RAK or two.... Love mark Phil.4:11