

08/01/2017
Friendship With The World

"You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Any one who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says; "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (Jas.4:4-6).

Again, James uses strong words to make his point. This time he is talking about the members of the Lord's church and their relationship with the world. In doing a bit of research, I found a difference in the way various versions of the Bible translate adulterous people. The above verses are from the NIV and has a generic adulterous people, while the ASV and NASV use the Greek word moichalides... It is the feminine form of the word and is translated literally as adulteresses... Whether it should be or not, in the ancient world, more reproach was attached to a woman who was unfaithful to her husband than the other way around. Perhaps James followed social convention when he used the feminine, but no one in his or her right mind thinks that only women were the object of James' scorn. No matter which biblical translation we use, this much is certain; James chose to use a very harsh word! He did this because of how strongly he felt about believers trying to keep one foot in the Lord's kingdom while keeping the other in the world.... He emphasized that for folks to seek material things from God or other people in order to spend them on their own pleasures, is to act the way the fleshly people of the world act. One cannot be a friend of God, like Abraham was, (2:23) and a friend of the world at the same time. He also affirms the fate of those who bear characteristics of people living in the world by saying; "Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?" Again, James confirms that people who are friends with the world live in sin. I also find it interesting that the word Scripture is in caps. I think that James does this in quoting Prov.3:34 in verse six (6) for a reason. He is saying that the Old Testament was in complete agreement when it came to speaking of folks who maintained a friendship with the world, and hence, toward envy and sin. There's little doubt about what God thinks about a believer's friendship with the world, is there?

Have a great day.... Do good and give God the credit....

08/03/2017
Getting To Practice Humility

"Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning

and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and he will exalt you"
(Jas.4:7-10).

In the 1st six (6) verses of chapter 4, James is mostly declarative, as he lays bare the sins of the people. Since I figure that we all know what sin consists of, just describing it is not enough. What were the readers of his epistle (us) to do about it? In his own inimitable way, James now turns to commands. Repentance and growth in Christ are never an act, like baptism, where a Christian can look back and declare, "There! I did it." If we are to live in Christ the way we're supposed to, it is a constantly changing process... In verses seven to ten (7-10) and even verse eleven, (11) James lays out eleven (11) imperatives.... "Submit to God" he says, and "Resist the devil...." "Draw near to God." "Cleanse your hands." "Purify your hearts." "Lament." "Mourn." "Weep." "Let your laughter be turned into mourning." "Let your joy be turned into gloom." And lastly.... "Humble yourselves..." I find it interesting to note that James begins these directives by setting two polar opposites beside each other.... Submit to God.... Resist the devil... The devil is the arch enemy of humankind. He delights in tempting people to sin and is never presented in the Bible as an evil counterpart to God. It is only working through human sin that the devil has great power in the world, but in the end, he will be judged as all other created beings will be judged. It is no wonder that James applies his directives in such a sober manner. The Christian life is one in which we must be on the alert, 24/7.... New things will confront us each day, and how we cope with them will determine how the Lord will judge us... His last imperative is my favorite, because it sets the tone for our relationship with God and others... Humble yourselves in the presence of God, and he will exalt you... A perfect ending to this devotional....

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

08/04/2017

The Great Revelation... His Grace Reaches Me

"Deeper than the ocean and wider than the sea, is the grace of the Savior for sinners like me;
Sent from the Father, and it thrills my soul, Just to feel and to know That His blood made me
whole"

Refrain.... "His grace reaches me, yes, His grace reaches me, And 'twill last through eternity;
Now I'm under His control and I'm happy in my soul. Just to know that His grace reaches me"

His Grace Reaches Me By Whitey Gleason 1964

I do enjoy the song, His Grace Reaches Me. The ladies sing most of the melody, while the men hum, ahhhhh.... It is lovely and the words are a powerful reminder of the unfathomable depth of God's love for us shown through His grace... It is undeniable that the great revelation of Christ to the world is about the grace and the Fatherhood of God. Today's "song" has its roots in

Rom.3:24, which is the followup of the previous verse... "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus" (Rom.3:23-24). Before Christ came, all were shut up under condemnation of sin because they had rebelled against God. At the initiative of God, and driven by His great love, God reached out by this grace to save. On the cross, Jesus died as a payment to God's justice so that people might be saved. One of the great messages of the epistle of James is this; The temptation of Christians to suppose that nothing is required of them because God saves through faith in Christ must be exploded. The apostle Paul did his best to fight those who wanted to remove the demand from Christian teaching... "Why not say ---- as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say ---- 'Let us do evil that good may result?' Their condemnation is deserved" (Rom.3:8). Though James did not present the doctrine of grace with the clarity of Paul, he did insist that Christians must obey God to please Him. God will draw near to those who draw near to Him in humility. We learn by combining the teachings of Paul and James, to balance our trust in God, knowing that He paid the price for redemption, with the obedience He requires....

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

08/05/2017
Bringers IV... My Part

"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).

As I started this Friday series about personal evangelism a few Fridays ago, it was stated that at least three (3) parties are involved every time an attempt is made to bring a soul to Christ: God, me and the hearer. For the last two weeks we zeroed in on God, so this week it is about my (your) part. Suppose you asked a young teen if he wanted something for which he would have to ask his parents for money to get. In today's world, might he emphatically say, "well, I could use a new updated cell phone?" Of course we asked what he thought the odds were that he would face his dad with the question after hearing him speak about the family's financial woes, he might say something like this; "Well in that case, the odds would be small that I would get it...." From a very early age, we learn to size up a situation to determine a course of action toward a desired result. For example, in the above scenario, we might ask differently for the money if that conversation about financial woes had not taken place. I think that personal evangelism, involving my part, works the same way. To achieve our desired result, that being the sharing of God's Good News with others, we must recognize that each situation probably requires a slightly different approach. See if this makes sense to you... There's a time to speak, a time to listen and a time to boldly proclaim the truth of God's message.... Agree? The broad spectrum of Jesus' actions ranged from sitting a young child gently on his lap, to overturning the tables of

unethical folks in the temple. That runs the gamut, wouldn't you agree? Certainly, Jesus understood that every situation provided special challenges of its own to accomplish the desirable outcome. Do we have a better role model than Jesus? God has given us each the intellect and experience to weed out the effective, therefore potentially successful methods, from the ineffective ones. If a particular method is not working, is it fair to conclude that we need to tweak our methodology? I don't think its at all arrogant to analyze the abilities God has blessed us with, if the end goal is to improve our effectiveness.... More about "me" next Friday....

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

08/06/2017
Early RVs

Today's quiz is about portable places to dwell that are found in the Bible, hence my cute title... Don't go falling in love with it now, because we're taking it back with us when we leave next month.... As always, have fun....

- _____ 1. Who accepted an invitation to hide in a tent and then was murdered by the woman who invited him? (a) Barak, (b) Sisera, (c) Heber, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. What, in the dream of a Midianite soldier, tumbled into their camp and flattened a tent? (a) a barley loaf, (b) a large cookie, (c) a big stone, (d) I made this one up.
- _____ 3. Who took spoils from the fallen Jericho and buried them inside his tent? (a) Caleb, (b) Achan, (c) Jabin, (d) Basra.
- _____ 4. What OT character took his wife into his mother's tent on their wedding night? (a) Abraham, (b) Isaac, (c) Jacob, (c) Esau.
- _____ 5. Who stored Goliath's armor in his tent? (a) David, (b) Saul, (c) the Philistine king, (d) It doesn't say.
- _____ 6. What tent was made according to God's specifications? (a) The tent of sacrifice, (b) the tent of meeting, (c) the tabernacle, (d) Pewee's tent.
- _____ 7. Who pitched a tent in Jerusalem to house the ark of the covenant? (a) Saul, (b) David, (c) Solomon, (d) Samuel.
- _____ 8. Who killed an Israelite and a Moabite woman inside their tent? (a) Jael, (b) Phinehas, (c) Balak, (d) Balaam.

_____ 9. Who did Noah say would live in the tents of Shem? (a) his whole family, (b) Ham, (c) Shem's family, (d) Japheth.

_____ 10. What rebel against David said; "Every man to his tents, O Israel? (a) Absalom, (b) Sheba, (c) Abner, (d) Joab.

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

08/07/2017

Life Is Short... Too Short To Speak Evil

"Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgement on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you ----- who are you to judge your neighbor?" (Jas.4:11-12).

Back in New Testament days, people became wealthy by one of two methods; they controlled business enterprises, or they owned land. Sound familiar? Land and money allowed their owners to control others, just the way command of armies did... Jesus had a great deal to say about wealth and its disadvantages. "Then Jesus said to His disciples; 'I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' " (Matt.19:23-24).

Those are daunting words, wouldn't you say? It is against this backdrop that James speaks about the brevity of life. I think that today's verses, although seemingly difficult to fit in with verses 13-17, does relate to them. When James wrote do not slander one another in verse 11, he was calling on God's people to be charitable in their judgements of brothers and sisters.

Gossip and the assigning of evil motives are to be absent when it comes to the support Christians are supposed to give one another... To take this wealth thing a bit farther, a Christian has done wrong if he slanders or condemns his brother or sister for the sake of personal gain. The brevity of life should teach us that we are not in a very good position to stand in judgement over the good-faith choices made by brothers and sisters in Christ. In the end, a Christian's assessment of another believer ought to be based on a concerted and conscientious effort to obey God's Word. As far as I know about the New Testament, the term Lawgiver when referring to God is only used here. He is a loving God, but also a righteous judge that expects His people to live by the laws found in His Word. For the next few days we will study about how the brevity of life pertains to us....

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

08/08/2017

Too Short To Plan Without God

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow I will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

What is your life? You are a mist (vapor) that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (Jas.4:13-15).

James does a bit of zigzagging back to 2:1-7, in which he taught about showing favoritism toward the rich. The rich were oppressing the poor, but that was not their only offense. There was an arrogance about them, acting as if what they accumulated was all that mattered. James, in today's verses, does not only speak to the rich, but to us also. He demanded that those who lean too much on what they possess ought to reflect on the brevity of life. This reflection would lead to humility, and humility would lead to God. (see 4:6-12)... Verse 13 starts off with the term,

"Now listen," (NIV) while the NAS says, "Come now..." Its as if he is saying these things are important, so "give it some thought." I think that James' meaning in these verses is crystal clear; life is short and uncertain, and those who pin their hopes on the uncertainty of physical stuff are missing the point... The Psalmist says this about those who place too much value in things;

"Like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish ---- vanish like smoke" (Psa.37:20). I certainly don't believe that one must be morbid and preoccupied with death to in order to realize that the shortness of life causes the wise to make their plans contingent on the blessings of God.... With no reference to God, to even the secular person, "a vapor or mist that appears for a little while and then fades away," or a mist or cloud that promises rain and dissolves into nothingness should be meaningful.... Our lives are indeed short, and we should make the most of the time we have into service to the Lord.... "Who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins...."

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

08/10/2017

Life's Too Short To Be Arrogant

"As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil" (Jas.4:16).

Have you known any braggarts in your life? They can be hard to be around, can't they? Humans can get so full of themselves sometimes, and James addresses that here. In the context, he is speaking about a rich merchant who is planning some "buying sessions" in other cities over the next year. James reminds him that "you do not even know what will happen tomorrow..." To make his point about making plans without including God, James lets everyone know about the brevity of life itself. The merchant, and us, would do well to make plans that are contingent to the will of God. In The Parable Of The Rich Fool, Jesus makes the same point. Having had a successful growing season, the wealthy farmer decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to store all of his grain and goods... Thinking he "had it made," he said this; "I'll say to myself, 'You have many good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry' " (Lk.12:19). Jesus' response to this? "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded of you." To take the teaching one step forward He said this; "Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Lk.12:20). Not only is it foolish to make plans as though life in this world were unending, it is offensive to God. To plan as if God does not exist, is to boast in one's own arrogance. James wraps it all up in a simple package when he says that "all such boasting is evil..." I say all of this in the light of how wonderful each day we live as a Christian is because Jesus said that he came that we might have an abundant life. (Jn.10:10) We just need to include Him in all of our important decision making with the knowledge that our hearts do not beat forever....

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

08/11/2017
Getting It Right Today

"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Prov.27:1).

Jane told me a story about her optimistic mom out on the farm in Kansas. If it had not rained for a while, and rain was needed, her mom would look at any clouds in the sky and say that rain was coming soon. Some of them actually brought that rain, while others were just wisps that amounted to nothing and disappeared. It is kind of the way that James, and the writer of today's verse from the book of Proverbs looked at life. James talked about life as a vapor or mist, while the proverb says not to boast about tomorrow because you do not know what a day may bring forth... There are many folks out there that muddle through life claiming to believe in God, but acting like the merchants of James 4:13-14 who talk about going to a city for a year or so to conduct business. James' response to them was much like that of today's Proverb... "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow..." Even if they claimed to be Christians, they made their plans and lived day to day as if there were no God. When we look at a person's life span and compare it to how long people have inhabited the earth, it is like the vapor or mist James is referencing... If we compare our physical lives to eternity, it's less than a mist. God wants us to live our lives each day as if it were the last one we would live... He wants us to live

those days with Him playing an active role in all of our plans... I believe the term of today is, "in the moment..." James wants his readers to know that it is evil to push God out of our lives; in addition to being evil, it is also foolish....

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

08/12/2017
Artsy Crafty Types

Today's quiz is about some folks in the Bible that had certain artsty/crafty skills. The questions should carve out a place in your hearts... As always, have fun....

- _____ 1. What enemy of Paul was a famous silversmith in Ephesus? (a) Artemis, (b) Simon, (c) Demetrius, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. What famous OT character fashioned a brass snake? (a) Aaron, (b) Jacob, (c) Moses, (d) Elijah.
- _____ 3. Who was the 1st metal craftsman mentioned in the Bible? (a) Jacob, (b) Tubal-Cain, (c) Aaron, (d) Jacob.
- _____ 4. What Israelite, a worker in gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, had responsibility for furnishing the tabernacle? (a) Bezalel, (b) Hiram, (c) Ahisamach, (d) Aaron.
- _____ 5. Who had a big ship made out of gopher wood? (a) Paul, (b) Noah, (c) Ham, (d) If you miss this one, you fail the quiz!
- _____ 6. According to Paul, what coppersmith had done him great harm? (a) Demetrius, (b) Hiram, (c) Popeil, (d) Alexander.
- _____ 7. Who fashioned a golden calf in the OT?
- _____ 8. What was the trade of Paul, Aquila and Priscilla?
- _____ 9. What craftsman from Tyre was put in charge of all the bronze work in the temple? (a) Solomon, (b) Hiram, (c) Androcles, (d) it doesn't say.
- _____ 10. This son of a goldsmith was involved in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. (a) Uzziel, (b) Hiram, (c) Uriah, (d) Hanun.

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

08/14/2017
Reasons To Weep

"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days" (Jas.5:1-3).

Like his brother Jesus did, James has some special news for the rich of the world. Jesus, in The Sermon On The Mount said this; "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal" (Matt.6:19). The rich knew little about life's misery, while the poor knew much about it. James foretold that there was a reversal in the near future. He assured the rich and reassured the poor that the judgement would bring miseries on the rich that oppressed the poor. He hoped his readers would look beyond the wealth of those they admired to the injustice they had perpetrated. James pictured the possessions of the wealthy as being consumed by the elements, rotted and worthless. So.... Most of us here in 2017 are neither rich or poor, so just how does all of this apply to us? James' language here is a vivid reminder that life here on earth is transitory, while the judgement of God is eternal. As a person involved in science, I found the stuff like your silver and gold are corroded to be fascinating. Properly speaking, part of the value of gold and silver lies in the fact that it does not rust or corrode, however, descriptions coming from a pre-scientific age have little interest in scientific language. James is simply saying that when one makes the striving for silver and gold their main preoccupation, weeping gets closer and heaven moves farther away... The corrosion will testify (witness) against you... In any age, folks must be reminded that material things will not last. When they put the striving for them ahead of the Lord, there are reasons to weep. There are so many blessing in the Christian life that have nothing to do with "stuff." Lets be thankful for them....

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

08/15/2017
Its All About Being Fair

"Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of the Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you" (Jas.5:4-6).

If you think these words from the pen of James are strong ones, you are absolutely right. Was he echoing the way the Lord felt about the inequity that exists in the world then and today? Here are the words that Moses wrote down in Deuteronomy 24:14-15... "Don't take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is an Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it.

Otherwise he may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin." Jesus even addressed this in The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard in Matt.20:1-16. The rationale that I see in all of these writings, both in the OT and NT is that God cares equally for the rich and the poor. If landowners have the power to withhold wages because of their position in society, they need to consider that the friend of the poor is the Lord of the Sabaoth... Lord of the Sabaoth was a common designation for God in the OT, but in the NT, James is the only writer that chose that name for God. In today's verses, James has a series of four (4) indictments against the rich, criticizing them for the personal choice they made and the way of life they embraced. Most of us are not rich landowners withholding wages from workers, nor those living in luxury that leads to a life of wanton pleasure, but there is still a lesson in here for each of us. God is fair! I believe that He calls on us through the scriptures to be fair also. People should not be taken advantage of because of their station in life. The Lord looks at His children that have accepted Him into obedience in the same way. No matter what their socioeconomic status, race or national origin, God accepts them as fellow heirs in the kingdom. He expects the same from us....

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

08/16/2017

Lessons In Patience

"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains" (Jas.5:7).

As we near the end of the epistle of James, themes converge around a group of words such as patience, endurance, suffering and prayer... It is patience that we will zero in on this morning. James paints with a broad brushstroke here, colored at every turn by reflections on the end of time as we know it. It is about the time when Jesus returns, and James is calling for patience because the end draws near.... This is wonderfully applicable to us today, as we await the Lord's return too. For them, any persecution would be tolerable because it would be of a short

duration. Sound familiar? Confession and prayer are added to the mix because they are a Christian's consolation while he or she awaits Jesus' reappearance.... Neither James, Jesus or any of the other NT writers allowed the frustration or fear that comes from hardship to overshadow their hope. I find it interesting that James did not try to titillate his readers with a need to speculate on signs that would warn the Christian community about His imminent return.

In his Spirit inspired wisdom, he told Christians that they should live in a state of perpetual preparedness. Here is our first lesson on patience... As it is elsewhere in the NT, reflection on the Lord's return serves moral living. The way to be prepared for Jesus' return involves the living of Christ-like lives. God expects this of us.... Nothing more ---- Nothing less.... Perhaps this is the most important of all lessons involving Jesus' return. We are to continue to mature in the Lord each day of our physical lives, knowing that this pleases God. More tomorrow, with some examples, about this virtue of patience....

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

08/17/2017
More Patience

"You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers. or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door. Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (Jas.5:8-10).

James, throughout his epistle, placed two rather broad ideas before his readers. One was to face and endure hard times with patience. Trials in life were to be expected, and he does not want folks to hate their tormentors, but rather leave vengeance up to the Lord. Secondly, James wanted Christian congregations to draw closer to each other in goodness, kindness, love and respect for one another. The powerful inference is that they will be able to strengthen one another to endure whatever comes their way. He said this; "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right" (2:8). As a corollary to the royal law they were not to show partiality, but rather they were to speak well of one another and to confess their sins and pray for one another. This sounds like a wonderful recipe for patience in 2017 too... To further his agenda about patience, James said; "you have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord brought about" (Vs.11). He also evokes the suffering faced by many of the prophets who were trying to speak the words of the Lord to the people... There is a world of difference between speculating on exactly when the Lord will return and living in a constant state of preparedness. Instead of carrying placards that say "THE LORD IS COMING SOON," Christians must prepare for the time with patient and holy lives. Here's my final take on this... We are to speak the truth, grow in faith, labor at our jobs, treat others fairly, provide for our families and live and serve in the community of God's people... That will take a heaping dose of patience...

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

08/18/2017

Bringers VI... Respond, Don't React

"Come to me, all you who are who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"
(Matt.11:28).

When others respond to our evangelistic efforts with courtesy, its pretty easy to leave the door open for future engagement, even if they initially decline. Often I offer them one of my "business cards" in hope that my kindness may not go unnoticed, and a proper response might be, "the offer is always open in case you change your mind." Unfortunately, many times our efforts are not met or received so amiably. How about if the person responds in a harsh manner saying something like this; "I hate it when you Bible thumpers try to cram that book down my throat..."

Under those circumstances, its harder to react in a Christ-like manner, because our basic instincts cause us to perceive confrontation as danger. We must resist the temptation to respond in kind, and react defensively... We must resist the urge to react negatively and fight back at all costs! Instead, react with grace and even empathy. Perhaps you could say, "I don't blame you because I hate having things crammed down my throat too..." If you leave them remembering how kindly you treated them despite their hostility about being verbally assaulted, it might leave a good impression. Just remember that some folks will be offended no matter how you approach them, though our critical and judgmental methods are typically the cause of such unnerving reactions... Can we expect to smack a beehive without being stung? A wise evangelist once said that "we should leave our crowbars at home..." In simpler words, we must let God open the doors for us instead of trying to force open those that have not been unlocked.

Next Friday we'll speak about the hearers....

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

08/19/2017

So Many Kids

This morning's quiz will be about children. Since we all started out that way, I hope that you can remember some of these children involved in the Bible. As always, have fun...

_____ 1. Which of the judges had 70 kids? (a) Samson, (b) Shamgar, (c) Gideon, (d) Ehud.

_____ 2. Who is the 1st child mentioned in the Bible?

- _____ 3. Who was Noah's youngest son? (a) Shem, (b) Ham, (c) Japheth.
- _____ 4. What king was the youngest of eight (8) brothers? (a) Saul, (b) David, (c) Solomon, (d) Josiah.
- _____ 5. Who was the youngest son of the OT Joseph? (a) Manasseh, (b) Ephraim, (c) Canaan, (d) Potiphar.
- _____ 6. Jacob and Esau were the 1st twins mentioned in the Bible. ((a) True or (b) False)
- _____ 7. Which of Jesus' disciples was probably a twin? (a) Peter, (b) Andrew, (c) James, (d) Thomas.
- _____ 8. What wicked king of Israel had 70 sons? (a) Ahab, (b) Jehu, (c) Joash, (d) Jehoahaz.
- _____ 9. What king had 19 sons and 1 daughter by his legitimate wives? (a) David, (b) Solomon, (c) Hezekiah, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 10. Who was older, (a) Moses or (b) Aaron?

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

08/21/2017

Simply Prayer

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray" (Jas.4:13a).

James began this letter (1:5) with instructions about prayer. He told his readers that anyone who lacked wisdom was to *"ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault..."* It should be noted first that God hears those who ask in faith. Prayer is not supposed to be a mere "ritual" that is somehow woven into one's daily routine. Prayers are to be offered in faith with the confidence that a loving Father hears... According to His will, God is able to step into human affairs in response to requests. It is a "double-minded" person that offends the majesty of God when he or she asks while doubting that God exists or that He even cares.... Few practices are as universally within the habits and make-up of literally all religious folks as prayer. Today, here in NJ, there will be an 80% solar eclipse that begins at 1:20PM and reaches its fullest at 2:45PM... As a person with a science background, I find the precise numbers involved in this phenomena to be staggering, as it testifies to the existence of a power beyond our own. Even if

nothing else were involved, I would want to have a relationship with that being. Through prayer there is! To be religious is to seek a relationship with that awesome power. The steps you ask?

(1) 1st to listen, (2) 2nd to obey, (3) 3rd to pray.... That prayer is to be an integral and very personal part of the Christian's life is a gimme... James emphasized two other aspects... First, prayer is a community act in which we offer prayers for one another. Second, he used the examples of men and women of faith from the past... As God heard the prayers of godly people in the past, He will hear ours too. This week will be devoted to prayer. To get a flavor for it, read Jas.5:13-20...

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

08/22/2017

Prayer 101... Reasons To Pray

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (Jas.5:13-14).

Today's devotional on prayer might be a very basic one, but James tries to give us reminders of the reasons why one ought to pray. First, he associates a person who is in some sort of trouble with the need to pray, and then he goes the other way, as he joins prayer to happiness and song... Singing is well-adapted to celebration and joy, and prayer, well-adapted for grief and emotion. Neither singing or praying should be limited to just one emotion... In Lk.1:46-55, where Mary came to Elizabeth, her song was a prayer. A bit later on, (Vs 68-79) Zacharias' song was the same. The writer of Psalms 137 expresses lament, while 138 is a song of joyous praise. Prayer is such a wondrous vehicle, as it can express everything from praise to thanksgiving, to joy and lament... Maybe it is being viewed by James as man's concession to his or her own weakness, as he associates prayer and suffering. Only once in his epistle does James refer to elders and to the church, but when he does it is in the context of prayer. If sickness strikes, he wrote, he should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil... In addition to this passage about anointing with oil, we can turn to one of the gospels and find something similar. When Jesus sent out the twelve (12), here's part of what they did; "They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them" (Mk.6:12-13). The anointing with oil was not a strange habit to them, as the Good Samaritan who stopped to help the wounded man, poured oil on his wounds in Lk.10:34. Lastly, confession and prayer are to accompany one another. It is appropriate for Christians to confess their sins before God, as the first step in turning from sin is the recognition and confession of a problem. I end today's devotional with some of the most powerful words about prayer ever written.... "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much..." (Vs 16)

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

08/23/2017

Prayer With A Twist?

"And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven" (Jas.5:15).

The first part of today's verse is pretty self explanatory, but the second part makes it more difficult as James adds this; "and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven." Now lets make no mistake here, all of us are to ask the Lord to forgive us of sin, but the second part of the verse is right on the heels of the restoration of one who has been sick. Is James possibly equating that the reason someone is sick is related to his or her sins? Is there any other biblical precedent to back this up? Do you remember the story of the paralytic man who was lowered down from the roof on a pallete to Jesus in the 5th chapter of Luke? Before Jesus healed him, having seen the faith of him and his friends, He said this; "Friend, your sins are forgiven." (Lk.5:20). Is Jesus even hinting that the man's condition was related to or the result of his sins? Many contemporaries of both Jesus and his brother James did in fact associate disease with sin. Sometimes suffering was the result of sin, but neither Jesus nor James implied that all suffering was the direct result of sin. Rather, James said that along with the man's physical state, thought was given to his soul too.... The sick man's call for the elders of the church (Vs 14) suggested some degree of faith. James declares that if the man continued in obedient faith, his sins would be forgiven.... I think that Jesus' dealing with the paralytic man was just the same, a concern for his soul... To be sure, people may get injured from doing something sinful, the same way they can be hurt by accident. There are a few diseases out there that one might contract by the result of some sinful activity, but we cannot relate all disease to sin. I hope this clears up something that some folks have struggled with over the years.... We may suffer from time to time, but it is not always caused by our sins....

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

08/24/2017

Saving A Soul

"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this; Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins" (Jas.5:19-20).

Though evangelism is fundamental, there is more to building up the church than teaching the lost about sin and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ... James ends his epistle on this note; One of the tasks of a Christian is that of watching for and encouraging one another in the faith. James begins his letter by telling us to consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance... I find it very interesting to note that he ends it by referring to those who fail the test... He does this by writing about those who wander from the truth.... With this powerful ending to his letter, I think that James is saying that saving a wanderer is as noble a thing as helping to win a soul to Christ who has never known Him before.... When a brother or sister wanders from the truth, other believers are to be concerned! In whatever way possible, they encourage and persuade in order to lead the wandering one back to the Lord. It is indicated that God reserves a special blessing for the one who turns a sinner back from his or her wandering path. When James writes, "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth," he strongly implies that truth is both available and knowable. For a believer to wander from the truth is to wander from Christ, and conversely, to be in Christ is to be in the truth... To follow the teachings of God's Word is to be in the truth, and one wanders from it when he or she fails to practice the faith they claim... When wandering from the truth, one fails to function properly within the community of believers because they have compromised the gospel message. Finally, because a disciple may wander from the truth, James felt the need to turn him back to the Lordship of Jesus. Like Jesus, James felt no hesitancy in speaking of truth.... In Jn.8:32, Jesus said "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free..."

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

08/25/2017

Bringers VII... The Hearers

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"
(Jn.14:6).

As we continue this Friday series about bringing folks to the Lord, we have covered God's part and our part, so now we actually get to the hearer... If you were not raised in the church, stop and think about what your life was before you became a Christian. More than likely, we thought we were pretty good people and had a shot at getting into heaven after we died. The truth, of course, is that not even one soul has the remotest chance of spending eternity with the Lord outside of Jesus. Today's verse puts it all in perfect perspective as Jesus tells us that no one comes to the Father except through Me.... Our own wisdom led us to a false conclusion that must be dealt with. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph.6:12). We must remember that our battle is against the powers of darkness that influence the thinking of lost souls. The gospel is the only power able to defeat

that, and we are the ones that are told to deliver it. There is no pre-written script or catchy phrase that we can use to convict a hearer of the truth. Instead, it is a type of demeanor and genuine care that will eventually make in impact... It not like being a high-pressure salesman who will not accept no for an answer, but rather an ability to answer a no with something like this; "If you ever change your mind, let me know..." It is amazing to think about human reasoning when compared to the infinite wisdom of God. It is incongruous to think that we can tell God how we must worship or what the terms of salvation really are. God will accept us to Him, but only on His terms...

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

08/26/2017
More About Kids

There's a lot of mention of kids in the Bible, so today's quiz will be related to this subject. Is it true that they know more than us?

- _____ 1. To whom did Paul write that elders should have control of their kids? (a) the Corinthians, (b) the Ephesians, (c) Timothy, (d) Clydeous.
- _____ 2. Which of the Ten Commandments states that children will be punished for their parent's sins? (a) 1st, (b) 2nd, (c) 3rd, (d) 4th, (e) none of them.
- _____ 3. Which NT writer advised young Christians to stop acting like children? (a) Paul, (b) Peter, (c) James, (d) Luke.
- _____ 4. This OT prophet advised people to tell their kids about the locust plague. (a) Joel, (b) Obadiah, (c) Hosea, (d) Amos.
- _____ 5. Which of the gospels says that the child Jesus grew and became strong in spirit? (a) Matthew, (b) Mark, (c) Luke, (d) John.
- _____ 6. Which epistle advises fathers not to exasperate (provoke) their children? (a) Romans, (b) 1st Corinthians, (c) Galatians, (d) Ephesians.
- _____ 7. Which OT book says that a child raised well will not turn from that way when he is old? (a) Psalms, (b) Proverbs, (c) Ecclesiastes, (d) Nehemiah.
- _____ 8. Which priest was too indulgent toward his two (2) sons? (a) Caiaphas, (b) Eli, (c) Annas, (d) Jethro.

_____ 9. Which prophet had two sons that were dishonest and took bribes? (a) Hosea, (b) Jonah, (c) Samuel, (d) Obadiah.

_____ 10. Which OT book says that grandchildren are wonderful? (a) Psalms, (b) Proverbs, (c) Ecclesiastes, (d) Leviticus.

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

08/28/2017

A Post Script To The Book Of James

"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (Jas.1:18).

As we come to an end of this series of devotionals from the epistle of James, I thought it might be fitting to summarize the themes that he stressed. In the beginning, I found that there was a very "practical" nature to James' letter. He filled the letter with several imperatives that were necessary to living a life that the Lord would be pleased with. Lets take a look at a few of these... James wrote in detail about the impartiality of God, and let us know with certainty that he wanted us to be the same way. He used the unfortunate example of showing favoritism to the wealthy to make his point. James dedicated a section of his letter to the intricate balance there is in life when it come to faith and works... He never downplayed the importance of faith, but at the same time said that one's faith is exhibited through the deeds that he or she performs. We cannot possibly walk away from this epistle without knowing the danger that lurks within the things we say... He referred to it as the tongue, and told us that we should think before we speak, lest we get ourselves in trouble... Maybe what I came away with above all other things was the conscious need for Christians to treat one another with kindness and respect. In goodness there is wisdom, and if we want that godly wisdom we should ask for it... (1:5). Keeping God in our plans is an important issue with James, and he ties this in with the brevity of life. (4:14-15). Finally, James commends those who are concerned with turning a sinner from the error of his or her ways, and presupposed that an individual's relationship with God is tied up with community life.... The letter leaves a Christian with a sense of admonition, concern for a weak brother and guarding one's life for godly living... All of this is an ongoing part of owning Jesus as our Savior.

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

08/29/2017
Contending For The Faith

"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude3).

Since the devotionals for the past 2 months came from the epistle of James, Jesus' brother, I thought it might be worthwhile to hear from another brother of Jesus in his short letter. Jude was one more biological brother of Jesus who accepted His teachings and went on to be an influential person in the 1st century. His short letter, consisting of only one chapter and 25 verses, has some powerful things to say. We know who Jude is because he identified himself 1st as a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and secondly as the brother of James in his greeting... (Vs 1) The death and ascension of Jesus left James as the oldest male in the family, so it is hardly surprising that he took a leadership role in the church at Jerusalem. We might have known little about Jude had it not been for this short letter... The 1st message that Jude has for us is found in today's verse... He said he wanted to write about our common salvation, but there was something else on his mind... He said this; I felt it necessary to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith.... Perhaps the question you might have here is what it means to contend earnestly for the faith. It seems to me that there was something going on there that had the ability to pull believers away from the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints... The saints here not only refers to those folks Jude was writing to 2,000 years ago, but us too. Just like them, we are entrusted with that faith. It would seem to me that that the truth was being attacked, and those to which it was entrusted (us) need to defend it! There is no "flip/flopping" allowed when it comes to the truth of God's Word. There is a finality to it and it is not subject to change. Thus, Jude believed that we today must contend earnestly (that means whole-heartedly) for that faith. What do you think?

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

08/30/2017
Trials Of The Defectors

"These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm ----- shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted ----- twice dead" (Jude 13).

The word I used in my title today, defectors, is not the biblical word used to describe the type of people Jude is talking about. The word is actually apostate, and its Latin root means to defect or rebel... For example, when Philip preached among the Samaritans, one of those who believed

and was baptized was Simon. (Acts 8:13) Later he turned away from the apostolic teachings and actually tried to buy the power of Peter and John to lay hands on Christians and convey gifts of the Holy Spirit to them... (Vs 16-21) Christians around the world have often suffered at the hands of non-believers, but the church today is often beset by those who claim an allegiance to Jesus Christ... Apostates are those who often come in supposed faith and obedience to Christ, but who turn back to the world. The sad part is that in they subvert biblical teachings and leave a carnage of the truth in their wake. For whatever the reason(s), their motives are varied. Jude uses six (6) graphic metaphors to describe them and their effect, and you'll find them in vs 12 & 13... (1) blemishes at your love feasts, (2) shepherds who feed only themselves, (3) clouds without rain, (4) autumn trees without fruit ---- twice dead, (5) wild waves of the sea, (6) wandering stars. I think that the metaphors are self explanatory, but you might want to read each of them and decide what they mean. Jude told his listeners that these false teachers were unscrupulous, so he described their deeds in such a way that good Christians can avoid them. I believe that these descriptive terms were set down for us so we would be able to see that their ultimate goal was the destruction of unity in the body. Tomorrow we'll look at how we are to combat this, and in doing so, make ourselves stronger...

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

08/31/2017
Just Remember

"But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who will divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit" (Jude 17-19).

Jude went so as far to evoke a quote from the book of Enoch, a well respected writing in NT times to get a point across about those who wanted to divide them... It said (Vs 14-15) that the Lord was coming to judge those who committed ungodly acts in ungodly ways, and spoke of their words as all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him... Against this backdrop, Jude warns his listeners to remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold... Christians are not required to know the intricacies of premillennialism with all of its twists, or the details of every protestant doctrine in order to know what the Bible teaches. The Bible must be, however, more than a "coffee table book." Jude told his readers that they could recognize false teaching by comparing it to what the apostles taught.... But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold..." (Vs 17) Jude's starting point was that the apostle's teachings were the authoritative source of Christian teaching. Though we

know little of many of them, in their capacity as authorities, they numbered at least twelve (12) plus Paul. Even if we do not know what all of them wrote, Jude is insistent that his readers know that there was an apostolic message, and the false teachers were denying key elements of it.... Because of this, the salvation of believers was in jeopardy. What the church believed mattered!

Doctrine was important! Jude wanted them and us to not think it was strange that false messengers would appear who would undermine the apostolic teachings. We must actually read and meditate on God's Word, and Just Remember....

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