



grow. pray. study.

January 5, 2020 *What Would Jesus Say to Our Divided Nation?*

Words like “the flames of hell”

MONDAY 1.6.20 James 3:4-10

The apostle James found one speech pattern particularly ironic. “With [our tongue] we both bless the Lord and Father and curse human beings made in God’s likeness. Blessing and cursing come from the same mouth,” he wrote. Applying this passage, Pastor Hamilton asked, “Does the Lord give us an exemption from practicing the Scriptures when it comes to our political leaders...and others with whom we disagree? Are we allowed to lay aside the Golden Rule?” *

- Sociologists note that in war, soldiers use dehumanizing nicknames for people on the other side. It seems to become easier to kill people if we stop thinking of them as people, as human. In what ways have you seen similar patterns in religious or political “combat,” when the “bullets” are words? Have you ever made friends with a person, then found out you hold some different views, and realized that the derisive labels you’ve used for “those people” may not be true?
- Pastor Hamilton wrote, “Part of the polarization...in our country today is a result of pastors and church leaders who have abandoned the teachings of Jesus and the apostles regarding the way we speak of those with whom we disagree. Part of the healing of our nation must come from the church modeling for our society how we are to love those with whom we disagree.” ** Do you believe James really meant that blessing God and then cursing people “just shouldn’t be this way”? Are you willing to rethink your own use of words to advance “the healing of our nation”?

Prayer: Lord God, sometimes those who disagree with me bug me so much that I wonder “where they came from.” But they, like me, ultimately came from your creative heart. Help me to move toward seeing them as you see them. Amen.

* Adam Hamilton, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008, p. 22.

** Ibid., pp. 22-23.

The inner source of polarization

TUESDAY 1.7.20 James 4:1-8, 11-12

James spoke to outer behaviors (e.g. “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to grow angry”—[James 1:19](#)) but also to their inner sources long before modern psychiatry. He saw Romans, Greeks, Jews and Samaritans fight, sometimes with weapons, but more often with bitter words. He challenged his readers to look inward. The apostle Paul wrote forcefully that we need to trust God to set right what is wrong, rather than trying to do it ourselves (cf. [Romans 12:18-21](#)). James asked bluntly and succinctly: “There is only one lawgiver and judge....you who judge your neighbor, who are you?”

- When you have negative thoughts about someone who disagrees with you, do you ever look inside and ask, “What does this person threaten, annoy or frighten in me?” Pastor Hamilton wrote, “We can make known our disagreements with others while doing so in love and with respect for the other.” When have you seen disagreement handled in love and respect? When have you been able to do that yourself?

Can James' wisdom about the inner sources of conflict help you relate in more Christ-like ways when disagreement arises?

- It is a fact of history that political opponents accused Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt (three fourths of Mount Rushmore!) of being dishonest, trying to destroy freedom, and being guilty of vile personal faults. What can that history teach us when we feel like using, or passing on, similar slurs aimed toward political candidates, business leaders or even church members or neighbors with whom we disagree?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray with the psalmist, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, Lord, my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14) Amen.

* Adam Hamilton, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008, p. 22.

No foul words, no bitterness

WEDNESDAY 1.8.20 Ephesians 4:25-32

Across our country, around the world we see the result of words that tear down community and set people against one another. Methodists face a potentially divisive General Conference in 2020. Our nation has a general election next November. We aim to be a community that follows Ephesians 4:29: "Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community." Changing our speech requires letting God change the inner sources from which our words come.

- Scholar N. T. Wright wrote, "People who are enslaved to anger and malice may think they are 'free' to 'be themselves', but they are in bondage." * When have you said words that hurt, and then thought, "Why did I say that?" What helps you understand your feelings better so you don't blurt out damaging words? Before you forward that e-mail, or post that tart response on social media, are you willing to ask, "Does this give grace? Does it build up? Can I picture Jesus sending this?"
- From scholar William Barclay: "Paul sums up his advice. He tells us to be kind (*chrēstos*). The Greeks defined this quality as the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbour's affairs as it does of its own. He tells us to forgive others as God forgave us. So, in one sentence, Paul lays down the law of personal relationships—that we should treat others as Jesus Christ has treated us." ** Which of your relationships come closest to living up to that standard? In which do you see the most room for growth?

Prayer: Lord of my life, be Lord of my words. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you, Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 56).

** William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Revised Edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 160.

A radically different kind of kingdom

THURSDAY 1.9.20 John 18:10-11, 33-40

[John 6:15](#) showed that, after feeding 5,000 people (and no doubt at other times, too) Jesus could probably have taken political power if he'd wanted to. But he hadn't come to create that kind of kingdom. Jesus baffled Pontius Pilate, a typical Roman political climber, who asked him, "So you are a king?" Calmly contained, Jesus said, "My kingdom doesn't originate from this world....My kingdom isn't from here." Jesus came from, and ruled over, a totally different (though equally real) realm.

- Pilate, a tough, cynical Roman politician, thought he knew how kings behaved. In his opinion, Jesus didn't act like a king. He was probably mocking the Jewish leaders more than honoring Jesus when he called him "the king of the Jews." What makes Jesus the kind of leader you want to follow? In what ways does his character shape the ways you choose which human leaders win your trust and allegiance?

- Peter reacted to Jesus' physical danger. As he'd said ([John 13:37](#)), he was ready to die for Jesus, to "go down fighting." Jesus knew that Peter's life, lived by Kingdom values, would do more to defeat the forces of evil than his sword ever could. Have you ever faced a situation in which God told you, in effect, "Put up your sword"? When have you needed to let God's spirit show you a more Christ-like way to handle an issue?

Prayer: Dear God, your kingdom is not of this world—but lots of my day-to-day life is. Teach me how to live out your kind of power, shown in your Spirit's fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Amen.

One creator—one human family

FRIDAY 1.10.20 Acts 17:22-28

The apostle Paul gave Athenian philosophers (most of whom looked down on all other people) a startling insight. He said all people, all nations, came from one creator God. We are all "relatives," if you will. These guidelines for Bible translators drive home Paul's meaning: "This first clause, 'from the one man he created all races of men,' must often be rather extensively restructured—for example, 'God created first one man and from that one man came all the races of people'....it may be rendered as 'God created all the different kinds of people from one single family' or 'God created one single clan from which all the different races of people have come.'" *

- Author Phillip Yancey said, "The issue is not whether I agree with someone but rather how I treat someone with whom I profoundly disagree. We Christians are called to use the 'weapons of grace,' which means treating even our opponents with love and respect." * Paul challenged the Athenians ideas, but showed respect by commending their devotion to an "unknown God." How did Paul's approach echo the way Jesus lived out God's heart (cf. [John 3:16-17](#))? How can you share your faith with non-religious and nominally religious people without condemning them?
- Few in today's first-world cultures hold the specific idea Paul challenged in the Athenians: "we have no need to imagine that the divine being is like a gold, silver, or stone image made by human skill and thought." In what ways, however, can we idolize "human skill and thought" in place of God? Do you find inner resonance when Paul said, "God isn't far away from any of us," or do you struggle to believe that is true?

Prayer: Lord God, I believe in and trust you as a personal being who loves me and my world. Help me live and act in ways that show that your love has touched my life. Amen.

* Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on The Acts of the Apostles*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1972, p. 341.

** Phillip Yancey, *Vanishing Grace*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014, p. 26.

Jesus broke down barriers of hatred

SATURDAY 1.11.20 Ephesians 2:11-14

One huge dividing line in Paul's world was between Jews and Gentiles. Paul had lived out that bias (cf. [Galatians 1:13-14](#)). There was a real wall in the Temple in Jerusalem. "Interpretations of purity laws resulted in Gentiles being excluded from the court of Israel (for Jewish men) and even the less pure court of women (for Jewish women). Christians in and around Ephesus would know that Paul was in Roman custody because he had been accused of bringing an Ephesian Gentile beyond the temple's outer court ([Acts 21:27-29](#))." * Tribalism, nationalism, bigotry, fear and violence are not new—they've been part of the human condition in nearly all ages. But Paul wrote in verse 14 that Christ destroyed that barrier in the Temple by rendering it pointless. Christ, he testified out of his own life experience, tore down the dividing wall(s) between people.

- Ephesians said on the cross Christ broke down the barriers that separate people. In a global society, we all see differences between people that trigger hostility or fear in us. Who do you find it hard to like or to trust? How does it affect your feelings when you remember that Jesus died for them, too? How can Jesus' grace to you make you more willing to tackle the hard work of breaking down long-standing biases and actions? How can you discern those (in any nation or faith) who seek to tear down walls and create more goodwill and peace from those who wish to build higher walls? "Christ is our peace." Do you see any difference between peace as a solely human effort to "split differences" and balance interests, and peace based on who Jesus is and who you are in him? Is one more lasting than the other? Why or why not?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you lived in an empire that saw crushing force as the only way to deal with enemies. Yet you reached out to people who snubbed you, and asked God to forgive the soldiers who crucified you. Tear down any barriers in my heart that keep me from caring about all of your beloved children. Amen.

Family Activity: Read Ephesians 4:29. As a family, discuss the meaning of this verse. Create a list of positive, encouraging words. After you have exhausted your thoughts, check additional sources such as the computer or the Bible for additional words to add to your list. Next, play a game of Scrabble (or Scrabble Junior) with your family. Play by the rules on the box but add one more rule. Agree to use only positive or neutral words. If someone uses one of the encouraging words from your family's list, he or she can receive bonus points! (Decide how many ahead of time.) Pray and ask God to help you speak only positive, kind and encouraging words to and about others.

* HarperCollins Christian Publishing. *NIV, Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, eBook: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Kindle Locations 268229-268232). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Lee Rudeen (Former Staff Member) and family following the death of Mark Antony Rudeen (father), 10/26/2019

Chelsea Evans and family following the death of Cynthia Gordon (mother), 12/15/2019

Eddie McGlasson and family following the death of Donald Joe McGlasson (father), 12/17/2019

Mary Bouck and family following the death of John Bouck (husband), 12/18/2019

Ryan Carhart and family following the death of Rosemary DellaRosa (grandmother), 12/18/2019

Renae Krause and family following the death of Derek Gonner (son), 12/20/2019

John Morris and family following the death of Thomas F. Morris (father), 12/20/2019

Judy Palmer and family following the death of Al Palmer (husband), 12/20/2019

Diane Browning and family following the death of Ruth Christy (mother), 12/22/2019

Annette Dyer and family following the death of Tom Harmon (father), 12/22/2019

Fay Beasley and family following the death of Dawn Sexton (daughter), 12/26/2019

Joe Fiorella and family following the death of Jerome Falter (father-in-law), 12/27/2019

Lou Loewen and family following the death of Ralph Spenst (father), 12/29/2019

Kay Alleman and family following the death of DeLoris Kitzman (mother), 12/29/2019