

Sermon: God's Goodness Among Us

In the passage from James today, James talks about the goodness of God.

God doesn't tempt us to do evil things, but he often uses life's challenges to strengthen and perfect us. In the process we become more like God.

Instead of tempting us to do evil things, God gives us good gifts. The God who put the stars, sun and moon in their places faithfully presides over our lives and provides everything good, and we must thank him for these gifts.

In order to receive every good gift from God, we must prepare ourselves to hear God's Word, especially in times of trial. When we prepare ourselves to hear God's Word, it will give us a fresh start in life.

How do we do that? Well we prepare ourselves by concentrating our attention, controlling our tongues, containing our anger and cleansing our lives of sin. Wrath doesn't promote the work of God or God's righteousness. In fact, wrath violates God's standard on conduct for believers.

Sin is not compatible with receiving God's Word. It prevents God's Word from reaching a person's heart. God's Word should be welcomed in the heart, received with anticipation like a love letter, and read with a desire to put its words and commands into practice.

James warns his readers about the dangers of sin and deception. An unbridled tongue makes a person's testimony useless. God will help us control our tongues and our anger. Our words reveal our true personality.

I'm sure we have all experienced the loss of control of our tongue. I certainly know that I have.

A good example of someone who could not control his tongue is the apostle, Peter. He had no problem telling anyone what was on his mind or how he felt. That got him into trouble on more than one occasion.

The world can easily deceive us. Many times, when something is presented to us by sources that we believe to be reliable, we will believe it without asking any questions.

This is especially true for the lies of Satan, and these lies often lead us into false beliefs. We must not be fooled by what the world says is true. We must focus on what God says is true and trust in him.

We must actively study the Scriptures regularly to find God's truths and then apply these truths to transform our daily lives, especially if we are called on to preach and teach God's Word. And everyone here today is involved in preaching and teaching the Word of God to others.

God knows what we need, so when we study the Scriptures, he will give us encouragement when we are struggling, rebuke us when we are rebelling, challenge us when we need to step forward in faith and warn us when we are heading down the wrong path.

Simply listening to God's Word has no lasting value. When we open the Bible, we must plan to do what it says. It gives its readers a way to follow the heart of God and the footsteps of Jesus.

God wants us to go beyond merely hearing the word to obeying the word. Casual hearers simply glance at the highlights of God's Word and continue on their way like tourists. Careful believers mine God's Word and find new, life-changing treasures. The Bible must have a continuing effect on the life of a believer.

Many Christians within the church today have the same problem as casual hearers of God's Word. They are spectators who enjoy hearing the Word of God preached and taught every Sunday. Their heads are filled with biblical knowledge and facts, but they fail to put that knowledge into godly living.

Their spiritual heads get fatter and fatter while their spiritual bodies waste away because they are not being used. James refers to them as being deceived. They have deceived themselves by hearing the word but not applying it in their daily lives.

Pure and faultless religion is marked by personal ministry. We must respond to the needs of others as Christ did. Pure and faultless religion is also marked by personal purity. We must not be corrupted by the world. Pure and faultless religion is a delicate balance between the positive and the negative.

Genuine faith denies the self, takes risks, loves others and always seeks to please God. Believers are enabled by the Holy Spirit to obey God's law. They are freed from the bondage of sin and enabled to obey God. They can give thanks to God.

Jesus equates the treatment of people in distress with how people treat him. This is the true test of faith. We must conduct our earthly lives in such a way as to not be ashamed to face the Lord. We must be compassionately involved with the problems of the world while remaining holy at the same time. The world is the ordered system that is under Satan's control. It is opposed to God's purposes.

We as Christians must show our love to everyone— not just to those who can benefit us but also to those who can't help anyone.

We will be known for our love to those who have been hurt or who have had their hopes and dreams shattered. Christ's love should encourage us to love God and love people. Our actions must be motivated by Christ himself and not by what we do, say, think or want.

Our attitude towards others shows our true attitude toward God. Our actions speak louder than our words, and a relationship with a living God calls for us to do something.

We need to get our hands dirty and get into the filth of human pain and sadness while at the same time not allowing that same filth to contaminate us.

Everyone God sends our way is really seeking his listening, compassionate heart at work through us.

If we want to help others, we can start by being good listeners. Quick solutions seldom make people feel better. They need solutions that can only come by listening carefully with an open mind and an open heart. We must listen to others in the same way that God listens to us.

When we are generous to others, our gifts are not based on the person's actions. We reflect the love of a God who delights in giving to those he loves.

If we want to know if we are putting God first in our lives, we must ask ourselves where we turn when we have a decision to make, a problem to resolve or we need guidance. Do we turn to other people or our desires first, or do we turn to God, his word and his principles?

God speaks of the riches of his mercy as shown through Jesus Christ. God broadcasts his forgiveness and his love. He proclaims the wonder of redemption and calls on us to repent and come near to him.

He is always available to hear our prayers, to listen to our concerns and to be touched by the nonverbal communication of our feelings. In return, we must be increasingly acquainted with the voice of God.

We must follow God each and every day. We are called on to live out God's love for us and share that love with the world. One day at a time, one person at a time, and always remembering that we are doing God's work. And that makes God very happy. Amen