

## “Real Religion!”

### I. INTRO:

A. **Prayer:** Jesus a *part-time consultant* or *full-time Master*?

B. **Mark Antony** was known as the “*silver-throated orator of Rome.*” He was a brilliant statesman, magnificent in battle, courageous, and strong. And he was handsome. As far as personal qualities are concerned, he could have become a world ruler. **But** he had the very vulnerable and fatal flaw of moral weakness, so much so that on one occasion his personal tutor shouted into his face, “Oh, Marcus, oh, colossal child! Able to **conquer the world**, but unable to **resist a temptation.**”

1. That indictment fits not only Mark Antony but also many of us today!
2. Oscar Wilde, “*I can resist everything except temptation.*” (actually true in his life)

### II. REAL RELIGION!

A. **Lead Us Not Into Temptation!** (12-18)

B. (12) **1st Promise! Blessed** - Happiness, genuinely happy.

1. In OT blessed is always in the **plural**, signifying being happy many times over.
2. This kind of happiness is impossible if it's dependent on circumstances.

C. (13) **2nd Promise! The crown of life** - not only a future crown to be received, but also the crown of a rich & full life enjoyed here & now.

In the ancient world **crowns**(*stephanos*) had at least 4 great associations:

1. The **crown of flowers** was worn at times of **joy** (it was the sign of happy/festive joy).
2. The **crown** was the **mark of royalty** (worn by kings & those in authority)
3. The **crown of laurel leaves** was the victors crown in the games (athlete coveted above all)
4. The **crown** was the **mark of honor & of dignity.**
  - a) The Christian has a **joy** no other man can ever have.  
The Christian has a **royalty** that no man has ever realized.  
The Christian has a **victory** which others cannot win.  
The Christian has a **dignity**, for he is ever conscious that God thought him worth the life & death of J.C. *William Barclay*

- D. (12-15) According to Greek mythology, *the crew on Odysseus' ship* escaped the lure of the **Siren's** beguiling voices by stopping their ears with wax.
1. Unfortunately, resisting *real-life temptations* will take more than ear plugs!
  2. James wants to fill our ears with *more than wax*, but with important insights & truths about temptations. Knowledge that will sail us right on by temptation's beckonings.
- E. Lust is not just desire, it's desire gone to seed. (cilantro)
1. The next time you face one of your typical temptations, **watch for** the struggle between *your desires & your reason!*<sup>1</sup>
    - a) If you *give into temptation*, it will be because **desire** has overcome **reason** in the struggle to influence your **will**.
      - (1) **Eve sinned by listening** to the enemy long before she **took** the fruit...  
Victory is won in the citadel of the **mind** far, far from the overt act of sin!
    - b) If we are to win this battle for holiness, we must recognize that the basic problem lies **within** us.
    - c) It is *our own evil desires* that lead us into temptation.
    - d) We may think we merely respond to **outward** temptations that are presented to us.  
**But** the truth is, our evil desires are *constantly searching out temptations* to satisfy their insatiable lusts.
- F. (15) **Death** - Mark Antony's most widely known & costly temptation floated right to him on a barge. Beckoned as dazzling bait, **Cleopatra** sailed up the Cydnus River straight into Mark Antony's unguarded heart. Their adulterous relationship, with its passing pleasures, cost him **his wife, his place** as a world leader, & ultimately **his life**.
- G. Sow a thought...reap a destiny! Mark Antony wouldn't resist temptation. **Will you?**
- H. Remember Joseph's story (Gen.39)
1. **Don't be weakened by your situation** (he enjoyed a secure high-paying job; his personality & accomplishments made him the object of praise! He was accountable to know one, Could have been very easy to sin!)
  2. **Don't be deceived by persuasion** (Potiphar's wife, day by day enticing)
  3. **Don't be gentle w/your emotions** (we must absolutely refuse to entertain lustful thoughts) ["Resist the 1st tiny rill (small stream) of temptation, lest it widen a breach big enough to admit the ocean. Remember that no temptation can master you unless you admit it **within**."] F.B.Meyer

---

<sup>1</sup> Jerry Bridges, The Pursuit of Holiness, pg.66.

4. Don't be confused by your immediate results (Joseph did the right thing. But once he got outside, he didn't hear any angels singing his praises for saying no. What he heard instead was the scream of a woman - a scream that would hurl him from the heights as Potiphar's overseer to the depths of an obscure jail cell)
- I. 1 John 2 made it clear, "make your aim **not to sin!**"
    1. Deep w/in our hearts our aim is more like, "I don't want to sin **very much!**"
      - a) Imagine a **soldier** going into battle w/the aim of, "*not getting hit very much?*"
  - J. (17) The eternal **Source of light** is not like the heavenly bodies, subject to variation or eclipse.
    1. There is no such *periodic variation* in God like that we see in the heavenly bodies.
  - K. (18) The Word gives us spiritual birth.
    1. 1 Pet.1:23 **having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.**
    2. It is the seed **implanted** in our heart that bears fruit. (21)
  - L. **Lead Us Into Being a Doer!** (19-27)
  - M. (19) **Ever paint a house?** The hardest part is *preparing* the surface, **not** the actual painting.
    1. The better the *prep work* the better & more lasting the results.
    2. It is the same for receiving truth into our lives.
      - a) W/o prep we simply **whitewash** our lives w/knowledge, which will **quickly peel**, revealing an **unchanged character underneath.**<sup>2</sup>
      - b) James had seen too many Christians who tried to **slap on God's truth** w/o properly *preparing* themselves so that it would stick!
      - c) **HOW** do we prepare ourselves?  
**With an:** Open Ear; Controlled Tongue; Calm Spirit; Clean Heart.
        - (1) **Open Ear/swift to hear**(19a) - our problem isn't hard of **hearing** **but** hard of **listening!** (The Jews were big on the reading aloud of the Torah)

---

<sup>2</sup> Charles Swindoll; James, pg.50

- (2) **Controlled Tongue/slow to speak**(19b) - You can't speak & learn at the same time!
- (a) A **young man** once approached **Socrates** to ask if the philosopher would teach him the gift of oratory. His request was then followed by an incessant stream of words until, finally, Socrates placed his hand over the inquirer's mouth & said, "Young man, I will have to charge you a double fee." When the fellow asked why, Socrates said, "I will have to teach you two sciences. First, how to hold your tongue, & then, how to use it."
- (3) **Calm Spirit/slow to anger**(19c,20) - why **because it doesn't achieve the rt of God**. The seed of God's Word cannot take root in a heart overrun w/resentment & revenge.
- (4) **Clean Heart/lay aside all filthiness & wickedness**(21a) - William Barclay explains, the word for **filthiness** root is *rupos*. Which when used in a medical sense means **wax in the ear**. If it retains the meaning here, James is telling us get rid of everything that **stops our ears** to the true word of God.
- (a) **Wickedness** refers to *hidden sins, motives, & attitudes* that cause the corrupt **outer** behavior that others see.

N. So what are the possible **hinderances & dangers** which may prevent God's word from *taking root & bearing fruit* in our lives?

1. Having anger; showing wrath; enjoying filthiness; abounding in wickedness; & now (in vs.22-27) hearing God's word *but* not acting on it.

O. So how do we prepare ourselves for the truth? (21)

1. 1st, **receive** (or *welcome*) Whenever truth knocks, we're to open the door & welcome it w/great hospitality.
2. 2nd, receive it w/**meekness**(or humility) i.e. *a teachable spirit*.

P. (23-25) The Word/Bible is like a **mirror** that helps us to **examine & cleanse** our lives.

1. God's Word is **unlike** a **mirror**, which only reflects **outward appearance**, **the Scriptures** reveal our **inner character**.
  - a) The **hearer** - promptly forgets what was reflected.
  - b) The **doer** - gives **careful attention** to what is reflected in the scriptures, **responds positively**, **applies** what is heard, & thus is **genuinely fulfilled**.

Q. (25) The **blessing** is in the doing!

1. James **doesn't say**, "just be doers". God isn't looking for **activists** who don't know His Word. **Nor** is He interested in **hearers** who know the word but **do nothing**.

a) *Hearers* - someone who audits a course at a university - someone who listens carefully & takes notes, **but** has no assignments, tests, or responsibilities.  
i.e. *Someone who merely takes in information!*<sup>3</sup>

2. "He is already half false who speculates on truth & does not do it.  
Truth is given, not to be *contemplated*, but to be **done**." F.W. Robertson
3. **1912 - Maiden voyage of Titanic**. Received message from another ship of icebergs in area. Radio operator put message under a weight at his elbow and went on with his work. It never reached the captain, and 1500 lives were lost.  
**Information without action can result in *destruction*.**

R. (25-27) The Christian gospel is a **perfect law of liberty!**

1. God creates w/in the hearts of those who receive it the **will & power** to **obey** it

S. We often hear or say, "I don't believe in religion but a relationship". Well, yes & no.  
James, inspired by the H.S. believes in religion...just the **right** kind, a **new** kind!

T. **Religion** = (orig.) In the sense of life under monastic vows.

1. Latin **religio** = obligation, bond, reverence, to bind.

2. Basically, James is saying Gods laws became an **inner constraint** & are no longer chiefly an **external restraint**.

a) **The difference?**

b) **Inner Constraint** = when we limit or restrain **ourselves**.

c) **External Restraint** = when one is kept under control. (a *straight jacket* of someone else's restrictions)

(1) **The difference?** If CM says you're not allowed to eat meat on Monday **nor** Tuna on tuesdays; **versus** you choosing to fast from either.

3. **Religion is an *outward expression of faith!***

a) **God loves religion that...**tames its tongue;  
**God loves religion that...**visits those hurting in the midst of their troubles;  
**God loves religion that...**keeps themselves free from contamination!

b) The picture of the **bridled tongue** is one who places it in his own mouth, not in the mouth of another!

4. True religion...doesn't slander another believer.

True religion...doesn't walk by on the other side of the road.

True religion...doesn't speak of God 1 minute & live like the devil the next.

U. How does your religion stand up to James' practical tests?

<sup>3</sup> Charles Swindoll: James, pg.52.