# *Mirrors, Mouths, and Moola*

# Good morning everyone. Pastor Craig asked me to speak to you today. For those who don’t know me, my name is Lister Chen and I was ordained an elder in the Prince George congregation several years ago.

# My sermon for today is entitled Mouths, Mirrors, and Moola

# Following the lectionary, our text for today is James 1:16-27

**16**Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. **17**Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. **18**He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

### Listening and Doing

**19**My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **20**because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. **21**Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

**22**Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. **23**Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror **24**and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. **25**But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

**26**Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. **27**Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

**James whom many believe was the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church, is writing to encourage a church that is going through various trials. Are you going through “various” trials? If so, this letter is also written for you. When it comes to trials, small or great, a reminder of our spiritual reality is crucial. James reminds his beloved church of who God is and who they are in relationship to him.**

**When our circumstances seem to turn against us, we may be tempted to believe that God has turned against us as well. The temptation James wants to warn against is the temptation to stop trusting in God and to fruitlessly vainly place our trust elsewhere.**

***Do not be deceived, my beloved. (******James 1:16 ESV******)***

**James is not just softening his statement here; he seems to be reminding them of who they are in relationship to God as his “beloved.”**

**After James warns his readers about being deceived, he then goes on to remind them of the truth. Verses 17 and 18 offer a rich reminder of who the Father is.**

**In verse 17 James seeks to build our faith by reminding us of the Father’s unchanging character.**

***Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (******James 1:17 ESV******)***

***John 8:12 Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life***

***Psalm 119: 105 says Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path***

***Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.***

* **God is a “generous” giver. He does not give begrudgingly or with strings attached. Have you ever been given a gift by someone you know was only given to obligate you in the future? We may be tempted to think this is how the Father is towards us as well. But James is clear that this is not how our Father gives. His giving flows out of who he is as a generous giver.**

**Second, James lets us know that “every” good gift is from the Father. James is emphasizing the inclusivity of all the good that comes our way. Think of some good things that have been given to you.**

**Third, James does not want us to be deceived about the gifts the Father gives. His gifts are good and perfect. The goodness of the gift means it is intrinsically good whether we know it or not. His gifts are perfect, meaning they are complete and not lacking, whole, integral**

* **Fourth, all these good and perfect gifts come down from “the Father of lights.” James lets us know with this description that there is no dark side to God’s giving. Even in times of trouble we can depend on God to give us his very best, exactly what we need in our time of trouble.**

***Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (******James 1:18 ESV******)***

* **First, notice the intimate language of our origin. It was God’s will, his desire to bring us forth. Even the word translated as “brought forth” refers to conception and birth. You are not an accident, but you are a deliberate choice of the Father.**

**Second, James lets us know that we are brought forth by “the word of truth.” This takes us back to Genesis, where God’s speaking is our beginning. And what’s more, this “word” that spoke us into existence is a “true” word.**

**Third, our “being brought forth” has a further purpose of being “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” The Old Testament’s understanding of “firstfruits” meant the best, or the “cream of the crop” at the beginning of the harvest. This was of the wheat, barley, vines, figs, pomegranates, olive oil, and honey. God created us to be the pinnacle and crown of his creation.**

**And produce the fruit of the spirit.**

**Galatians 5:22-23**

**But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**

**So, you can see why James is adamant in telling us not to be deceived. Our trials can be used to whisper lies into our ear that we are not loved, that we do not matter and that we have no future. Don’t believe it! Remember who God is and who you are in relationship to him.**

**In light of what James has said about who God is and what his good purposes are toward us, he now goes on to encourage his readers to receive what God is giving.**

***James 1:19-20 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***

***Matthew 13:15 says For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.***

**With this address, James then encourages us to be “quick to hear, slow to *speak, slow to anger.”* These three commands are not detached from what James has been saying. He is not digressing into a different topic on effective communication or conflict management. He is telling us how we can respond and receive what our generous God is giving us in our times of trial.**

* **Quick to hear: This first command might lead to the question, “hear what?” Looking further in our passage gives us the answer. James is going to refer to “the word” three times. He tells us to receive “the implanted word,” as well as to be “doers of the word” and not just a “hearer of the word.”**
* **Slow to speak: This naturally follows the first command. Notice he doesn’t tell us “not” to speak but to be “slow to speak.” Why is that? Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who is not listening but just trying to find a pause in the conversation so they can get their own word in? It can be frustrating. That’s not really a conversation but more like parallel monologues. If James is telling us primarily to hear God’s word to us, then being slow to speak is letting our words first be formed by what we hear. James is telling us to speak only after we receive the “word” we hear from the Father.**
* **Slow to anger: The word James chooses for “anger” is not referring to just a momentary loss of temper but rather a continuing and permanent state of opposition. Do you know people like that? Are you that kind of person? James is warning us to be slow at coming to a place that anger and wrath is our way of handling problems.**
* **Genesis 4:4-5 reminds us of the results of uncontrolled anger. And Abel brought an offering – fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering. But on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. We know that anger led to the murder of his brother Abel.**
* **Galations 5:19-21 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are; immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.**
* **We will hear and find God’s answer and provision for what really needs to be set right. And we are encouraged to put this word to work by being “doers of the word, and not hearers only.” Otherwise, we deceive ourselves. James is telling us to put our full trust and weight on God’s word spoken to us. This means we act on it, we let it, rather than our circumstances, tell us our identity and purpose. James uses an illustration of a *mirror* to make his point.**
* **James 1:23-24 For anyone who hears the word but does not carry it out is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror. And after observing himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.**
* **Col. 1:27 To them [Lord’s people] God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**
* **When we come face to face with our true identity in Christ, we are not to walk away and act as if we are someone else.**
* **James 1:25 but whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom**
* **Luke 4:18 Jesus says, He has anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives.**
* **It is Jesus the law-giver and liberator**

**James concludes this section by talking about the tongue and contrasting a religion that’s worthless with a religion that works.**

***If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. (******James 1:26-27 ESV******)***

**A worthless religion is where we place our trust in our own words rather than trusting in the Father’s word to us in Jesus.**

**James 3:5 says Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.**

**When we are using our words as a means of control, then we are not trusting or receiving the “implanted word” that brings us salvation. In this way we are seen to be “deceived.” Then James tells us that a “pure and undefiled” religion is “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”**

**In James’ day the orphans and widows were those who were powerless with no influence or status. In short, they had nothing to offer in return. James is not just telling us to do good to the marginalized but rather to have all our actions toward others come from a place of fullness from receiving from the Father. Our actions are not motivated by what we can get in return but rather are motivated by what we have already received from the Father. When our trust is firmly rooted in the Father, we are free to act towards others with no other end in mind. We can speak to and care for others with no need to get something for our service. What an amazing blessing this would be if we approached all our relationships from this place of freedom!**

**Last, a “pure and undefiled” religion is “to keep oneself unstained from the world.” This is similar to James’ admonition to put away “all filthiness and rampant wickedness” so we can receive God’s implanted word. In short, anything that tempts us to put our trust in any word other than the Father’s must be avoided. Just as Adam and Eve listened to the voice of the Serpent in the Garden, so is the stain that spreads in our world. We are continually to keep ourselves from being stained by such mistrust. James is encouraging us to place our full trust in the Father so we can receive his word that gives us a righteousness that we cannot give ourselves.**

**So remember the three M’s of Mouth, Mirror, Moola. Guard your mouth against hasty angry words. Look into the mirror of Jesus and see your true identity in Christ. Use your riches to serve those less fortunate. Then we will not be deceived by false words, false identity, false religion.**