*Dana Congdon #1*

There’s a principle that I am trusting in these days, that God’s strength is perfected in our weakness. And the theme of our camp is one that presses truly on my heart. As Paul speaks to those dear confused, carnal Corinthians, he says, “for I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I bethrothed you to one husband, to Christ, that I may present you as a pure virgin.”

最近我越发的确信“神的能力在人的软弱上显得完全”（林后12：9）。这次营会的主题再次激动我的心来分享这些信息。当保罗对亲爱的、疑惑的、肉体软弱的哥林多弟兄姐妹说：“我为你们起的愤恨，原是神那样的愤恨。因为我曾把你们许配一个丈夫，要把你们如同贞洁的童女献给基督。”（林后11：2）

In these last days these are the things that press upon my heart as well. We know the Lord wants a bride; a pure and holy bride. And we know from Ephesians 5 that He has done all on His part to prepared this bride. But we are also aware that by the grace of God we have a responsibility to prepare ourselves. We remember in Rev 19, there was a great heavenly shout: “Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty reigns! For the bride has made herself ready.” - what a wonderful thought! That all heaven waits for the bride to make herself ready.

在末后的日子，有一些事情在激动我的心。我们知道，神想要一个新妇，一个预备好了的圣洁的新妇；在以弗所书第五章我们也知道他已经为预备新妇做了一切。但是我们也应该知道，靠着神的恩典，我们有责任预备我们自己成为新妇。在启示录19章记载了从天上来的呼喊：“哈利路亚！因为主——我们的神、全能者作王了。我们要欢喜快乐，将荣耀归给他。因为，羔羊婚娶的时候到了；新妇也自己预备好了”。多么美好的事——天上的万象都在等着新妇预备好自己！

This may be the last time we gather on an annual basis. I am convinced that as soon as the Lord finds His bride pure, ready, a virgin, He’ll be coming.

这次的聚集也许是我们最后一次像这样一年一度的聚集，我相信很快神的新妇就预备好了自己成为贞洁的童女，神就要回来了。

With this idea in mind of our being prepared, I felt in my heart I want to share in these days the epistle of James. In recent days I have laid hold of something that puts the book of James together. It seems full of exhortations that are rambling and unconnected. But if we can look deeper and find the key that holds the book of James together, this sheds new light on the whole book.

关于预备自己这方面，我很有感动要和大家分享雅各书。最近我发现有些东西能把雅各书串联到一起，因为雅各书看起来似乎是一些闲谈和毫无关联的劝勉，但是当我们更深入的看就会发现新的亮光，能够打开雅各书、把雅各书连在一起的钥匙。

The key is found in James 1:21-25

这把钥匙事雅各书1：21-25

“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.

“所以，你们要脱去一切的污秽和盈余的邪恶，存温柔的心领受那所栽种的道，就是能救你们灵魂的道。只是你们要行道，不要单单听道，自己欺哄自己。因为听道而不行道的，就像人对着镜子看自己本来的面目，看见，走后，随即忘了他的相貌如何。惟有详细查看那全备、使人自由之律法的，并且时常如此，这人既不是听了就忘，乃是实在行出来，就在他所行的事上必然得福。”

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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.”

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

你们亲近神，神就必亲近你们。有罪的人哪，要洁净你们的手！心怀二意的人哪，要清洁你们的心！ --雅各书4：8

There are four books in the Bible put together for one specific burden: James is one of four books put together side by side by the Holy Spirit for our sake. They all deal with the perfecting process of the bride. They all deal with our holiness.

1. Hebrews
2. James
3. 1 Peter
4. 2 Peter

圣经上有四卷书是为了同一个负担被放在一起的：雅各书就是其中的一卷，为着我们的缘故，圣经的作者被圣灵感动把这四卷书放在一起。他们都是讲成为新妇的过程，是关于我们的圣洁的。

1. 希伯来书
2. 雅各书
3. 彼得前书
4. 彼得后书

These are all books on holiness. In this realm they speak of two things, and it is important that we understand these.

这些书都是讲如何成为圣洁的，在这个范围内，他们讲了两件事，理解他们对我们非常重要。

**The Saving of the Soul**

魂的救赎

A phrase called “the saving of the soul”. In these books it does not mean our salvation, or our being saved by grace. This is talking about our soul. Now that we are saved, the Lord wants to take our soul and saturate it with the life of Christ; our minds will be captured by Christ; our emotions, captured by Christ; our will, fully yielded to His will. And as we know, in our experience, our souls often rebel to this jealousy of God as He wrestles control for our soul.

“But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.”

“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.”

“for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

This is all the work of God **after** we become Christians.

In these books there is the word “perfection”. We know that there is no perfect Christian on this world except Jesus, but God puts us in the perfecting process.

“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,”

“Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

“We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.”

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

**The difference between holiness and righteouness**

James is a Jew and this is how he explains it: God is holy - it is His nature. Out of His nature He performs righteous deeds. God is right, God does right. God makes right. Everything He does is right, and God demands righteouness in His kingdom from us. But the basic concept that God is holy, and God does righteousness.

So this is for us as well. Our being made holy has to do with our inwrought character by the saved life of our Lord Jesus. Out of the inwrought holy life, there are righteous works that we do.

When the holy life of the Spirit of God indwells us, it enables us to do righteous things.

So we think back to Rev 19 about the bride. She has prepared her garments. The garments are explained as the “righteous acts of the saints”. True religion is a holy life that bears the fruit of righteousness.

These letters have a specific message to Jewish Christians, because they have switched around the truth. They thought that by doing righteous works that can become holy. But you can do all the righteous works you want, you cannot make yourself holy. These Jewish Christians had a problem there, so James, the writer of Hebrews, and Peter are bringing them back to the holy place.

**The Person of James**

James is uniquely qualified to write this. Before he was a Christian he was zealous for the law, for righteousness. And in that zealousness he reacted to his own brother, the Lord Jesus. James was the younger brother of Jesus. He saw his elder brother’s life. He was offended, perhaps, by the freedom that Jesus took from the Jewish laws. And his other two brothers and sister perhaps opposed these things as Jesus started to minister.

There are 2 occassions in scripture that imply that James and his brothers weren’t on board with what Jesus was doing.

“Now Jesus’ mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you.’ He replied, ‘My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.’”

And the other occassion, Jesus’ brothers chided him for not going to Jerusalem for the feast of the tabernacle.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians,

“Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,”

Can you imagine what it was like for James, to be wrong about his brother? To discover that your brother in the flesh is the Messiah of God? James must have fallen down before the Lord. And we see the humility that became the mark of James’ life at the beginning of his letter:

“James, a servant (slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Can you imagine being a bond-servant of your blood brother? But to James this was so much more!

In Acts 1, James was praying with the other disciples, praying for the Holy Spirit to come. Can you imagine, Mary sharing the details of Jesus’ birth?

When Jesus appeared specifically to James, it must have been that there was a purpose for James’ life. Paul refered to him as a “pillar” in the church in Jerusalem. He was called “James the Just”, “James the Righteous”. There were several James, but he was known as James the Just, because that was the character of his life.

“James the Just” would have been quite ironic, because in Hebrew, his name would be “Jacob the Just”. James = Jacob in Chinese.

In the church, he was known for being a man of prayer. He prayed without ceasing. He prayed in the temple, on his knees, so many years, that he developed huge callouses on his knees. They called him the man with camel’s knees.

There are some things we don’t know about James. Especially whether he looked like Jesus. Perhaps his voice had intonations similar to his brother. We know that the words that he spoke were often the very words of Jesus.

In the book of James, there are 52 verses that were exactly the words of Jesus in the gospel. He was a man who spoke and lived Jesus’ words.

So we see him in Acts 15, and gain an impression as to the depth of his holiness and righteousness. He was a man of few words. At the Jerusalem council, everyone said their words but James remained silent. Some argued for and against circumcision. James stood up, and when he spoke, there was no more argument. He spoke God’s wisdom. As soon as he spoke, “and it seemed good to all of us, and the Holy Spirit”. James’ decision was the Lord’s decision. James had that kind of authority. When he spoke, you’d be a fool to question.

When we come to the book of James and you read these many different things, you may want to start an argument over some of the things James said. But you’d be a fool - this is a holy man of God.

If you read the record carefully, you’ll see that no one loved Paul more than James in Jerusalem.

James didn’t get saved and immediately become holy and righteous. As all of us, he had to go through the process of sanctification and outward righteousness. There are a number of traditions from the early church regarding James, and here is what most of them say and agree upon: James gave all he had to feed the poor; he made no rash comments before praying and seeking the wisdom of God; James was respected by believers in Jerusalem until the day he was martyred because he believed his brother was the Messiah.

James chewed upon the words of Jesus as He spoke about kingdom righteousness. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”. “You are the salt and light of the world”; “Your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees and the scribes...the Pharisees do outward works of righteousness but inwardly they are corrupt and evil.” Jesus said, “your righteouness must begin in your heart”. So man isn’t righteouness just because he doesn’t commit outward adultery, if in his heart he commited adultery.

Jesus brought a whole new righteousness that starts from the heart and expresses itself outwardly. As our king, as our bridegroom, He demands these righteousnesses of His bride.

**The Secret to a Righteous Life**

As the disciples and James meditated how they can live such righteous and holy lives, the key that unlocked the secret came in the day of Pentecost. Beyond the tongues and power that came upon them that day, the greatest miracle - a holy life - indwelled them. And suddenly all those mysterious things in John 14-16 were understood. Indeed he left, but he’s here! He sent a comforter, and He dwells in us, and He became that holy life. And out of that holy life, righteousness flows like rivers of mighty water. Paul later calls this the “mystery of holiness”.

In the days of the early church, their Jewish or Gentile neighbours looked at them and wondered what makes them different. What’s the mystery of their godliness? The mystery - Christ in you, the hope of glory! That’s the mystery!

How can God’s spirit come and indwell and transform your life such that an inner holiness is there? And works of holiness exceeding the Pharisees comes forth?

As I travel and speak in various places, so few Christians understand this basic doctrine to righteousness and holiness. Many Christians scholars say James is just Old Testament Jewish law, missing the point completely.

James is not exhorting Christians to some outward acts by striving. He is bringing them to a recognition that Christ has become our righteousness. And that, not just in our standing before God as a result of His precious blood, he is speaking of Christ’s life in our righteous acts. He refers to this key we want to talk about tonight; a law that abides within. It’s the key to our sanctification. He calls it “the perfect law”; “the law of liberty”.

There’s a familiar Old Testament term that we don’t use very much. It is the OT definition of a man who is holy and righteous.

**“An upright man”**

The wisdom literature of the OT talk about the upright man. It means a man who is straight and not crooked. James wants his readers to be upright men.

“In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.”

The word in Hebrew is Yashua - it means morally straight, nothing crooked. He is transparent. He is a man with status before God because he is straight. There is nothing underhanded about him. James wants his readers to be upright in their lives.

The term “upright man” is used more than 50 times in Psalms, Proverbs and Job.

“For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.”

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness;”

What is the key that makes an upright man? We read 15 times that an upright man has an upright heart - a straight heart, a pure heart. It is straight before God, before the Son of God, before the Holy Spirit, before the brethren in the church. A perfect heart.

“Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!”

There is an upright man whose heart is right with God. So his life is right with God. There are no crooked ways.

The opposite of the upright man in the OT is the crooked man; the wayward man; the sinful man. The root word is the crooked man.

Are you crooked or straight? How do you know? James tells us.

**The key of the upright man**

The upright man abides in the perfect law, the law of liberty.

“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.”

The OT also states that the upright man is blessed. This man is abiding in the law. Not the OT law. You don’t abide in the OT law, you sit under it. You’re abiding in this law, it is a living law.

Why does he use the word law? He is not trying to get us all legalistic.

Law, practically defined, are the principles by which we live. We live under the law of gravity. It is how we function. There are laws that mark an upright man that enables him to live a holy life, to do righteous good works. It is not a binding law, it is a liberating law.

Listen: the perfect law - the law of liberty.

Before I tell you James’ definition of it, let us go outside James for a moment. Other writers describe this law in different ways.

Paul describes

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

Paul writes about the struggle that he was bound to the sin of law and death, but is now set free by the law of liberty.

I would that a few of us here live this, not as a theological proposition, but a reality!

Now many of you know that one of James’ biggest bothers is phony religion. He speaks of it a number of times. What is phony religion? When people talk the talk but don’t live it!

Many Christians cry that they wish they’d be crucified with Christ, and how they want to be holy. They don’t get it!

John speaks of the law of liberty. He doesn’t call it the law:

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”

Quoting Jeremiah, the writer of Hebrews writes,

“This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbours, or say to one another, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

Do you, dear saint, live in the reality of this new covenant? James calls this the ingrafted word that is able to save your soul. Why don’t we need to tell people to know the Lord? Because Christ is in you, you know the Lord!

**What’s the key to abiding in the perfect law, the law of liberty?**

“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.”

We have filthiness and wickedness that we need to repent of. When we repent, we turn to God. What do we discover when we come to Him humbly for grace?

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

The only way is through humility by the ingrafted word. When we come as sinners for cleansing, we discover something wonderful. When we were born again, the word of God was ingrafted in us, into our life system.

What does this ingrafted word say? It speaks to you of who you are in Christ. If any man is in Christ, He is a new creation, old things are passed away, everything has become new. You are a new person, you life in Him and He in you. We are often so busy we don’t hear the ingrafted word that saves our souls.

Even as you are united in Christ in His burial, you are united with Him in His resurrection! The old man has been crucified, the new man has been resurrected. Christ in you! That’s who you are.

Are you trying to be like Christ? Do you realise that Christ dwells in you? His life is grafted in you! The Holy Spirit wants to bring the power of this life through faith in you.

“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 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.”

What does this mean, for a man to look at his face in the mirror? He’s not talking about a man looking at his natural face in the mirror. In the Greek it says when he looks at “the face of his birth” in the mirror. This is the new you, as Paul says,

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

We often look into the mirror and walk away forgetting. And we go on trying.

**A call to reflect**

I want you to go look in the mirror and see who you are in Christ, because we can’t go on until we see this. The key to our sanctification is to see who we are in Christ, and to allow that reality to set in, and we see Christ and not ourselves.

I have a godly jealousy that we be ready, upright, pure and ready for our groom! Does our Lord have to wait another generation as we dawdle at the foothills? When will the bride step up and say, “come Lord Jesus!”. This is the burden of James, the practical outworking.

“Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”

*Lord we pray that your Holy Spirit will liberate us from the bonds of ourselves. That you will enable us to look at this word of truth ingrafted in us to see who Christ really is. That we can learn to become upright men. Straight before our God. Straight before our Lord Jesus. Straight with the Holy Spirit. Straight channels for the will of God. Upright in the assembly. Upright servants in the kingdom of heaven. You are looking for upright men and women. Do this amazing transforming work we pray. In Jesus name, Amen.*