

Objects in the Mirror are Closer than You Think

God's grace and peace are yours in Jesus!

Try for just a moment to imagine life – without mirrors... without anything that shows your reflection. You're not going to know how your hair looks in the morning before leaving for work. Even if you don't care about your hair, imagine driving without the help of mirrors to monitor your blind spots. Mirrors are used in so many different industries... from the dentist who checks your teeth... to those who work with lasers and telescopes... even by those who operate “fun houses” with their curvy, silly mirrors that make you look goofy. I think we would have to agree that life without mirrors would be very difficult.

Since the beginning, mankind has always found mirrors to be very useful. Archaeologists have found mirrors made from polished obsidian dating back to 6000 bc in Turkey and polished copper from 3000 bc in Egypt! Mirrors are helpful, useful, dare I even say vital.

The Holy Spirit inspired James to write down the Scriptures we are considering this morning. This James is most likely Jesus' ½ brother. James, along with his brothers and sisters, grew up in a very unique house, unlike any of us. They grew up with Jesus, the holy, sinless, son of God; he was indeed the perfect child and they were not. In a way that really qualifies him to write to us this morning about the vital nature and usefulness of a mirror – so that we might see ourselves as we are and so that we might also see God's gracious gifts.

I. That we see ourselves as we are

When we teach about God's Law – we often speak of the 3 uses of God's Law: the **Curb**, the **Mirror** and the **Guide**. God's Law as a Curb - curbs outright evil in society; not everyone murders or steals. The Mirror is one that people really don't like... I mean who wants to look into the mirror in the AM? Who wants to see what they look like, especially when gazing into God's bright and clear mirror?

God's mirror doesn't hang in your bathroom, it hangs on the pages of Scripture. When you look into it, you see the words, “Be holy as I the Lord your God is holy.... Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect... All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God... There is no one who does what is right... Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” Looking into this mirror of Bible passages give new meaning to that phrase on the bottom of the passenger side car mirror, “Objects in the mirror are closer than you think!”

Of all people, James himself grew up and lived with the mirror of perfection and holiness with Jesus every day! It sort of makes you think that these following verses were spoken from his own personal experience... ¹⁹ *My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,* ²⁰ *for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life 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.*

It wasn't until after Jesus ascended into heaven that James realized “the Good and Perfect Gift” that had come down from heaven and was living in his house. For him, the temptations to be angry at Jesus... to speak quickly and harshly towards his brother would have been constant. It wasn't until later that James could finally look into the mirror and humbly recognize his sin and confidently accept the Word of God which came to save him. Thankfully James saw his sin.

Going through life without God's Word is like living life without mirrors – dangerous and deadly. It starts by humbly recognizing that our sin is closer to us and more deadly than we realize. We're not in danger of a car crash or going out in public with bad hair... without the

mirror of God's Law we are in danger of an eternal and unending crash in hell. Without the mirror of God's law we can't see our sin, but we can be sure the Almighty God does.

II. That we see God's gracious gifts

And yet here's what so amazing about our God... just as it was for James who had Jesus as his own brother living in his house. Our God is a God of second chances... a God of incredible patience... a God who truly, truly, truly seeks the salvation of every soul. This has been his goal and still is. He doesn't change, like shifting shadows; he stays true to his plan... a plan which reached its fulfillment when THEE Good and Perfect Gift has come down from heaven in Bethlehem. Gaze into the mirror of God's Word... look intently into God's Perfect Law – the Whole of Scriptures – you will see that this perfect gift *is Jesus!*

Yes, the Scriptures show us our sin and what we deserve because of it, but the Holy Spirit also reveals to us through the Scriptures that we have been given a Savior. This same Holy Spirit, as James says, "*has given us birth through the word of truth!*" Instead of the death we deserve, we see that God has given us life. Through faith in Jesus, the many good and perfect gifts of forgiveness for all sins, peace, joy, comfort, wisdom, knowledge and understanding and more... These gifts are closer than they appear – for they are already yours through Jesus!

While we could certainly go home and rest in peace, but there's an encouragement here that James gives us, perhaps one he learned first-hand too – it's that we too easily forget... we forget what God has made us to be. Like a man who looks into a mirror, walks away and forgets what he looks like, too often we forget what it means to live in the light of God's gift of grace. We forget to put our faith into practice.

The encouragement is to keep looking into God's Word. Keep letting the Holy Spirit build you up as that new creation in Christ. As you and I are continuing each day to look intently into God's Word, we are reminded of the true freedom we have... freedom from sin and guilt and shame. We are strengthened in that freedom to walk away from the things of this world that would pollute our body, mind and soul. We grow in this freedom so that we realize we don't have to use our words to hurt or harm others.

Those are things we are freed from... but we need also to realize we are freed FOR a purpose. In Christ we are free to serve one another in self-less love. We are free to build one another up with words of encouragement, words of hope, words of wisdom. We are free to lovingly serve especially those who cannot serve themselves or need extra care. James mentions orphans and widows... but that list goes on and on... those who are young, those who are sick, those who are elderly... The opportunities to serve one another in love are closer than you think... it just takes time in God's Word to realize them and then put our faith into action.

For James, it took some time too. I'm sure there was some regrets that he didn't see Jesus as his Savior at first, but then again it was with a confident and joyful faith in his ½ brother that he confidently took a leadership role in the New Testament church in Jerusalem, not afraid because he knew that he was closer to Jesus than ever. He put his faith in action for some 30 years until his death, always confident in the good gifts God has given him, confident in God who does not change from age to age.

Brothers and sisters, may each of us strive to look in the mirror each day, seeing our sin, seeing our Savior... never forgetting our need, never looking to another to meet that need... and as we do each day, let us like, James, boldly and confidently commit ourselves to serving our God and neighbor in thanksgiving and love. Amen.