

Season 2, Episode 3: James: Grace that shapes both heart & hands (1:19-27)

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Felicity: Hello, everyone. Welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I live in America. And this is my sister Sarah, who lives in the UK.

Sarah: Hi, everyone.

Felicity: Nice to see you, Sarah. How's your cup of tea and ambition?

Sarah: I've got a peppermint tea today.

Felicity: Very good, very clean. To the palate.

Sarah: I don't know, I'm not really a herbal tea fan. I thought maybe I should branch out.

Felicity: Yeah, well, it's the sort of tea I get asked for by people all the time when they come to my house, and I never have. I always think I need to get a box of peppermint tea.

Sarah: That is precisely why I have it. We have, like, a range of herbal teas for everyone who came into our house, like a year ago. Yeah, exactly. Now it's just a bit old.

Felicity: They still smell good. I would think herbal teas smell a little better than they taste always.

Sarah: Yeah, you want it to smell like the herbal tea but tastes like squash.

Felicity: I think that is true. That is true.

Sarah: What have you got?

Felicity: Gone for a classy? Loose leaf earl. Great.

Sarah: Lovely.

Felicity: I was in Trader Joe's this morning, which is a local kind of supermarket.

Sarah: And I found this kind of biscuit.

Felicity: Which they're calling it a fig cookie. I think we call these fig rolls. Doesn't it look like a fig roll for you?

Sarah: Doesn't look very nice.

Felicity: Well, I haven't tried it yet, but I think it's got potentially just a.

Sarah: Bit of soft fig in a biscuit. Isn't all right? Pretty good. Okay, well, while you're eating that well, I just wanted to ask you, really, felicity, what do you do when you don't feel like reading the Bible that you should?

Felicity: Because I think that feeling happened quite quickly.

Sarah: In fact, it happened to me this.

Felicity: Morning as I'm lying in bed after a fairly interrupted night due to small people, and I'm thinking, I don't really want to get up and read my Bible. I'm not sure to snooze here. And I was thinking, why did I get out of bed and read my Bible? And I think that it's part of this thing we've been talking about with James in wanting to see the world through God's eyes and knowing that I don't do that on my own. So if I want to do my day, my week, my life, seeing it God's way and seeking to do things that please Him, then it's really hard to do that if I'm not reading the bible and I think it's one of those things. I never regret it afterwards, not always, but I often hesitate before I do it because I can think of a few things I might do. But I never come away thinking I wish I hadn't done that. I always come away thinking I'm really glad that I started my day like that or I did my nap time like that, or whatever. So what about you?

Sarah: Yeah, I think I would echo all of that. I think I felt like that even just as we were coming to a course. So I'm really tired. I don't really feel like doing this. And actually I always feel like doing it when I'm doing it. And I always love reading the Bible when I'm in it. But I do find it an effort and it is like I just have to pray for my heart.

Felicity: It is a heart thing, isn't it? I think it is a spiritual thing.

Sarah: Yeah, it is a spiritual thing. And also, just because we don't feel like doing it, doesn't mean it's not good for us to keep doing it.

Felicity: Exactly.

Sarah: Like encouraging my kids to say thank you just because they don't feel like doing it, it doesn't mean I shouldn't keep on helping them to say thank you.

Felicity: Yeah, good point. Should we read it? No, I think you should read it passage for us.

Sarah: Okay, I'm going to read it. So we are today we're doing chapter one, verse 19 to the end of the chapter. Okay. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral fails and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the Word planted in you which can save you. 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. Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues, deceive themselves and their religion is worthless. 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.

Felicity: Thanks, Sarah. Just hearing it read again. I was hit again by that punch of verse 22. It's so stock, isn't it? Do not merely listen to the Word and deceive yourself, but do what it says. Like it's so straightforward. It's just something I do all the time listening and not doing it.

Sarah: I know it packs a punch, doesn't it? This and I think we've both been feeling really quite vulnerable in this, haven't we? In terms of like we are doing a podcast where we are talking about the Word, we are talking about the Bible with each other and how easy it is to talk about it but not to do it. And I just feel like that's the one thing I take away from this passage. There done. Job done. Yeah.

Felicity: But I think while it's a hard thing to feel, it's a good thing to feel as well, isn't it? Because it helps us feel the kind of the weight of the Word is what we do need to be listening to and doing. And I love the way that he describes it in verse 25. Whoever looks intently into the perfect law of that gives freedom and just the idea that actually listening to it and being obedient to it, doing what it says actually that is the means of having freedom. Not because we're legally gaining our freedom, but just because following the word of God, doing what he says is the best thing to do. And that is a freeing thing to do. Which I think I forget when we just talk about it in abstract terms, I forget that being obedient to God is a freeing thing but in reality, when we are listening to it and doing it, that freedom is a true feeling. I think that's right.

Sarah: Yeah. But as you say, it's the opposite of what we think is right. It's the opposite of how our simple flesh operates because we think law and we think being slave to that and not being able to live my way and do my thing and actually no, it's not that. Is it like the law that God designs for his people is good because he is good and it displays his character in every way and therefore it gives freedom when you follow it and continue on in it. And actually we look at that and there's just an example of that in that first. In verse 19, everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. If you even just take that self and you just say yes, that is a wise way of dealing with people generally, isn't it? To do the opposite of that would stir up huge amounts of anger and strife in a way that isn't freeing but constrains you to really sound a relationship. But actually to do that and to really fulfill that command is a freeing thing because it's beautiful to see that in action, isn't it?

Felicity: Yeah, because I love that in that verse 19 or verse 20, when he's saying that this human anger that would come about through not doing that, that would get in the way of the righteousness that God desires and the righteousness of God is just a beautiful thing, isn't it? I guess it comes back to the wisdom of that first passage we looked at last week,

that kind of this is the wisdom of God that then enables us to produce a harvest of righteousness. That is a beautiful thing. And verse 21 therefore humbly accept the Word planted in you which can save you. And that word is the word as in the law. The Bible. But also that's Jesus, isn't it? That is the glorious reality of who Jesus is and that saving grace that he brings, but also than us wanting to be of his righteousness, of that beauty and that freedom.

Sarah: Yeah. And just the fact that again, that's just such grace, isn't it? That the word it's been implanted in, you know, we're not striving and attaining to something that we can't get hold of like it's already enough. That word of truth has already been implanted in us. The first fruits of which he talked about last week. And actually, what does obedience look like there? It looks like tending to that word, doesn't it? And tending to that word looks like listening to it and doing it. I don't know. I heard someone just really simply to say you've got two ears for a reason and just what that means for listening to the words. And also this practical example of listening to other people. If I look at the balance in my day, am I balancing it in that way with my two ears and my one mouth?

Felicity: Basically, yeah. And I think that's the humbly accept the Word. That's a very James like kind of posture, isn't it, of humility and recognizing who we are and who God is. And so why wouldn't I sit under God's word? Because he does know best. I often think I do know best, but in reality it's God and His Word.

Sarah: And he gives a really helpful example here, doesn't he, of someone who goes to a mirror and what is it like to look into the mirror and if I've got something in my teeth, I fix that straight away, don't I? Like that is what a mirror does. You go to check that you look okay and fix whatever is wrong on your face. And actually he's saying, well, how foolish should be to go away and just do nothing about whatever's in my teeth at the moment. And that's the same with the mirror of God's Word, is what he's saying. Would you say that that's the same with what he's saying of God's Word? But why wouldn't you look intently into it and change what's exposed? Absolutely weird.

Felicity: Yeah. And then that means of seeing the need for change and then being able to actually do something about it by God's grace through his wisdom. Then the picture of what that is, this perfect law that gives freedom and they will be blessed in what they do. That's a really desirable kind of thing isn't it? So it makes sense to, yes, listen and respond and seek to humbly accept the word planted in us. And really the person who keeps this perfectly is Jesus, isn't it? So as we seek to respond in this way, we are seeking to be more like Jesus. Would you say? Is that the right thing to be saying at this stage or is it too early?

Sarah: Yeah, I think so. I think it's just hard to know, isn't it? James doesn't take you there. He doesn't take you to Jesus and say, do you remember what Jesus was like? Do you remember? He doesn't describe Jesus in this way. But I think that is our natural explanation to go there, isn't it? And you look at what he then says, what is true religion? What does true faith look like? And he says to keep a tight rein on your tongue, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself polluted from the world. And immediately you do think, yes, Jesus is the one who wholeheartedly fulfills that. He is the one who was always looking out for the needy. He was the one who was always managing to get alongside people and yet remain untainted by sin. And he was the one who always spoke perfect words. I don't know whether he just assumes that you will go to thinking about Jesus because I just find it hard that he doesn't say it. Yeah, I know.

Felicity: And I wonder whether in that then, is the fact that he is talking to believers, brothers and sisters. And I guess in some ways James's words do echo of the way that Jesus speaks a bit as well. It feels quite Sermon on the Mount kind of I don't know yet. I think maybe we'll sort of be able to discuss that a bit further in later passages when we just kind of have a bit more of James under our belt. But the kind of bottom line is this is a desirable, righteous way of living that God tells us to do. And so why wouldn't we want to listen to it and experience that freedom that comes from that? And it's so challenging, isn't it? You and I were speaking yesterday about you read verse 27 and you're like, how can I do this better? Like, what can I do to have this real faith that he's talking about? It's so hard to look after the vulnerable, really, orphans and widows of the vulnerable and then keep oneself from being polluted by the world. You had some good thoughts on that yesterday, Sarah. What were you thinking about your thought process?

Sarah: I think I've just been so challenged by this week and I just feel like I'm not doing this and I'm not doing this enough. And I found that really hard. But my temptation has been to go, okay, what's the quick fix? What can I just do a bit more of and kind of tick that box, so to speak, rather than what I think I ended up with as I was praying through it and thinking through it. Actually, I need a whole kind of reorientation of my heart in this. I need it not to be a quick fix. I need not to be motivated by guilt, but I need to be motivated by grace. I need to be motivated by the grace that I've been given in the Lord Jesus, the grace that I see in Him as I see what he and how he responds to the needy and vulnerable. Pray for my own heart to desire it, as you say.

Felicity: Yes, because that's an interesting phrase just on that phrase. They're motivated by grace idea. When you say that, you mean that as you see what you've been given in Jesus, then why wouldn't you want to kind of live it out? Is that what you're talking about?

Sarah: Yeah, I think that there's a contrast, isn't it? Either I'm motivated by guilt, I'm not doing this enough. Oh, no, quick, I need to do it more and I feel guilty, or I'm motivated by a love for Jesus and I love in His Word and desire to obey Him more. And actually I need to strive for the latter. And the only way I do that is going back to the words planted in me and praying for the Lord's wisdom and praying for the Lord to be at work. And so then as I go to, like just quickly going to something like Matthew 25 and seeing that the refrain that it talks about there is every time you do something for the needy and the vulnerable, you're doing it for me, Jesus said. And actually, as I have that perspective, of course I want to be doing more and more because I want to be doing more for people who are made in his image and people that he loves and cherishes and has died for, I think motivated by the gospel, essentially, isn't it? But that takes work in my heart, and that's been a big process this week for me to get to that point of not just wanting a quick fix.

Felicity: Yes, I think that's so helpful. It's so helpful, isn't it? Because I think that's true of James as a whole. We can hear the commands and our kind of immediate response is, well, I just need to do it better, when actually that's not the what's the word? Almost like the process or the cycle that James takes us through. Like, he exposes that we can't do it, and so we cry out for wisdom, fall back on Christ and the grace through Him, and humbly accept the Word that's implanted in us. So through that grace, we are able to kind of run in this direction. Not completely fulfill it, but run in this direction. Yeah.

Sarah: Would you pray for us to stay as we seek to do that?

Felicity: Absolutely. Heavenly Father, we praise you so much for that word that you have implanted in us. And we pray that you would enable us to humbly accept it and tend to it. Father, please would we be those who listen to Your Word and do it, and in that would we be those who live out more and more of Your righteousness. We pray that you'd show us how to care for the vulnerable, how to not be polluted by the world. But as we see our hearts, we pray that we might come back to you every time. Please would we be always asking you the God who gives wisdom generously, who graciously lifts us up. We pray that you would please be at work in us, that we might be those who really want to run in this direction, listening and doing what you say. Amen.

Sarah: Amen.

Felicity: Thanks. A whistle stop tour. I feel like because we talked about the heart quite a lot though you can kind of talk about the heart, but thinking that through is like a deep it's another thing, isn't it?

Sarah: So do remember we've got questions in the show notes, so please pick up those questions and why not talk about them someone else? If you have the opportunity to give us a review, that would just be really great in terms of just helping other people to get to know what we're doing. We really appreciate any and everything we read about and we're just so thankful for everyone who takes the time to do that. And we look forward to seeing you next time.

Felicity: Absolutely. Thanks Era. Thanks everyone. See you next time.

Sarah: Bye.

Felicity: Bye.

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