

Being the Church at Brentwood

Inner Worth

**Ps 125 & James 2:1-17
(712, 373, 400, 644)**

September 9, 2012

We live in a world that is fascinated by appearances.
We live in a world that is absorbed with the externals.
We live in a world that is mesmerized by how things look on the outside.

It's the clothes we wear.
It's the weight we bear.
It's the make-up we use.
It's the colour of our skin.
It's the people we hang out with.
It's the places that we go.
It's the cars we drive.
It's the neighbourhoods we live in.
It's the churches that we go to.

Think of the commercials and advertisements
that you've seen in the past week.
What percentage of them have appealed
to the way you look on the outside.
50%, 60%, 70%, 80%?
Probably somewhere between 70% and 80%.

Some of the same dynamics were obviously happening
in the communities to which the letter from James was sent.
The author warns the readers not to be seduced by appearances.
If they show partiality
based on external appearances,
they are disobeying God's desire and intention.

Instead, they are to treat everyone as children of God,
citizens of the Kingdom,
brothers and sisters of each other.
"Love your neighbour as you love yourself."
That is the key to a fulfilling, flourishing life.
That is the Law.

Now, it's important to understand the Biblical idea of the Law.

The Greek word used in this passage is *nomos*.

It points back to the Hebrew word *torah*.

The basic principle behind the Biblical idea of the Law is that the whole of life originates with and belongs to God.

The aim of the requirements and demands of the Law are to align people with the intention of God to live with people as their God and have them live with him as his people.

This is the covenant.

It is a blessing given by God so that people can fully enjoy the divine gift of life by living in community as God intended, community with God, with each other, and with themselves.

As James points out several times in his letter, the Law of God is true freedom for humanity.

It is the Law of God's love that fulfills our every desire and gives us the strength to love others as we love ourselves.

This is both the source of and the expression of our inner worth.

We are worthy because God loves us.

We are worthy because God has drawn us back into an intimate relationship with himself in Jesus Christ, a relationship of being children and friends.

We are the beloved of God.

That is why we are worthy.

That is our inner worth.

And the freedom offered to us in obeying this divine Law is to live into true freedom, to live into true worth by doing the will of our Father.

That will,

as expressed in the original covenant with Abraham, is to use the unique talents entrusted to you by God to bless all peoples and care for the creation.

There is a key insight that I want to emphasize here.

It is this.

When we choose to live freely from the strength of our inner worth, we are being the humans God created us to be.

That is what James is encouraging us to do.

He is encouraging us to see ourselves as God sees us in Jesus Christ, as creative, resourceful, and whole people with a purpose.

It is our inner worth,
given to us by God's grace in our creation and our redemption,
that gives meaning to our lives.

I first ran across this quote in Stephen Covey's *The 8th Habit*.
He says it shaped his life and work.
He found it while researching his doctoral thesis at the University of Hawaii,
but could not remember what book he found it in.
I subsequently discovered it came from Victor Frankl,
an Austrian Jewish neurologist and psychiatrist
who survived Hitler's death camps.
He argued throughout his long professional career
that people could survive, indeed thrive,
in the midst of external hardships of any kind
if they found meaning and purpose for their lives,
if they discovered their inner worth.

The quote is this:

***Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response.
In those choices lie our growth and our happiness.***

It's the choices we make that are crucial.
Do we pay primary attention to external influences,
many of which point us in the direction of a false sense of self?
Or do we listen to the voice of inner worth,
the voice of God within us expressing his love for us
and assuring us that he has a purpose for us?
Do we find the meaning of our lives
in the intimate relationship God offers in Jesus Christ,
a relationship that connects us to all other human beings
and the whole creation
in a community of love, peace, and justice?

That's the vision of inner worth we are striving to express
in the life and witness of this congregation –
in our suitcase campaign, in our diaper campaign,
in our welcome on a Sunday morning
or at Jazz Vespers on Saturday afternoons this fall,
in our World Food Potlucks (the next one is on Nov 3),
in the many diverse ways each and every one of us
takes the grace and strength we are nourished by in worship
back into our lives during this coming week.

In all of those situations, we are making choices
about living out of the inner worth we have been given by God.
We are making choices about loving God,
loving our neighbours, and loving ourselves.

In those choices lies our witness to the power of Jesus Christ
to ignite and nourish the inner worth of everyone we meet.

If we choose to treat them as beloved children and friends of God,
then they will begin to sense that value and worth within themselves,
in that inner sanctum, in their soul,
where their Creator and Redeemer waits to meet them.

James was reminding his readers
and now, some two thousand years later, us
that external appearances can be deceiving, demeaning, and debilitating.
If we choose to give them power over our lives,
we will not be following the intention God has for us.

The faithful and wise choice is to accept God's view of us
as being gifted and capable human beings
who are being invited to use those gifts
to love God, others, and ourselves.

In that choice lies our true growth and true happiness.

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