Coram Deo

Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura

Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi

Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Pressure Point- On Not Being Deceived”

**Nineth Sermon Series on Book of James: “Pressure Points”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9VTlG2udUw>

March 3, 2024

***16****Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.****17****Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.****18****Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*

Christina Grimmie, sang the song Deception on our video clip that reminds us all of the pain and confusion that comes in life when we discover that we have been deceived. Especially, when it is from someone we trusted.

The word 'deceive' in its various forms occurs 87 times in the scriptures. And three of those times are within the last portion of James Chapter 1. We find the word “deceived” in verse 16, 22, and 26. In Greek there are actually three different words in the text. James has a rich vocabulary and is nuanced as he writes. Verse 16 has the word “planao” which means deceived by being lead astray**.** *(being deceived)* Verse 22 has the word “paralogidzomia” which means deceived by reasoning falsely, or thinking contrary to reason. *(deceiving ourselves)* Verse 26 has the word “apatao” which means to deceive by cheating or giving a distorted impression. *(being deceptive).*

James is attempting to address all the types of deception that can lead people in to wrong thinking and acting and being taken advantage of. Deception is a dangerous thing; both in being deceived as well as being the one doing the deceiving. When we face difficulties – which as you know was what James was writing this letter in response to – when the bottom falls out of our world, when life gets hard, what is the most likely lie that we are deceived into believing?
Well actually, there are two deceptive lies that we fall into. The first which we addressed is, that God is punishing us. To which we know now is a lie. And James unequivocally and definitively says that when the hard times come believe that God is no way punishing you and those events are in no way a punishment from God. Now, the second deception that James is refuting is an attempt to convince us that God is not interested in us, doesn’t care about our hurts, doesn’t care about our needs, doesn’t care about our pain and won’t be there for us in times of need. To which James says ***16****Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.****17****Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.****18****Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*

I

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren… How? First, **look up!** Recognize where everything good and perfect comes from. “***16****Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.****17****Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights…”*

As believers when we lose focus on the nature of God, and focus on what is going on around us, we can lose hope and forget who we are. Yet, James is saying that by virtue of you being a child of God you are already blessed, favored and every good and perfect gift is from God. The world today is filled with deep fakes, AI, counterfeits and the confusion that often comes from it. Who among us hasn’t been sent a fake text or email about the IRS coming to arrest us if we don’t pay the sender a certain amount. It is easy to take our eyes off of what is important to be distracted by what is unimportant. Never forget to look up and know that you are a beneficiary, James said, not of evil, but of every good and perfect gift that comes from the Father of lights.

I am reminded because of the music that we played at the beginning that encouraged us to “Turn our eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely deem by the light of his glory and grace.”

Helen Lemmel wrote these words after being inspired by a missionary’s life. However, I have always been inspired by Helen’s life, born into wealth but didn’t let that take her eyes off Jesus, was married and after going blind abandoned and lived in poverty for the rest of her life, yet still, she praises the Lord and wrote inspiring hymns glorifying God inspire of her circumstances. All because she looked up and kept her eyes on Jesus.

II

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren… How? First, look up and second **look out. *17****Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.****18****Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.* We need to look out for those who would deceive us into believing otherwise.

The fact is that it is not the uneducated that are taken in by cults and organizations set to deceive. The fact it is the educated, the financially well off and societies “elite”.

Nxivm is a cult in California that had people from the wealthy elite like the Bronfman’s, and the Getty’s and the Hollywood actors join and be taken in for hundreds of millions. Elizabeth Holmes the founder of Thernaos the blood testing technologies convinced corporations and individuals to give over 700 million dollars to her technologies which was just a con and smoke and mirrors. It is when we think we can’t be fooled or taken in that we are most vulnerable so James tells his people then and us now, to look out and don’t be deceived. Yet, even in the church we can deceive ourselves into thinking that something other then keeping our eyes on Jesus is important. The church service ended at the Lutheran Church in New Sweden, Maine as everyone “passed the peace.” It was the first Sunday after Easter, and the 50 people in attendance headed to the fellowship hour to have some coffee. Some of the people complained that the coffee was bitter, but people usually complain about church coffee, so they didn’t think much about it until some people began to get violently ill. By the end of the day, 16 people were hospitalized and one of them would die by the next morning. Police discovered that arsenic had been dumped into the 30-cup coffee maker, making this the nation’s worst case of mass arsenic poisoning. The next shock was that a well-respected member of the church, 53-year-old Danny Bondeson, a potato farmer, was found dead at home from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He left a note implicating himself in the poisoning. The investigation is now expanding to other members of the Bondeson family, whom police suspect may have been involved in the poisonings. The story behind the story at this point seems to be that there was a disagreement in the church about a communion table. For years the church had a communion table that was against the wall, and the blessing of the bread and wine was done while facing the wall. The Bondeson family had donated a new altar so that the bread and wine could be done while facing the congregation. But traditions die hard, and the board seemed unwilling to replace the old altar, even though a new one had been donated, because they did not want to offend some of those who wanted the bread and wine blessed while facing the wall like it had always been done. Speculation is that not only Bondeson, but other members of his extended family, had become as bitter as the church coffee and decided to teach some people a lesson.

 These people should have known better - all of them - they who had had the blessings of God so freely given and yet they acted as if they knew nothing.

 James says ***16****Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.****17****Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.****18****Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.*

III

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren… How? First, look up, **look** out.And finally, **look after.** Understand that you are precious to God and that you are the first fruits and be doers of the word and look after the “orphans and the widows.”

James says, you are the first fruits of all creatures; we are blessed to be a blessing. We are being reminded that we have these two things – hope and inheritance. This caused me to think again about the little girl and her brother who came to us from a crack house. She was desperately trying to feed her baby brother from the scraps from the garbage. They came to us with scabies, lice and malnourished. We bathed them, deloused them, medicated their skin and placed them into new warm pajamas and put them to bed with a kiss and a hug. The next morning, she awoke to find her brother not in the room and raced down the stair only to be stopped in her tracks by what she saw. With tears coming down her eyes she saw a warm fire in the fireplace, me reading the paper at the kitchen table while feeding her baby brother, who was in the highchair and Liane (my wife) cooking Saturday morning breakfast of eggs and bacon. She ran down the stairs and through her arms around my legs and said, ‘Can you me my mommy and daddy and can we stay her forever.” She lacked hope for herself or the inheritance of a loving home. And it has been our desire, as best we can to provide this and to find this for children just like them.

 Not long after this story was published in my first book, *How I Became Father to 1000 children and the Lessons Learned,* I was asked to do an interview. Afterward the makeup artist mentioned to me that she and her husband had been trying to adopt for 2 years and had been getting nowhere. I asked her some important questions took her name and said I would look into it. The fact was I knew that there were hundreds of children waiting for adoption. The problem was she had gotten lost in some red tape. We made some calls and within a week she was called to unravel the red tape; within 3 weeks she and her husband where present with a possible match, and on Easter Weekend of that year only 8 weeks after our conversation, they received their little boy who now had both a hope and an inheritance.

 In a far greater and vaster way then our intervention into these children’s and families lives, God in Christ has entered into our lives to save us, redeem us, and adopt us to given us a hope and an inheritance that can never be taken away.

***16****Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.****17****Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.****18****Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.* I have come to believe that whatever joy there is in the world come from working for others’ happiness; whatever suffering there is in the world comes from thinking only of your own. You think about that. Amen.