

Series: James

February 7, 2016

Title: Point of No Return

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Text: James 1:19-21

Into the Vortex

Niagara Falls:

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The Niagara River flows from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario, a distance of 36 miles. 11 miles upstream from Lake Ontario is its most famous feature: Niagara Falls. The falls tumble 18 stories over the Niagara Escarpment, funneling into a deep gorge.

The raging torrent within the gorge at the foot of the falls is not a place where you would want to go boating. But upstream is a different matter – unless you get to the Point of No Return.

The Point of No Return is that place on the river where you find yourself caught in the torrent of water rushing to the lip of the falls *and can't turn back*. Needless to say, it's not a nice way to end a day of fishing on the river.

Listening and Speaking:

The biblical writer James understood that the river of life has rapids and gorges that can ruin our relationships and sweep us into the chaos and brokenness of this old world. But before the waterfall there is always a Point of No Return. It is a place that gives the final warning before we get swept up into the vortex of angry words and bitter outcomes. That is why he talks to us about *speaking and listening*.

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James 1:19 NIV

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

Right communication begins with *listening, not speaking*. Listening is to be our *first option*. James tells us to be “quick about it.” Listening doesn’t just mean being silent while we think of what we’re going to say. It means paying attention to what the other person is saying. It means trying to see things from their perspective. It means letting something from them have a place in our lives.

Being quick to listen means being slow to speak. Bad things happen when we are quick to speak and slow to listen:

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Proverbs 29:20 NIV

*Do you see someone who speaks in haste?
There is more hope for a fool than for them.*

Proverbs 13:3 NIV

*Those who guard their lips preserve their lives,
but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.*

Slow to Anger!

This brings James to the danger of the vortex:

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak **and slow to become angry.***

The spoken word is perhaps the most powerful thing available to human beings. A war can be launched with a word. A relationship started or ended with a word. Every great invention began with thoughts and words. Our ability to speak shows how we are made in God’s image. He created all of reality with the spoken word. We create either a world of god or a world of hurt and pain in the same way – with the spoken world.

James writes:

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James 3:9-10 NIV

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

Taking time to listen before we speak helps us be slow to anger. When we fire from the hip, we are generally working from our own assumptions. What a difference it makes to get more information *first*. It's a lot easier to not light the anger fuse, than to try to extinguish it after it's lit!

The Point of No Return

Anger=Chaos:

James warns us that there is a Point of No Return for us in our relationships with others. After challenging us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, he offers this rationale:

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James 1:20 NIV

because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

The world we live in is a world that *tends toward chaos*. In many ways, our world is like the Niagara River. All may seem peaceful and serene, but down-river there is a mighty waterfall that unleashes incredibly destructive forces – a taste of the chaos that God conquered when He created our world and that Jesus defeated on the Cross to bring God's New Creation.

God's Righteousness:

James explains that lashing out in anger, or seething in passive aggressiveness, never serves God's purpose of remaking our world. Anger gives us the illusion of power and feeds the fantasy that we are fixing an injustice or reorganizing the world. But it has nothing to do with God's New Creation, and everything to do with the same old, same old of this sinful and broken world.

We were created to be God's re-creators. We were placed here on earth as His representatives, created to "produce the righteousness that God desires." That means that our words and our actions are meant to make the world more and more like Him.

A Better Way:

Like boaters on the Niagara River, we must make the choice as to whether we get sucked into the vortex of the chaos and brokenness of our world, or live, listen and speak in such a way as to produce God's goodness.

Choosing to be *quick to listen and slow to speak* gives us a chance to see the warning signs of approaching the Point of No Return. It gives us a chance to remember that we are here in this world as people made in God's image, bearing His reflection. We do not become accurate reflections of God when we lash out in anger and self-righteousness. We simply become contributors to the widening chaos.

But there is a better way!

The Other Point of No Return

Turn Around!

When you sense that you are approaching the Point of No Return, there is but one thing to do: *Turn around!*

James puts it this way:

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James 1:21 NIV

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.

Instead of getting sucked into the vortex of chaos and evil that comes when we float past the Point of No Return, we are to make a U turn, and *listen* to God's Word as He speaks to us.

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Psalms 119:37 NIV

*Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.*

Learning to Listen:

Instead of more chaos and anger, James tells us to:

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James 1:21b NIV

...accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

It all comes down to being *quick to listen to God*. God created us and gave us life through His Word. He offers to do the same in our lives – if we accept the word planted in us. In other words: if we listen to Him. When we listen to Him and let His Word grow in us, He plants the seed of a whole new way of living, hearing and seeing. He grows Himself in us.

And the result is that we experience His rescuing and saving power.

Point of No Return:

There is a Point of No Return beyond which we descend into the chaos and brokenness of this world. But there is *another* Point of No Return. It is the place where we step into the newness and brightness of God's saving power.

When God changes us – transforms us – we pass that other Point of No Return. No longer do we want to go back to the chaos and brokenness of the world. We are a different person altogether. As Paul says:

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2 Corinthians 5:16-17 NIV

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

What God starts, God finishes. What God speaks, transforms, grows and comes to pass. When you make a garden in your life for God's Word, it grows into the plant of His eternal Life. God Himself says:

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Isaiah 55:10-11 NIV

*"As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth*

*and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,*

so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

*It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

But in order for God's Word to grow in our hearts, we must first join David when he prayed:

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Psalm 19:14 NIV

*May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

And words that please God come from those who are quick to listen.