

**August 30, 2009**

**James 1:17-27**

## **Just Looking**

**When you get to heaven do you think you will experience "culture shock?"**

**Today's lesson from the Book of James teaches that there shouldn't be any culture shock in heaven.**

**People I admire are persons who bring a little bit of heaven to Earth.**

In the 1970s, futurist Alvin Toffler coined the phrase "culture shock" to describe the effect rapidly advancing technology was having on civilization.

But in truth, what Toffler described wasn't so much a shock to our "culture" as it was the flowering of technological gee-whiz gadgetry that worked to change the face and pace of society.

Basically, people are not "shocked" by technological advances as much as they are intrigued by them. People love to "play." Is there anything quite as enchanting as a new electronic "toy?"

Ever wonder why "science fiction" stories and movies are so wildly popular? It's not because the alien worlds our imaginations envision are so weirdly different or unexpected.

The "Star Trek" genre thrives because it tell tales laced with all the culturally familiar values and notions we can identify with. The difference is they get to have lots more elaborate toys to play with than we do.

Adaptive human beings can easily deal with gadget changes.

It's only when we begin to experience genuine cultural changes -- changes in moral codes, basic values and guiding principles -- that we finally begin to feel the tremors of a serious "culture shock."

-- It's a shock to our system when we hear about a 12-year-old murdering a 24-year-old woman in Detroit.

-- It's a shock to our system when "juvenile courts" release a child turned 21 who in short order is back in prison.

-- It's a shock to our system when we see people living their whole lives -- birth to death -- below the poverty level in America.

-- It's a shock to our system when we are told after the fact that contaminated food was sold in our local grocery store.

-- It's a shock to our system when a young, unmarried, couple deal with an unplanned pregnancy by delivering the child in a Motel 6 and then dumping the baby out in the trash to die.

Those are the real culture shocks -- events still too far outside the realm of what our cultural psyche deems acceptable that they send tremors through our souls.

Each one of us has their own threshold of "shock-ability." Some changes roll right off your back. Other changes merely annoy you. Others disturb you down to the depths of your soul.

But did you ever notice that those people who seem most sensitive to every little cultural change, every lifestyle blip are the same people who yearn the most for the long-awaited peace and stability of a future heavenly existence?

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Hello!

Talk about culture shock!

You tell me why it is, that we have a terrible time adjusting to computers handling our money, yet we feel completely comfortable in a new existence where there is no such thing as a credit card!

We blithely assume heaven will be so, well, "heavenly," that we never even consider what kinds of "culture shocks" we will encounter there:

(In Heaven)

-- where we turn the other cheek instead of getting even.

-- Where gold is as dust while goodness is treasured.

-- Where love is neither a full-body contact sport nor a winner-take-all competition, but is the atmosphere we breathe.

-- Where instead of struggling to gouge out a niche for ourselves, we are enfolded by the unity of peace.

-- Where the only designer labels to be found reads "Graced by God"-- and it is found on everyone and everything.

If the truth be told, won't this place called "heaven" in actuality be utterly foreign to us and our experience? Won't we experience a form of "culture shock" greater than any we have ever known before?

But wait. Before you decide to be buried with a bottle of tranquilizers by your side to help you cope -- consider today's epistle lesson.

The text from James declares that heaven should not be such a "shock" to our systems after all.

First, the writer reminds us, that every "generous act" and "every perfect gift" we experience on Earth are in fact heaven-sent from God.

Each moment of grace and goodness we experience during our lifetime is a tiny glimpse, a momentary preparation for the heaven that awaits us.

In stunning fashion, James' epistle counts our very existence -- as flawed and frail as it is -- as one of those heavenly glimpses, for God has created us to be "a kind of first fruits of God's creatures" (v.18).

Let's push the "Repeat" button: You and I were created as "first fruits" -- not scooped up from the bottom of some cosmic barrel.

Heavenly ways and divine ordinances should not bring any great cultural shock to our spirits -- but should strike a resonance of familiarity and well-being within us.

When we experience "heavenly moments" here on Earth, they should pluck a chord of response in our souls -- reminding us that this is the way God intends our lives to be experienced.

That is why James' text goes on so stridently, to urge believers to act as God's first fruits--not merely accept that designation as a static identity.

"Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers," (v.22) insists the epistle writer. Once hearers become doers, we can play fragments of heavenly music throughout our earthly existence.

You haven't already heard today some strains of heavenly melodies? You expect you'll probably get through the day without any experience of heaven-on-earth? Then something's wrong with your soul.

You and I are gifted with the capacity to taste of "the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5).

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NOW.

You and I can experience the foretaste of eternity.

NOW.

Often when people are shopping they say:

"I am just looking." When asked do you want something unusual, different, special, they can only respond: "Just looking." The whole thrust of today's lesson is to get us to do more than "just look."

We need to realize that we can find heaven here on earth. That is why we pray thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

We are laboring to construct here in this life on Earth as many roughed-out models of our heavenly home as possible.

To be sure, every attempt will be incomplete; every model will lack scale and power; yet each and every genuine attempt truly brings a portion of heaven onto this earth.

James concludes with a simple, practical, straightforward directive: "care for orphans and widows in their distress."

-- Why are you volunteering to worthy causes or contributing to missions.

-- Why are you trying to make sure our children have a place to grow and thrive at Franklin Church?

-- Why are our children and youth and Christian Education so important?

-- Are you feeling sick? Why does our church need to care about those who are ill, hospitalized or shut in?

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-- Why do we visit Alzheimer's patients who do not even know we are there? Why do we bother to spend time with them?

-- Do we really tell our children we love them?

-- Are you kind to people at work who undercut you?

-- Why are we pushing this church into the 21st century? Do you say it will never change?

-- You know how much it costs to keep this church and its mission and ministry running?

-- Why do you smile or say something nice to everyone you meet?

-- Do you ever waste an opportunity to proclaim Christ's love to others?

Do you spend your time on earth "just looking?"

You want to escape the real "culture shock?" Then bring heaven to earth. Then do more than say "just looking." Be a hearer and doer of God's word.

Amen.

