

## “Have a Coke and a Smile”

James 1:17-27  
Mark 7:1-23

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To start today’s sermon, I need a little help from everyone here. I am going to begin singing a song, and I need you to join in.

*I’d like to build the world a home and furnish it with love;  
Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow-white turtle doves.  
I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony,  
I’d like to **buy the world a coke** and keep it company.*

Oh, how advertisement and the power of suggestion has got us. The real words to this song are:

I’d like to build the world a home and furnish it with love  
Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow-white turtle doves.  
I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony,  
I’d like to **hold it in my arms** and keep it company.

It’s funny how advertisers, even in 1971, knew the power of suggestion and how it could affect us. Coke has had some of the best advertising in the market: Have a Coke and a .... That’s right, “Have a coke and a smile”(1979). “Coke, You can’t beat the... ..” “Coke, You can’t beat the Real Thing”(1990). How about these? “Things go better with Coke”(1963), “Official Soft Drink of Summer”(1989), and my all time favorite, partly because it really fits into today’s sermon, “Coke adds Life” (1976).

I would like to make a comparison between Coca-Cola and a simple natural compound...water... to help us understand today’s scripture. Coke is a man-made product that is a mixture of several items as noted on the ingredient list. The list includes: carbonated water, high fructose corn syrup, caramel color, phosphoric acid, natural flavors, and caffeine. Oh, and, the label includes the following statement: “This product includes ingredients sourced from genetically engineered crops, commonly known as GMOs.”

You know what water contains? When it is pure, it is made up of a molecule that has two hydrogen atoms covalently bonded to one oxygen atom. That’s it: Water molecules in a glass.

The two drinks are very different in form, yet coke still has drinkability due to its first ingredient, water. But there is a huge difference: Coke is designed by humans to become something that you will crave, forcing you to desire more. The company does this in a couple of ways: 1. It contains a lot of high fructose corn syrup which is a form of sugar, and sugar is a carbohydrate. When you take in sugar, your body reacts in a way that makes you desire more of it. 2. It contains caffeine. When you drink caffeine on a

regular basis, your body becomes used to it and begins to crave it. Finally, the branding within the company, recognizes that the shape of the bottle is attractive and fits quite nicely in your hand and the bright red label attracts your eyes to it. In addition, there are marketing schemes that help to create a feeling that buying a coke is cheap, but when you buy a coke at \$3.00 in the local gas station, it is actually pretty expensive.

The bottom line, coke is a product of the world. It is designed, through different manipulations, to take your eye off of a better choice and even cause you to crave the drink itself.

On the flip side is water. Water comes from the tap. It's free. It contains H<sub>2</sub>O: Nothing to create a craving, nothing added to make it special...just water.

Now let's look at the outcome of drinking the two items. If you were to only drink Coca-Cola and you averaged three bottles each day, you would add 262,800 calories per year to your diet. If you did nothing to combat the extra calories, you would gain 73.5 extra pounds in a year. Not to mention, the dentist would love you, as he is now able to build an extra wing on his house due to the excessive wear on your teeth due to the sugar and acid that is now swirling around your mouth three times a day.

Drinking water each day, well that adds zero calories, which means it does not affect your weight. In addition, it has no negative effects on your teeth or any other body part.

Here's the deal: Coke is created of the world-- it even has different flavors, like cherry vanilla, but drinking it really is not good for you.

Water, on the other hand, is part of God's creation. Water is present in the very first book of the Bible. In fact, we find the first mention of water in Genesis 1:2- *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* We know that water sustains all life forms, it helps us become clean, allows growth and it rains down on us from above. Water is a pure gift from God.

This purity is referenced in the book of James as we look at our first reading: "Every good and perfect gift is from heaven, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights" (James 1:17).

Before I get too far into the discussion of the verse, I want to share a little bit about the book of James. The book of James is a bit different than other books of the New Testament. You get quotes from the book of James like, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). His "works" view of justification seems to oppose the view of the Apostle Paul, who is the Bible's defender of "justification by faith alone." These seemingly opposing views may not be as far apart as it would appear. When James speaks of "faith," he seems to be pointing to a simple intellectual understanding of the existence of God. Paul, on the other hand, looks at faith as a relationship of trust that is built on the promises of God.

The idea of works is a bit different as well. When Paul mentions the concept of works, he is speaking of the Jewish works based on rituals that have been developed by the Temple. Ritual works would have included actions like circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the different food laws, including the cleansing of oneself prior to eating as noted in the reading from the Gospel of Mark. James, is not concerned with these points in this writing, rather, James' idea of works focuses on caring for widows and orphans and keeping oneself unstained from this world. By the way, Paul also noted the importance of "faith working through love" in Galatians.

I have to tell you that I really enjoy the book of James. The author sheds light on the importance of upholding moral imperatives within our lives as serving Christians. Due to the gifts given by God through the gift of the Good News, that is the gospel of Christ, we are able to understand and obey the message that Jesus brought forward. It is due to our understanding of the Gospel that James expresses the need to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus shed light on the purity that God has presented to us.

One of the teachings of Jesus, that helps to serve as springboard into today's lesson comes from the beatitudes. Jesus said,

<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.*

<sup>7</sup> *Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

<sup>11</sup> *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

As we look at the beatitudes, there is one word in the English language that comes to the forefront in all of them: Humility. In this world, the concept of humility seems to a

forgotten notion. Instead, the world creates a desire to seek out wealth, happiness, pride, victory, strength, domination, popularity and power. Jesus doesn't seek any of this. We crave the needs of this world, and due to the devil's schemes, we begin to crave (kind of like Coca-Cola) the things of this world: a huge bank account, a better house, a bigger boat, greater friends, a group of followers who hear our voice, constant happiness, all of our wants being met. The cravings of this world simply continue to grow upon one another and cause us to desire more and more and more and more. And when we don't get what we want, we think it is unfair and we become angry.

This is where James shows his cards. Let's read James 1:19-21 again: 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 filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

When we don't get what we want, we become angry. This type of anger does not "produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:20). The world, through the schemes of the devil, wants us desire its goods and the devil uses anger to defend this point of view. Why? Probably because anger is very accessible. We experience it daily. For example, just take a drive down 115 in the middle of summer with a bridge out and 15 mile detour as you follow a semi going 45 miles an hour. Or, how have you felt lately when you've gone downtown Frankfort and tried to find a parking place? The difficulty with anger, especially as James points out, is that being angry takes away our ability to love.

What are the two greatest commandments? 1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. 2. Love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus states that the two greatest commands begin with LOVE. There is no mention of anger, no mention of disgust, no mention of disappointment or hatred. The greatest commands begin with love. If we look to the Apostle John, we see that he places the ideas of love and hate on opposite ends of a spectrum, with love on one end and hate on the other. Although, we have times that anger can be justified, for example, when the poor are being oppressed, most of the time anger is not necessary. Most of the time anger is not even beneficial as it changes our mindset and becomes a controlling factor in our lives.

The problem with anger is that it is a great deceiver. Anger takes us away from Jesus' desires, and James wants you to know that controlling human anger is really important. He wants you to know that anger is taking you away from a relationship with your savior Jesus Christ. James wants you to take the anger out of your life, so you can focus on the greater things pointing you to Jesus.

What does this mean to us today? If your anger is born of a worldly desire, recognize the worldly desire and get rid of it. This is another way of repeating words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: *And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and*

*be thrown into the fire of hell.* Jesus is telling us to remove the thing that makes us sin by causing us to be angry. A simple example would be if you go golfing once a week and you end up cursing the ball, the club, the way the green is shaped, the playing partner who whispered while you were putting... and you go home and share the anger with your wife or child, then stop golfing. Seek something that is purer, more God-centered and more kind to those around you.

The reality of anger is that we are never going to be perfect, but we need to recognize the emotion of anger and its humanness, how destructive anger is to ourselves and our neighbor, and how it is seen as a sin to God and that it will take us away from His righteousness. If you allow anger to control your life, it will. James is very direct in what we should do with anger, “all moral filth” and “evil that is prevalent.” James simply states, “get rid of it” then “humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

Following the discussion on anger, James moves to an interesting discussion on listening to the Word and being sure to follow it. As a Christian, we are called to not only hear the Word of God but to act on it. It is in this verse that I believe the idea of Christianity has gotten a bad name. If every Christian followed the words of the Bible, we would be seen as kind, compassionate and caring. But we are not seen that way by a lot of people. We are seen as judgmental and angry. A great number of people outside of the church simply see Christians as hypocrites. James names the problem in verses 22-25: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at their face in the mirror and, after looking at themselves, goes away and immediately forgets what they look like.”

The mirror that James describes in the passage is a mirror that shows us our reflection as God sees us as we take in His Word of life. The difficulty comes when we forget our image as God sees us. This is when we make up lies like when we gossip, telling somebody all about someone else’s personal business, but we say to ourselves, “Oh, I’m not gossiping, I just wanted to tell this person, so they would pray for them.” Or, if someone has done something wrong at work and the boss belittles the person, but the boss thinks to themselves, “I’m not angry, I am just trying to make sure they don’t make the same mistake again.”

The truth is God sees what is inside of us more than what is outside of us. Unfortunately, a lot of Christians focus more on outward sin and judgement of that, rather than looking at the heart of a person, or even into their own heart. We can see this in Jesus’ words found in Luke 18 as Jesus points to a Pharisee and a tax collector:

<sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

<sup>13</sup>“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

<sup>14</sup>“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Jesus knows that we are going to sin. He understands that we will make mistakes. In the end, He wants us to admit this as well: Admit that we are sinners and that we need His saving grace to enter into a relationship with Him.

God’s mirror will reflect our true heart. The world’s mirror will reflect things of this world. Jesus pointed to this same truth in our reading from Mark today when he said, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”

As you leave today, please take some time to consider where your heart is and how you are following God’s direction for your life. If the “Coca-Cola” of this world has caused you to crave it and your desires have allowed you to move away from loving God and loving your neighbor, then admit this to the Lord and ask for help in removing the idol from your life. Coke will never add life. Only the grace provided by Jesus’ sacrifice will do that.....

And all God’s people said, “Amen.”