

James 1:22-27

April 19, 2020

Our regularly scheduled programming did not include this big, massive Coronavirus invasion into our lives. I know it seems like eleventyhundred years ago, but before any of us knew what COVID-19 was, we were studying the book of James.

Many of us have been forced to slow down and maybe some of us are doing some self-reflection. James will help us. It seemed good to visit again with the brother of our Lord and allow his no-nonsense style in these days of quarantine.

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. [23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. [25] But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

James 1:22–27

PRAY

All native English speakers have heard the following aphorism:
“If it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, quacks like a duck,
then it is probably a duck.”

The meaning is clear enough: if we run across a bird that has
all the features and characteristics of a duck, then it is
probably a duck. Typically, this dictum is used to say
something like:

You know who someone is by how they act.

In other words, Your life tells who you are.

We know the characteristics of ducks—

They quack.

They swim.

They waddle.

What about Christians? How can you tell who is a Christian?

How would you describe them?

They—

- Listen to Christian Radio
- Have been baptized
- Say they believe in Jesus
- Raised a hand

- Walked an aisle

No.

James helps us, and I'll give you a hint, it is a bit easier to spot a duck than a Christian.

You see it is easy to—

- Speak like a Christian
- Hang with Christians
- Sing like a Christian
- Look like a Christian

And NOT be a Christian.

How can you tell?

A Christian is a DOER of the Word.

A Christian lives a life of submission to the word of God.

I'm going to give you a spoiler to this sermon right up here are the front. You are going to be tempted to listen to this FOR other people. But James has other instructions. He is going to tell us to listen for ourselves.

James is easy to understand hard to live out. This is how James is. He is so straightforward that he can cause us to squirm.

Main idea: Christians DO the word.

A Look into the Mirror

A Look at ourselves

1. A Look into the Mirror

Vs. 22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Like the sunlight streaming into a sleepy teenager’s room, that verse is so clear it is painful. Christians MUST be doers of the Word. They must NOT just hear, but hear and DO the word of God.

What does it look like if someone is a hearer only?

Verse 23 tells us,

[23] For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

[24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

Imagine if you are outside working in your yard on a hot day. You are mowing and trying to make your lawn look like someone cares. You are pruning bushes. Your mower breaks down and you fix it. Your hands are black with grease and you wipe it on your head. As you are mowing, a rock caroms off the

wall and hits you in the forehead a trickle of blood seeps out. You keep soldiering on and then a bird poops on your head.

You stumble into the house—inhale a cold drink of water and happen to get a glimpse of yourself in a mirror. You are a mess. You have black streaks. You have a scab. You have bird poop in your hair.

Imagine if, as you assessed the damage you said, “Huh, interesting.” And walked away. And you went about the rest of your day without doing anything to fix your condition. Instead of showering, getting a Band-Aid, combing your hair, you do nothing.

NONE of you would do that.

James point is this—if you hear the word either through reading, sitting under preaching, preaching yourself, teaching or singing and you make NO changes you are like someone who goes through life with bird poop in his hair.

As outlandish as that sounds, It is MORE bizarre to hear the word and NOT be changed by it. To NOT let it inform HOW you live your life. To hear the life changing, life giving, Spirit empowered word of God and you do NOTHING—is like going through a day, a week, a month with bird poop in your hair.

The word must make an impact.

If you hear the word—and are unchanged, consistently you are deceiving yourself. When we come in contact with the word of God, there is always something about us that needs to change. The word of God is transformative.

Do you hear the word and obey? Or merely hear?

Don't misunderstand, we MUST both hear and DO not just do. And not just hear. They go together.

We must hear and change.

There are two and only two roads to go down—

The road of self-deception- in verse 22:

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

OR vs. 25,

“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

Which do you want—Logically?

To be deceived?

To be blessed?

I pick A.

After a look in the mirror, now we have a hearing and doing test.

2. A Look at Ourselves

Vs. 26,

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

Some of you might think—“religious”—I’m not religious. I’m a Christian, religion is fancy buildings and smells and bells and all the rest.

When James says “religious” he means: how your relationship with God is shaping your life. In other words he is saying: If any of you think you are following the Lord and yet you don’t—

Bridle your tongue
Visit Widows and orphans
Keep your unstained from the world

You are probably self-deceived.

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

Did you see the three ways?

1. *Speech.*

Whether you have thought about it this way or not, you have a super-power that can lay even the strongest low—your speech.

How do you speak? We all need to look into the mirror of God's word here. We all need to examine how we speak. There is a reason that James puts this as the first test of being a doer of the word.

Notice, he doesn't say that we NEVER speak but just that we are to bridle our tongues. Doers of the word bridle their tongues. Just as you put a bit and a bridle in a horses mouth to control him, We must bridle ourselves.

Bridling means you speak when you should.

Bridling means you remain quiet when you should.

Bridling means you use your words to build up.

Bridling means you DO NOT use your words to breakdown.

James is so concerned with how we speak that he is going to talk about the tongue in each of the next four chapters.

Nothing shows if you are a doer of the word as how you speak.

Do you know why?

James tells us—look again at verse 26,

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.”

Do you sound like a Christian?

Some patterns that we need to control and bridle—

Flattery: Using your speech to make someone feel good just so you can get something from them or so they won't be a problem for you.

Careless: Shoot off your mouth spouting opinions here and there and everywhere; to those who ask and those who don't.

Negativity: Your words always look on the darkside—seldom is heard from you an encouraging word.

Judgment: You are happy to use your words to draw conclusions and share them with anyone.

Accusation: As you jump to conclusions you level accusations. Sometimes they are in the form of a question, but you are looking to pull others down. The Evil in an accusation is that people think—well, it might not ALL be true but some of it HAS to be. Really?

Slander: This is using your words pull someone else down. Slander is not necessarily spreading lies—that is bad enough—but it is using your speech to make others think less of someone else.

Gossip: Speaking about something that is not your business with someone else.

This COVID quarantine should give us an opportunity to take stock personally. Are you are doer of the word or a hearer only? Consider your words. If you want something very practical, look back over the last six months at your words on Social Media. The blessing and the curse of Social Media is that our words can travel faster than the speed of light.

What do your words say?

We need to HEAR and DO the word—and bridle our tongues.

We have our speech to consider—also our:

2. *Service.*

Vs. 27, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.....”

At this time, there was no such thing as a safety net or stimulus checks or welfare, so orphans and widows had no help. They being the most vulnerable in society had to rely on others to help and protect them. They had no one to watch out for them.

Do you see the point here in verse 27?

Are you helping those who having nothing to offer you back?

Widows?

Orphans?

Special Needs?

Sick People?

The Poor?

The Hurting?

It is so tempting to arrange our lives so that we live around those who can do something for us—if that is how we live we are hearers and NOT doers of the word. Is there anyone you can help expecting nothing in return?

We need to HEAR and DO the word—otherwise we will only care about ourselves and not those in need.

Bridle their tongues

Serve those in need

3. Separate.

Vs. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

This certainly DOES not mean that we separate ourselves FROM the world we live in. No, we are in this world, the call here is not to be OF the world. Those that are doers and not just hearers refuse to own the philosophy of the world around us.

The world’s passions MUST not be our passions.

The world’s priorities MUST not be our priorities.

The world’s perspectives MUST not be our perspectives.

Doers put Jesus and his kingdom ahead of everything else.

Ahead of—

Money

Comfort

Career

Education

Reputation

Family

Leisure

We need to HEAR and DO the word—otherwise we will adopt the mores and patterns of the world around us.

Speech.

Service.

Separate.

The point is NOT so much—STOP speaking so horribly and START serving others. It is—but I want you to see a deeper connection.

Verse 26 gives it to us—

“If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.”

WHY do we hear and not do?

Because our hearts are out of whack.

We see an explicit connection between what we say and our hearts. By heart, he doesn't mean that remarkable muscle beating 60-80 times a minute delivering blood to your body. Heart in the Bible denotes who you really are.

Do you see what we need to change? Our hearts. Who we really are.

If we are hearers ONLY and not doers—

Our speech, service, and separation WILL be out of whack.

We need more than just tips on how to speak or where to serve or worldview training. We need to change at the heart level.

You see—the message here is MUCH more than just—bridle your tongue!! It is change your heart. Change who you are from the inside. We need the transformative power of the word working in concert with the Spirit to transform us.

So, if you just go away and just bite your tongue without addressing those places you need to be transformed, nothing will change for long or for good.

What do we do? Say, “I’m stuck?” No.

We have a savior to ask for help.

Christians—convicted?

Where do we go? Jesus. We are free to go to him knowing that he will not send us away. The sin we are convicted of, he already died for. He died to forgive us of our unbridled speech, our selfishness and our worldly stains BUT he lives to empower us to change.

Are you a hearer only? Go to Jesus. Ask for help.

This quarantine we are living through is a challenge, but also an opportunity. If each of us is not taking stock in who we are

and where we need to change, this time will be a waste. I don't think it has to be that way.