

True Religion James 1:27

Introduction

We are doing the chosen series because God is passionate about vulnerable children and calls his people to be involved...

Scripture

²² 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.

- Big idea: Caring for the vulnerable is a demonstration of faith.
- James is a practical book, it's boots on the ground.
- Illustration: Some of the bible is a textbook, this is more like a handbook
 - o This is how it actually works, this is what the Christian life is supposed to actually look like...
 - o And being a Christian, being a doer of the Word, part of that is visiting the orphan in verse 27.
- Quickly here, let me walk through and show you how James builds out that idea...In verse 22 we have this idea, many people hear, but few people do
 - o In Matthew 7, Jesus says those who hear the Word and do it, are like the man who builds on the rock, when the storm comes they don't collapse. But those who hear the word and won't do it, are like those who built on the sand
 - o They both heard, but true belief in the word of God is revealed in how your life is built out
- The heart of this passage is that we have a natural inclination to hear more and do less. I have said this before, but in a Southern culture where there is a lot of preaching, we can fall in love with conviction even...
 - o Hearing the Word. But do we love conviction on Sunday more than obedience on Monday? What is the living breathing Word of God pushing us to change about our lives?
 - o Are we gonna do, or just hear?

- We watch, we theorize, we learn things...but do we actually go there¹
- And so then he gives us this small illustration, the hearer looks into a mirror, and then when they turn away it's gone

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.

- They forgot what the problem was...Oh, there is something in my teeth, hair is a mess, didn't wash my face. Most of us would say that happens because we forgot to look in the mirror.
- But what the Bible is saying here is, the hearer looks in the mirror, knows there is a problem, and then just walks away and forgets...it's gone.
 - o The hearer hears a sermon on generosity then doesn't tip. Or a sermon on the image of God, then laughs at a racist joke. Or hears a sermon on confession, but hides their porn addiction.
 - James is saying, "Don't go to the Word, see the issue, and then forget it."
- Instead, make the change, be a doer. Now the question is how? And the answer is not what you may think. The answer isn't force, facts or fear...the answer is a new image
 - o If you want to be a doer, you have to begin seeing something different in the mirror...
- Gospel: 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.
 - o See what he is saying, the way to become a doer is not to look at yourself, it's to look at the gospel.
 - o Looking at your own sin will point out the problem but it doesn't give you the motivation to fix the problem.
 - Illustration: The mirror that shows you sin, it's like train tracks. They point the right way, but there is no power in the track to move the train of your life toward holiness.
- A better motivation comes from looking away from your sin and to your Savior, the law of liberty, better said, the gospel
 - o This is the gospel. All of humanity is under the wrath of God because of our sin...our dishonesty, the way we've treated the poor, things we've said and thought about each other, our greed...they are enough to separate us from God eternally.
 - o But God sent Christ to live a life absent of all sin, so he could give us the fullness of his righteousness...and that exchange came on the cross, He

¹ Merida

died for the sin of the world, and through faith, we join Him in His resurrection

- Illustration: Baptism is not salvation, but it's a public declaration of faith...I am declaring before the world, I am resurrected with Christ! I am joined to Him, I am in Him
- And here is how that motivates us to be a doer of the Word, it's counter intuitive, because when we look in the gospel mirror, Jesus is the one we see looking back! It's not me...filled with my sin, it's Jesus totally righteous
 - o And that casts a vision for my life! Something to live into. The gospel creates a new identity to live into.
 - o This is who you are because of God's grace so chase it...and creates a people with a bias towards action...

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

- That's why he says here, go after it...not because doing a good deed saves you, or makes you right with God.
- We have a way better motivation, this is who you are. You are an action-oriented people, you are not hearers, but doers...you are a people whose lives are changed by the Word of God
 - o So go and be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ...

Demonstrate your faith by supporting adoption and foster care

- For some, that means doing it, and I mean it when I say some. There is no pressure, shame. This is a big deal, but you can be involved in many ways without adopting or fostering...all of us can be involved...
- Couple of things...maybe this series has brought out in you a deep passion for the vulnerable, or maybe it hasn't
 - o And if it hasn't I want to challenge you. Over and over in the Bible we are called to the fatherless, and the vulnerable. To treat the poor and broken hearted in a certain way...
 - o To identify with them. I've told you, every child of God came to the family through adoption, we identify with the orphan. Every child of God had to be reunited with the family, we identify with foster children...
- And if that's just not where you are, hey is there an understanding of the gospel? Is your identity a true believer, or is there this southern fried religious façade that makes you think attendance is more important than heart change
 - o One guy said it like this...if there is no commitment to align practice and identity, you have to ask if there is an identity at all?
 - Do you identify with the vulnerable, the orphan, the broken hearted spiritually? Is this your true identity?

- But for the believer...Remember William Carey? "I'll go down, if you hold the rope."...We need rope holders, and we need those willing to step forward and walk this road...
- Where do we go from here?
 - o Have a heart that is for the vulnerable, and be willing to step through the door when God brings something to you...a family you know that needs babysitting help, or a meal, or help with a fundraiser, or a prayer warrior in their corner through endless court appointments...
 - You have the Spirit of God in you and He will reveal opportunities for these precious children and families that he loves and holds dear, will you put your yes on the table for what the Spirit prompts you to do
 - You have what they need...the Spirit in you, Jesus said we would do greater works than Him! In breadth, in volume, through the Spirit of God

Conclusion

- We have an opportunity to visit the orphan...to intervene for them, to show up for them...Their affliction, their poverty, their powerlessness, their bereavement²
- But it's deeper...God visited Sarah to give her Isaac in Genesis 21; God visited the children of Israel in slavery and their misery in Exodus 4; Ruth and Naomi returned to Israel because the Lord had visited the people and blessed them there; who is man that God would visit them Psalm 8:4; God visited the people when He brought them back from exile in Jer. 29; Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1; In Acts 14 at the Jerusalem counsel God is said to have visited the Gentiles...
 - o This is the point. Yes, visitation means caring for the vulnerable, but it also means something deeper...visitation is a word used to denote that God showed up in somebody's life, and changed their circumstances...
 - o Visiting the orphan means that God wants to change these kids' lives, through us...
 - It means that God wants to visit these kids, and he does so through the church...when it comes to building families through adoption and reunifying families through foster care, it's God's work...but the church is God's plan A
- Church lets build families the way God builds His...
 - o Isn't that the church you want to go to? A church that begins to have a reputation among the poor and vulnerable and the city alike...They don't just hear, they do. Let's pray.

² NICNT, Moo

*Sermon by Andrew Hopper, lead pastor of Mercy Hill Church in Greensboro, N.C.
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preparation, small group Bible studies, personal study, etc.*