

Hearing and Doing the Word

James 1:16-27

Introduction

When you get to various portions of James, like this text, you find yourself saying, “That sounds a lot like Jesus.” That’s true. James has been obviously saturated in the teaching of Jesus. This particular passages comes to mind:

Matthew 7:24-27

24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

This is at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Wise people live their lives on the Word of God. That involves hearing and doing the Word.

James 1:16-27

- The *word of God* ties all this together.
 - 1:18 — the word of truth
 - 1:21 — the implanted Word
 - 1:22-25 — a doer of the Word
 - 1:25 — the perfect law/the law of liberty
 - 26-27 — are three ways to do the word.
- Notice also the theme of *spiritual deception* (mentioned three times)
 - 1:16 — Don’t be deceived into thinking that God is evil/tempting you
 - 1:22 — “Don’t kid yourselves” thinking you are mature because you are hearing a lot of teaching; maturity involves acting on the Word.
 - 1:26 — “Don’t kid yourselves” (You aren’t mature if you can’t tame the tongue.)
- And a more secondary theme: two mentions of the Father
 - 1:17 — The Father is the giver of all good gifts.
 - 1:27 — The Father is a father to the fatherless and protector of the widow.

Some Christians are knowers: You love to study, love footnotes, and you love to double-check my sermon on your Bible software.

Some Christians are activists: You wake up and you are raring to go. The three minute devotional thought is good enough!

But ... **Knowing and doing the Word are both essential for growing in maturity.**

To know the right thing to do, James says, but not do it is sin. (4:17). But an uninformed activist is also problematic. Having “zeal without knowledge” is dangerous.

I have three simple points: (1) Value the Word, (2) Humbly Receive the Word, (3) Do the Word....

#1. Value the Word (James 1:16-18)

James highlights the Father’s common grace in verse 17, and His saving grace in verse 18 – this salvation comes to us through the word of truth.

A. Our Good Father (1:16-17)

V 16: A transitional verse. “Don’t be deceived..” – God is not evil, but good.

- He isn’t tempting you to do evil (13-15), but the source of all good gifts (17).

V 17: This verse highlights what we often call God’s “common grace” – God’s general goodness displayed in the world.

- “He has mercy over all that He has made” (Psalm 145:9)

“the Father of lights,” is unique to James.

- The image of heavenly bodies points to God’s creative power and care over the world. (cf. Job 38:4–15, 19–21, 31–33; Ps. 136:4–9; Isa. 40:22, 26)
- “He makes it rain on the just and the unjust.” (Matt 5:45)
- Even the most evil men in the world get to experience something of the goodness of God.
 - o Examples: Hitler, Pol Pot, etc.

This should amaze us. God is good to the most undeserving in expressing his common grace.

Many people struggle with “the problem of evil,” but no one seems to struggle with the “problem of good.” How could a holy God allow any to experience his goodness. We think we are entitled to his goodness so no one seems to have a problem with the good.

- It’s easy to take his goodness for granted, but we shouldn’t. We should constantly give thanks.
- God is always good. He does not change like heavenly bodies change.

B. His Life-Giving Word (18)

In His grace, He brings us to life through the Word – “by His own will, he brought us forth by the Word of truth....” (18)

So we move from the common grace of God (17) to the saving grace of God (18).

- “Of his own will” – God chose to do this by His grace.
- “Word of truth” – The instrument by which we’re brought to life. (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5).
 - Why are you guys all about the Bible? Here’s why. God brings the dead to life through it.
- “Brought forth” – new life (cf., 1 Pet 1:23)
 - Illustration
- “firstfruits” – a typical way to talk about Christians in the NT (2 Thess. 2:13; Rev. 14:4; and also Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15). We experience a foretaste now of this great salvation that will one day encompass all of creation.
 - Because the word of truth has brought us new life, we have power to resist temptation (1:13-15)

This word matches our new nature.

- New creations are attuned to a new word.
- Teenagers can detect their favorite songs quickly – just a tiny fragment of the song is played and they can start singing it; we should be that attuned to the Word. It addresses our interests; it matches our nature, it helps us face the trials of this life (Dorinai).
- Value the Word.

#2: Humbly Receive the Word (James 1:19-21)

Here James contrasts heart attitudes: madness vs. meekness, hostility vs. humility.

Hasty speech and anger do not please God (19-20)

The word will be the focus of vv. 21–27, but before he goes there, James addresses sinful behaviors related to speech and anger in verses 19-20. He will address this subject later in the letter (1:26 and chapter 3).

- Dorinai: “We learn more by listening than speaking. Big talkers are rarely good listeners, and angry talkers don’t hear a thing.”
- Anger makes it difficult to get along with people; and it makes it difficult to get along with God!
- It doesn’t “produce the righteousness of God” — that is, it doesn’t glorify God.
- So James says, put it away, so that you can listen slowly, carefully, humbly.
 - “Quick, slow, slow” — like a dance class. Some dances, are quick, quick, quick, quick; some are slow, slow, quick, quick

Well, this rhythm is more important! Don’t forget it!

- The rhythm of the mature Christian: slow to speak, slow to anger, quick to listen.

Proverbs 17:27-28

27 Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,
and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

28 Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

If you have uncontrolled anger, you will have uncontrolled speech.

- We need to learn to say “I’m sorry” when we fail with our words.
- Jesus placed a tremendous value on listening in the context of the Word of God bearing fruit in our lives. (eg., Matt 13)
- Learn the rhythm — quick, slow, slow.

Cleansing (21)

- “Rid yourself” or “take off” — filthiness, and wickedness
- It connotes the idea of putting away dirty clothes.
- “Filth” is the same word in 2:2 for the poor man’s clothes (“shabby”)
 - It’s okay if your clothes are shabby, but not your attitude
- Prepare for the word by putting away sin.

Receive with Meekness the implanted word (21)

- The secret to being a good student of the Scripture is humility.
- How do you hear it? With a grudge? With hesitancy or hostility or with humility and hunger?
- Allow the Word that you have received to influence every aspect of your life.
- Don’t merely hear it audibly, but allow it to change your heart.
- Psalm 95 – An “Everyday Psalm” in some traditions. – “Do not harden your hearts”

Growing (21b)

- “Save” – in a comprehensive sense.
- We are saved; being saved, and will one day be saved. (Justification, sanctification, glorification.)
- The Word has a transforming effect in our lives if we will receive it humbly.

William Wilberforce and George Mueller are two men who received the Word humbly and changed the world.

Wilberforce was 5’3 and at one time 76 lbs.! He fought slavery for 46 years! What made the difference for Wilberforce? One of the many admirable disciplines of Wilberforce was his love for Scripture. He memorized many passages, including Psalm 119! He would often walk home reciting it!

Mueller once said, "I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord." At age 71 he said, "I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again."

I heard a recent story about an itinerant speaker, who told a bunch of stories, and then pointed to the pulpit and said this book will change your life... (Sigh.)
No, this book will change your life — if you will humbly receive it.

#3: Do the Word (James 1:22-27)

A. The Difference between Knowing/Hearing and Doing (22)

Don't deceive yourself! Spiritual maturity is not about what you know; it's about how you live what you know.

James' focus:

- Faith must lead to deeds (2:24)
- The wise person shows wisdom by the way he or she lives (3:13)
- Anyone who knows what to do, but doesn't do it, is sin (4:17)

Don't just enjoy Bible study; aim to live it!

- The purpose is to do it!

B. It's Intended to Change You (23-25)

23: Scripture is like a mirror to our souls

- Everyone is consumed with a mirror, we need the Bible more than we need a mirror.
- The Bible tells us more about ourselves!

23: Look intently

- Study it

24: Make changes: Scripture shows us how we need to repent, and holds out the promise of grace.

- Don't forget!

25: Nature of the Word

- It's perfect – reflects God. It's perfectly suited to instruct us
- It gives liberty – "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free"
 - It shows us the gospel.

25b: Blessed in your *doing* – not your knowing/studying.

Many are charmed by the Word, but not changed by the Word.

The purpose of the Scripture is to change you!

We need to conform the whole of our life to the whole of the Bible.

This is the “information age” but not “the application age.”

Don't just be a social media warrior! Be active! Be engaged! Be physically present!

C. Three Ways Do the Word (26:27)

These verses are like the Table of Contents to the book.

A. A Controlled Tongue (26)

- Matthew 12:34 – your words tell the truth about your heart
- James 3:9
- A good word related to social media!!!
- “No man can tame the thumbs!”

The Improper use of the tongue pervades this letter:

- Self-justifying Speech (1:13)
- Shaming Speech (2:3-4)
- Superficial Speech (2:16, 18)
- Scorching Speech (3:6-7)
- Shifting Speech (3:9)
- Slandorous Speech (4:11)
- Self-reliant Speech (4:13)

B. A Compassionate Ministry (27)

- More on this in a bit

C. A Clean Life (27)

- We are made clean by the spotless Lamb of God.
- And now we are to pursue a clean life.
- To be free from the contaminating effects of the world (immorality, materialism)
- Not isolated from people, but separated from sin.
- See James 4:1-11

Notice that James puts these two together: purity and the poor.

Typically:

- Conservatives – purity (social separation)
- Liberals – poor (social justice)

James puts them together.

- Jesus put them together!
- There are many churches that are all about holiness (talk much about sin and accountability groups, etc), but have never lifted a finger for the poor. That's unacceptable.
- And there are liberal Christians, who have rejected a biblical understanding of holiness, marriage, sin, etc, but are all about social justice. That's unacceptable too.
- We need to be a people who pursue holiness (not legalism) and social justice as faithful Christians.
- We must repent of both the sin of omission (the conservative types who do nothing for the poor), and the sin of commission (tolerating that which is clearly a violation of Scripture).

James put these together. Jesus put these together!

A Compassionate Ministry

Before God, *the Father*" – this father who is compassionate; who is the "Father of the Fatherless" – Reflect him!

God "visited" His people when they were childless, breadless, and crushed under Egyptian oppression.

- Sarah was barren – God visited her (Gen 21:1)
- Ruth – God visited them when no bread (Ruth 1:6)
- Luke 7:16 – God has visited his people
- Psalm 68:5

Visiting orphans and widows means care and involvement.

Widows

Scripture says a lot about widows.

- Ps 68:4-6; Isa 1:17.
- Famous widows:
 - Ruth and Naomi;
 - Widows in Kings narratives 1Kings 17; 2 Kings 4
 - Widow at Nain - Luke 7:11-15;
 - Praying widows - Luke 2:37; 18:1-8;
 - Generous widow - Mark 12:41-42

- Jesus for his mother – John 19:25-27
- Acts 6:3 – this was an important ministry
- 1 Timothy 5, specific instructions
 - Widows were vulnerable. This is before social security, retirement homes, etc. They could have awful situations.
 - We are still called to care for them, even though their living conditions may be a bit different.
 - In other countries, they are in very vulnerable – Land Grabbing
- Ukraine: In the 1990's after the collapse of communism in Kiev, the economy tanked and poor women and strangers filled the streets begging for food. To care for Widows, Ryken says, "One church hosted 'Babushka Banquets'" at which they served rich feasts of beef, potatoes, vegetables, fruit salad, and bread.

True religion involves caring for widows, and ...

Orphans

Why Orphan Care? 3 Reasons/Motivations

#1: To Obey the Word.

- There is an avalanche of texts about caring for the orphan!
- That's why James could make such a comprehensive statement.
- He had the whole OT ethical structure behind him!

One of God's titles, "Father to the fatherless."

The Father of Lights is the Father to the fatherless.

- God receives this name, like some people receive nicknames (Ps 68:5)
- It reflects His character and nature.
- It's appropriate in light of the number of texts that highlight God's compassion and care for the orphan.

In the Old Testament

The trio of the vulnerable – the orphan, widow, and sojourner – receive special attention in the Old Testament. "running buddies"

God had a plan to care for orphans, and that plan was *His people acting justly and mercifully*.

Further, the New Testament writers often look back at the Old Testament to base moral and social exhortations *for the church*.

Tim Keller: “Just as Israel was to be a ‘community of justice,’ so the church is to reflect these same concerns for the poor.”

Aristides to Emperor Hadrian, 125

Falsehood is not found among them; and they *love one another*, and from *widows* they do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver *the orphan* from him who treats him harshly.

#2: Because God Visited Us in Our Affliction

John 14:18

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

Galatians 4:4-7

- God didn’t adopt us because of our attractive merits, but because of his amazing mercy.

Eph 1:5 (you’ve been adopted) and Eph 5:1 (imitate God as beloved children) go together.

- Reflect the adopting love of God to a world in need.
- Certainly, not everyone is called to adopt, and not every child is available for adoption; but every believer is called to imitate God.

The gospel teaches us that we identify with the orphan, widow, stranger, and therefore, we should be the people who have the greatest sense of compassion for them.

James calls us to reflect the nature of our redeeming God by aiding orphans “in their affliction.” And the *affliction* exists.

#3: As an act of worship to Jesus

- Matthew 25 – “You’ve done it unto Me.”
- The orphan has a face, and that face is a Galilean carpenter.
- We probably won’t solve the orphan crisis, but everything we can do matters when done in the name of Jesus.
- Begg preaching in a nursing home as a young minister... “We do it unto Him”

20 Ways to Care for Orphans

We can all do something.

Few people would say they “Hate orphans” – but they’ve done nothing...

Be compassionate *and* wise.

- In our zeal, we can actually create problems.
- This is a general rule throughout...

1. Pray
 - Father, “What do you want me to do?”
 - Go on a prayer walk and talk to the Father
2. Start small. (Talk, read, write)
 - Can’t do it all right now – don’t be idealistic.
 - Talk – Have a conversation
 - Read – Do some studying
 - Write
 - Write a letter to an orphan
 - Journal about it
 - Do some art work
3. Support good organizations
4. Speak up
 - Use whatever platform you have to create awareness
 - Orphans are not only powerless, they are voiceless
 - The purpose of influence is to speak for those who have no influence (Prov 31:8-9)
 - Senior class president, a coach, a teacher, a principle, a lawyer, pastor, etc.
 - If you’re a writer, write!
5. Be alert and practice hospitality
 - Have your eyes open to needs...
 - Have a big mouth and open arms
 - Be a consistent and compassionate pro-life advocate
6. Adopt
 - Have you seriously considered this?
7. Foster
 - Contact agencies and see what can be done.
 - Consider fostering.
 - Give supplies.
 - Care for case workers – throw them a party to say thanks
8. Sponsor
9. Care for the functionally fatherless.
 - Keep your eyes open.
 - Volunteer at local ministries, programs, schools
 - Practice Hospitality
10. Provide practical care for adoptive/foster parents (e.g., respite care)
 - You can provide respite care through the foster care system
 - Others have helped adoptive parents for a weekend.
 - Baby-sitting
 - Meals
11. Fund adoptions

12. Provide for needs as you hear about them
 - Shoes
 - School supplies
 13. Train leaders
 - Churches and church leaders aren't doing it.
 - Seminaries need to be teaching on it
 14. Promote/Support in-country adoption
 - Lost of myths abound
 - Much cheaper
 15. Move
 - Go live among the poor and the orphan
 16. Visit
 - Visit with a purpose and a plan.
 - Grateful for orgs that are there all the time, with people on the ground; and we actually meet a need.
 17. Provide transitional assistance
 - This is a big need around the world for those who age out
 - Strengthen relationships with orphanages
 - Turn business leaders loose
 18. Use your vocational skills
 - Leverage calling
 19. Fight trafficking – many are orphans, or those aged out.
 20. Orphan Prevention
- Poverty often leads families to put their children up for adoption. So we must fight poverty wisely and compassionately.
- Relief
 - Restoration
 - Development

We have everything we need to invest in orphan care ministry.

- There are many ways to do it.
 - We have the greatest motivations for doing it.
 - A great Savior who demonstrated care for the least of these.
- “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” John 14:18
- He's given us the Holy Spirit to us; may we go to them.

Sermon by Tony Merida, lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, N.C. Permission has been granted for you to use these teaching materials for sermon preparation, small group Bible studies, personal study, etc.