

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

This morning, we are going to continue our study through the Epistle of James.

Growing up as a child before smart phones and the internet – one of the ways that my brothers and I would entertain ourselves when we got home from school was by sitting in the living room and watching old reruns on the television.

The two most memorable shows that we watched were of course Gilligan's Island and Happy Days.

Now, in Happy Days – one of the most familiar recurring moments of the show is Fonzy walking up a mirror – he looks at himself and simply says the phrase eyy!!!

That phrase was never intended to be part of the show. It was never written in the script.

When the show first came out, the network executives wanted Henry Winkler to run a comb through his hair every time he looked into a mirror.

But when they filmed it for the first time in front of a studio audience, Henry Winkler stopped himself from combing his hair and simply stared in the mirror while noticing that his hair was already perfect and uttered the phrase eyyy!!!

It received such a huge laugh from the audience – that they made that scene a recurring one in the show.

The reason that I bring up Fonzy looking at himself in the mirror – is that James is going to exhort us to do the same thing.

Not a physical mirror so that we can see if our hair is out of place – but to the Word of God, because the word of God acts like a mirror and it will reveal to us what in our life needs correction.

And in doing so, James will reveal that this practice will lead to spiritual maturity.

Let's pray...

[Jas 1:19-27 NKJV] 19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. 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 observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues [in it], and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone

among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion [is] useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, [and] to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Once again, James is writing this epistle to the early church in Jerusalem – mostly Jewish Christians who had been going through a time of tremendous persecution and trials.

The Jews didn't want them and the gentiles didn't want them.

Many of them had been forced to leave their homes and had lost all of their physical valuables.

And James touched on this in verses 9-11, where he encouraged them to glory in their exaltation – that they may not forget about how spiritually rich they were by focusing on their temporary poverty here on earth.

Now, there are many different ways that we can respond to trials and tribulations.

James has already told us to count it all joy and to seek God's wisdom.

This is the biblical way of responding to trials.

However, there are other ways to respond to trials – and one of them is addressed here by James in verse 19.

[Jas 1:19 NKJV] 19 **So then**, my beloved brethren, let every man be **swift to hear**, **slow to speak**, **slow to wrath**;

One of the ways that we can respond to trials and tribulations is with anger.

James is not saying don't get angry. That's unrealistic.

We're all going to get angry from time to time.

Someone cuts me off when I am driving because they are on their phone – I may get angry – especially if my wife and kids are in the car with me – however, this doesn't mean that I am going to chase that person down and give them a piece of my mind.

We need to remind ourselves that Jesus got angry in the scriptures.

When Jesus cleared out the Temple in Jerusalem the religious leaders had all these rules about sacrifices that were oppressing the people and increasing their own power.

The businessmen in the Temple area were using the people's desire to worship God as a profit making opportunity - selling what people needed for their offerings at inflated prices - changing money at skewed rates - ripping people off in the name of God.

Jesus goes in and tears up the place. Takes his whip and goes through the court - turning over the tables - the chairs - money is flying around. He opens the pens and drives out all the animals and the businessmen.

This is not what James is speaking of here in his epistle.

The word translated “anger” actually refers to a deep-seated rage. It doesn’t refer to a passing moment of displeasure which is soon gone and forgotten.

No, James is speaking of that deep emotion which, when released, is like a volcano erupting.

This is the reaction of some of the early church – as a response to the persecution; they were starting to harbor resentment – they were allowing the anger to build up – and this was evident by their attitudes and actions.

Why did they have this type of reaction?

They reacted with anger because instead of being swift to hear and slow to speak – they resorted in doing the opposite.

They were slow to hear and swift to speak.

There is a reason that God made us with two ears and only one mouth.

We are supposed to listen more than we speak.

Turn with me to the book of Ecclesiastics

[Ecc 5:2 NKJV] 2 **Do not be rash with your mouth,** And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God [is] in heaven, and you on earth; **Therefore let your words be few.**

When we are constantly complaining and bickering – we are not in a position to listen to the council of God.

Once again, James tells us at the beginning of his epistle to ask for wisdom from God – how then are we going to receive the wisdom when we are not in a position to hear His word.

[Rom 10:17 NKJV] 17 So then faith [comes] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

When we stop complaining about our situation and actually start listening – that is when we will hear God's voice in our trial.

[Jas 1:20 NKJV] 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

There is nothing good that ever comes out of our uncontrolled anger. Ever.

In fact, we must understand that the wrath of man is a rejection of God's rebuke – it is a rejection of God's correction.

When we respond in uncontrolled anger, our focus is on us. Our faith is on us and not on God.

Instead of all that griping and moaning and reacting we ought to be seeking to hear God's word - **pondering what God through His word desires to teach us.**

[Jas 1:21 NKJV] 21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

There will be some who will say to James, I don't complain all the time. I try to listen. I come to church and the bible studies and I don't appear to be getting anything.

I don't hear the word of God.

To those, James would say, you don't hear because your ears are clogged with filthiness and are overflowing with wickedness.

In order to be able to hear the word of God, we first must be tuned into his frequency – and we can't hear God when our frequency is tuned to those things of the world.

And the way we tune into His frequency is by cutting away the flesh.

He was exhorting those in the early church to put-off the old man, and put on the new man, created in Jesus Christ when you were saved.

Getting rid of those things in their lives that hindered their relationship with God.

I asked you to make a note that we are to receive the word of God with meekness –

James calls us to receive with meekness – or a teachable heart - humility.

A letting go of our defenses and pretenses.

This means getting off of our little pedestals of pride.

Where we say - "I can handle this. I'm not that bad. It really doesn't affect me that way."

We desperately need to allow God's word to penetrate down the deepest levels of our pride - our greed - our hateful thoughts - our lusts - our grudges - our bitterness - those things that defile us at the deepest level.

That's hearing. That's receiving.

When we do that - James writes that God's word implanted is able to save our souls.

Turn with me to Matt 13,

[Mat 13:1-9 NKJV] 1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. 4 "And as he sowed, some [seed] fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. 5 "Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. 6 "But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. 7 "And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up

and choked them. 8 "But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9 "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

In the parable that I just read – did the sower sow a different seed among the four places or the same seed?

It was the same seed – the only thing that was different was the condition of the four soils. There was the soil that was by the wayside (road), there was the soil that was rocky, there was the soil with the thorny bushes and the good soil.

Now, Jesus explains to us the parable of the sower later on in the chapter and he tells us that the seed is the word of God and the different soils is our hearts – how we receive the word of God.

When we receive the word of God in meekness / humility, it acts like a fertilizer – meaning it is going to take root – it is going to grow within us – it is going to produce God's fruit in our lives.

The key word is receive –

"Able to save your souls" describes an on-going work of salvation.

These Christians were already saved – James here is encouraging them to continue to be sanctified by the enduring of persecution as a Christian can and should.

[Jas 1:22 NKJV] 22 But **be** doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving** yourselves.

The word that is used here for “be” in the Greek – is a command. It is a command that we must continually be doing.

In other words, we must continually be doers of the word.

This is not something that we arrive at and check off of your to-do list.

This **is** something you and I will continue to do for the rest of our lives.

James isn't going to contradict the idea of salvation by faith, instead what he is doing throughout the letter is clarifying what true faith looks like.

True faith results in action.

True faith will produce a change in your life.

True faith will spur you on to do good works, not because you're trying to earn your salvation, but because you're trying to follow the One who has saved you – that is the only reason that we do good works.

And the reason that James brings this up is because he doesn't want us to deceive ourselves.

He is warning us about the deception of a false faith in God.

What does a false faith in God look like???

A false faith will say all the right things, but there's no change of life to match the faith.

And even though a person with a "false faith" might fool those around them, the truth is that the one they're deceiving the most is really themselves.

Think about a person who wants to get in shape.

They join one of the gyms here in town.

Every few days, they put on their exercise clothes, and they go to the gym.

They find a comfortable table in the snack bar, order a latte, and sit there for an hour or two, reading articles and blogs on fitness, and nutrition.

Are they going to get fit? No; they're deceiving themselves.

All the equipment is there, but they must utilize it in order to see results.

[Eph 2:10 NKJV] 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

The word for "workmanship" is the same word we get our word poem from. We are God's poem; and we are poets ourselves.

As we allow ourselves to be led by God, we are collaborating on the great poem of our lives.

For those that are hearers only – it means that you are not collaborating. You may listen to the poet – but you are not making any contribution to the poem.

[Jas 1:23-24 NKJV] 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

James is describing the man who has heard the word, but doesn't put it into action in his life.

He's like a guy who looks at himself in the mirror.

He might look closely at himself and say, "Hmmm, I need to shave..."

But as soon as he walks away from the mirror, he forgets what he saw and never changes.

It is the person that hears the word of God on Sunday – he or she is convicted by the Holy Spirit – they agree wholeheartedly with what was taught that Sunday.

However, as soon as they walk out, they forget the message that was taught.

Mirrors, and what you do with them can tell a lot about you.

God's word is a mirror.

When we study it, we see ourselves as we ought to see.

When I have real faith, I don't just read the Bible, I respond and change.

[Jas 1:25 NKJV] 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues [in it], and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

He who looks is the believer who is absorbing God's word - taking it in at the heart level.

He perseveres in it - meaning he keeps on seeking out the meaning - searching for insight - for application - for ways to conform his life to God's word.

Then - rather than forgetting - he becomes a doer.

He actually seeks to put God's word into action in his life.

Choosing to respond by trusting God with our lives - in whatever the drama –

It means choosing to obey God's word - choosing to do whatever God instructs us to do - to give Him authority to make whatever changes He desires to make in our lives - even changing us at the core of who we are - our very character – our attitudes – our emotions – and how we think about life.

James describes God's word - the Scriptures - as the perfect law - the law of liberty.

The law of liberty is freedom.

Not the freedom to do what we want – the freedom to follow our own pride into disaster.

But, the freedom to do what we should - to be doers - to obey God - to live as God has created us and called us to live.

Choosing to trust God means that we're set free from just existing and trying to tough it out - hammering away at a self-improvement course that only produces despair and guilt and depression.

Set free from trying to do life on our own and to somehow figure out how all this works out and trying to make sense of what is way beyond our understanding.

And when we respond - seeking to do God's word - God blesses us.

God begins a work of transformation in us - teaching us how to do live a life free from all the filthiness and wickedness.

When we choose to be a doer - God sets us free to be all that He's created and called us to be.

We experience the amazing unexplainable blessing of doing life with God - knowing His presence - His provision - His power - His pleasure - His peace in our lives regardless of what life throws at us. Amen!!

[Jas 1:26-27 NKJV] 26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion [is] useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, [and] to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

We only see the word religion in scriptures a handful of time and it is never used in a positive sense.

When we read the gospels – we have many instances of the Pharisees and the Sadducees who thought they were religious because they observed certain rituals and ceremonies but they didn't have a true relationship with God – they were always doing things with ulterior motives.

James gives us three examples here of what good religion looks like. Again, we are looking in the mirror to see if we have these qualities.

1. The first thing he points to is the words that come out of our mouth. Apparently the church had a problem with their mouth – James is going to have more to say regarding speech in a few weeks. We need to control what comes out of our tongues – our speech will determine where we stand spiritually. Do we spend time encouraging others or do we spend time gossiping and tearing one another down. Do we express wrath by relying on the flesh or do we rely on the Spirit? Because if there is – there is a disconnect between hearing and doing.

2. Do we demonstrate compassion to those in need? If we've really come to Jesus and laid our hearts open before Him and His word - then - James writes - one evidence of that will be our concern for others demonstrated in quiet - often unnoticed - acts of compassion. **If our attitude towards other is bent by being focused on ourselves - then there's a disconnect between hearing and doing.**
3. Are we living in purity before God - unwavering in our commitment to live in obedience to His word? If we're getting the stain of the world's sin all over us then there's a disconnect between our hearing and our doing.

This is what it means to take a good hard look in the mirror – it is all about doing a self-examination of where we truly stand in Christ.

The mirror will reveal the disconnect – and will place our focus back on Him and His word – no matter what the circumstances.

Amen!!!

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

