

Faith Must be Lived

James 1:18-27

February 4-5, 2017

Clearly this book was written by James, but which one? Most Bible scholars believe it was written by James, the half-brother of Jesus. He did not believe Jesus was the Messiah nor follow after Jesus during his time on earth. They grew up in the same house together. Can you imagine having Jesus as your big brother? How much pressure was that? Comedian Michael Jr. has a whole spiff on that. Very funny.

James had problems, he would get in trouble, and can't you imagine his mother saying, "Why can't you be more like Jesus, James?" Or he would go to his parents with his problems and they would say, "Well what would Jesus do?" So they got him a bracelet.

At one point, Jesus's mother and brothers came to speak to Him, thinking perhaps He was out of his senses, but Jesus responded, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And then He said, "Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."

But after witnessing the resurrection, James became not only a believer and follower of Jesus, he became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It was such a radical transformation that he opens this letter by referring to himself as a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus the Messiah.

James isn't writing to a particular church, but to the "twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad." The church was born in Jerusalem at Pentecost and was distinctly Jewish. But then a great persecution arose against them and they were dispersed abroad, taking the gospel with them.

The theme of this letter is that faith that is genuine and sincere, that is living and active turns the life upside down, or perhaps more rightly, it turns the life right side up. Living faith affects the life of the believer so that it changes how he lives. This letter is extremely practical because it touches on things we deal with every day.

Some have criticized this letter because they don't like the phrase, "Faith without works is dead." In their minds, it seems to suggest that faith and works are both required in order to be saved. But nothing could be further from the truth; what James is saying is that faith that is sincere and authentic results in a life that brings about good fruit, good works, and a changed life.

Jesus said, "The good man of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good."

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| I. Be the First Fruit God Desires |
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- Verse 18 – He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be the first fruits among His creatures. The concept of first

fruits was distinctly Jewish. The first portion always belonged to God. It was considered the best.

- Spiritual fruit is the result of abiding in Christ. God is serious about fruit in your life. He's serious about wanting to transform your life, your heart and your character.
- Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you." Many people don't like the word 'commandment' because, well, it sounds so command like.
- If I'm the captain and commander of my own life, then God is most certainly welcome to give His suggestions and I'll take that into advisement. But if He is the captain and commander, then His words are certainly more than suggestions.
- God said Israel was like a fig tree that produced no figs and should therefore be torn out by its roots. That seems to suggest that God is serious about fruit.

A. Be quick to hear

- Someone once said that there is a reason God gave us two ears and one mouth. It isn't your ears that get you in trouble, it's usually your mouth.

- Have you ever said something and immediately wished you could take it back?
- Being quick to hear is part of the first fruits of faith because God is very much concerned about how we treat the people around us.
- Frankly, many marriages could be saved by sincerely applying this piece of wisdom. There is something deeply ministering when you truly listen and are slow to speak.

Illus - St. Francis of Assisi once said, “Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.”

- Being slow to speak means to consider the impact of your words before you say them. Words are powerful, they can tear down or they can build up.

Ephesians 4:29, Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

- This is the result of faith. God transforms the heart so that you speak words of life because God has brought life into your soul.

Luke 6:45, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good... for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”

B. Be slow to anger

- If you are quick to hear and slow to speak then it follows that you should also be slow to anger. But then he adds, *“for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”*
- If you don’t master your anger, it will most assuredly master you.

Proverbs 1:19, A man of great anger shall bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you’ll only have to do it again.

Proverbs 29:11, A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.

- Everyone gets hot in the head sometimes, but blessed is the one who keeps control of it...
Be slow to anger.
- Because the anger of man does not bring about the righteousness of God and that is the fruit He desires.
- The righteousness of God is seen in edifying others, in blessing them with your words; anger is the opposite, it’s about tearing them down.
- Anger is a weapon, but it’s of the flesh. Notice that it’s often the flesh that rises up first.

Illus - When you get cut off in traffic your spirit doesn't rise up within you, saying, "Bless you, brother, you must be in a hurry, please take my lane." No, it's the flesh that rises up first.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4, For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.

II. Prove Yourselves Doers of the Word

- Verse 21 – in humility, receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.
- God 'implants' His word in our lives and it bears fruit because it is empowered by God Himself. And we must be careful how we receive it... If you receive it with the wrong kind of heart, it bears no fruit.

Luke 8:15, "The seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance."

A. The word changes what kind of person you are

- Verse 23-24 - The one who is a hearer only and not a doer, is like a man who looks at his

natural face in a mirror; and immediately goes away, forgetting what kind of person he was.

- In other words, the word of God shows you what kind of person you are; it also shows you what kind of person God wants you to be.
- What kind of person are you? What's in your heart? The word of God will show you; verse by verse. It's like a mirror that shows you what you're like.

Illus - Notice it says, it's like 'a man' that looks in the mirror... He used a word which means "a male." A man will only glance at a mirror, but a woman will 'behold' in a mirror. Women appreciate the value of a mirror more than a man. They may even have a series of mirrors they use to get started on their day.

- But notice also in verse 25, "Look intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abide by it..."
- The 'law of liberty' is the word of God that sets people free from the things which poison and embitter the soul, things which hold people captive.

John 8:31-32, 36, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you

free... And if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

- Notice that James is not saying that people should become doers by acting religious. That was what the Pharisees did and Jesus criticized them for it...

Matthew 23:24-26, “You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! You clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees, first clean the inside of the cup and the dish, so the outside may become clean also.”

Illus - It’s like it a parent that just picks and picks and picks at a child to change their behavior, but does nothing to build them up and minister love to their heart.

B. The one who abides shall be blessed

- Verse 25 – the one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, having become an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.
- If you want to live the blessed life, this is a great key. God blesses the effectual doer, the one who has looked intently at the word of truth and taken it into his heart.

2 Corinthians 3:18, But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

- Then James, in verse 26, writes boldly and powerfully, mincing no words, *“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.”*
- This particular word ‘religious’ is used only here in the New Testament. We could say it this way, “If anyone thinks himself to be spiritual, and yet does not bridle his own tongue, that man’s spirituality is worth nothing.”
- In other words, it’s possible for a person to deceive himself into thinking that because he hears the word of God that he is a spiritual person, but if the word of God does not get hold of a person’s heart so that he cares for those in distress and does something about it, he has truly deceived himself, for his spirituality is worthless.
- This is in fact the word of God becoming like a mirror that causes us to look at ourselves and ask, “Am I deceiving myself into thinking that I am spiritual, when in fact I

don't really care about those in distress? Am I so self-centered that I have no time to help others?"

Illus - One day a lawyer stood up and put Jesus to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"

The man answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

- The story of the good Samaritan challenges all of us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.
- The one who looks intently at the law of liberty and abides by it and becomes an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in whatever he does.