

FAITH THAT WORKS - PART 3: "HEARERS AND DOERS OF GOD'S WORD"

James 1:19-27

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Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us.

Sermon Series Introduction

Today, we're in Part 3 of our sermon series called "Faith That Works" - Where we're going through the book of James together.

The title of today's sermon is "Hearers and Doers of God's Word."

Before we begin, let me pray for us.

Sermon Introduction

I'd like to start with a story...

Imagine that you're the founder and CEO of a company. And one day, you decided to go on vacation. As you're away, you send detailed instructions to your team members on what they're supposed to do while you're away.

Now, one day, you finally return to the office and imagine... to your surprise, the office was in a total mess! So you ask your team members, "Hey, what happened? Did you receive my instructions?" And they said, "Yes, we got your instructions. In fact, we love it so much that we've been gathering together each week to study it! It's amazing!"

Wouldn't you ask... "Ok, but what did you do about it?"

Imagine how absurd that'd be, right? They studied the instructions, even agreed with it, but did nothing about it.

But if we're honest with ourselves, don't we sometimes do the same thing with God's Word? Even though we gather each week to hear God's Word, read God's Word, pray God's Word, and sing God's Word, when the service ends, we can so easily forget about it, do nothing about it, and continue living our lives as if nothing happened.

In today's passage, James wants to show us how easily we can fall into such absurdity and he exhorts us to not merely be hearers who forget but doers who live out God's Word...

The One Thing

*As God's people, let's not be hearers who forget,
but doers who live out God's Word.*

Scripture Introduction

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to James 1:19-27.

For context - James is writing to his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are going through various trials and temptations.

He exhorts them to count it all joy when their faith in Jesus is tested... because that's when their faith is strengthened (1-12)

And he told them to not be deceived when they're tempted but to trust the truth that God is good (13-18).

So that's where we are in today's passage.

Now, let's read James 1:19-27...

Scripture Reading

James 1:19-27 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant 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 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.

This is God's Word.

Overview

What does it look like to be doers of God's Word?

- I. Listen to the Word with humility (vv. 19-21)
- II. Look into the Word with perseverance (vv. 22-25)
- III. Live out the Word in love and holiness (vv. 26-27)

I. Listen to the Word with humility (vv. 19-21)

Let's begin with verse 19 - We're reminded that James is writing to his beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. And we know that these Christians were facing some sort of trials and hardships. We don't know exactly what they're going through; we can only imagine, but I think we can still relate with them because we've all faced high-stress situations before (where everything seems like they're going wrong). Maybe we're facing something like that right now...

In such moments, it's easier for us to lose our emotions... quicker to get angry...

Last week, we saw how these early Christians were even tempted to blame God for their temptations and accuse Him of not being good.

Because in trials and temptations, it's easier to get angry at God, and at others, and at everything - and it's easier to feel completely justified in responding that way.

So now James tenderly exhorts his beloved brothers and sisters - even amidst the difficulties that they're facing - they're not to be quick to anger... but instead they're to be quick to hear... slow to speak... slow to anger...

Even though they may have a thousand different things in their minds... Even in the heat of the moment, they shouldn't be quick to lose their temper...

They're to breathe... and take a moment to pause...

And then he tells them why...

Look at v. 20 - James explains to them the reason on why they shouldn't be quick to anger (I'm sure there's a lot of reasons, but he highlights one): Because the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

He's reminding them that our fleshly anger does not produce God's righteousness; it does not produce a godly response.

Because a godly response should reflect God's righteousness to others.

But an ungodly response doesn't do that.

So that means that when we're quick to anger and quick to speak (when we say things we shouldn't say & say things we'd regret later)... then we're misrepresenting who our God is.

Because our God is not quick to anger and impatient.

So as those who love God and have received His grace and mercy, it should disturb our hearts when we misrepresent Him to the rest of the world.

Because as God's people, we're chosen to be different - we're to be holy as God is holy, and we're to be the salt and light of the Earth!

We're to represent Jesus on Earth.

Look at verse 21 - So in light of this, James tells these Christians to put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness

They're to get rid of such unrighteousness from their hearts, as if they're throwing something away that's covered in mud and completely ruined.

But the question is: How do we put away such rampant wickedness?

Because it's not easy, right? When we're going through suffering, it's almost acceptable for us to not be as approachable. It's almost the norm in society that if we're going through something difficult, it's ok to be angry!

And so we feel like it's completely ok to respond in anger if things don't go our way or if things don't meet our expectations.

So for us, this kind of response almost feels so right and natural...

But here, James calls such a response as "filthiness."

That's not okay in God's sight...

Such a response does not reflect God's righteousness, but reflects our own sinfulness and self-centeredness.

So then, how can we not respond in that way? James tells us how...

He goes on to say that we're to receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. Here's the turning point. Yes, there's sin in our hearts, but there's something else too: it's the Word of God that's been implanted in our hearts.

Think about that... the Holy Word of God... This is the seed that was planted in us. It's this Word that has the power to save, to purify, and to change our hearts.

So in the heat of the moment - when we really feel like we're burning up and feel our internal temperature rising... - in such moments, instead of being quick to listen to our emotions and desires, James calls us to be quick to receive God's Word. This is the antidote to their anger and frustration: it's listening to God's Word.

But here's the thing: it requires meekness and humility to truly receive God's Word. Because it requires humility to admit that God's Word is right and we're not... and it takes humility to admit that we cannot change ourselves, and that only God can change us through his Word.

<pause>

So as we're going through our own trials and temptations, I don't think the reason why we struggle is actually because we don't hear God's Word at all. Because I don't think we completely forget God's Word. But I think in the heat of the moment, we actually choose to not receive it with meekness and humility.

<pause>

I remember thinking that I was a gentle person - slow to anger. Cindy probably thought the same thing. That is... until we started wedding planning. Then I realized that I'm not as slow to anger as we thought.

Wedding planning was a trial. In that 8-month period, I probably lost control of my emotions more times than I had in the previous 5 years combined.

And each time, seconds before I lost my cool, I could hear God's Word in my heart: slow down... be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (show love and patience to Cindy).

But... that voice sounded more like a whisper.

So to be honest, it's not as if I didn't hear God's Word at all. It's just that in the moment, I intentionally choose not to receive it with humility. Because in the heat of the moment, I feel like I'm right and God is wrong...

Because the problem was that - at the same time - there was another voice in my heart that was getting louder and louder. It was my own desires, telling me, "Hey, this isn't how it should be! You deserve to have this go the way you want! You should make your point by raising your voice!"

Sadly, I wasn't quick to listen to God's Word. I didn't choose to receive it humbly. Instead, I was quick to listen to my own desires and emotions (that felt right at the time), and that caused me to be quick to anger and quick to speak... and slow to listen to Cindy.

After I was finally humbled, I apologized to Cindy. But looking back, I wonder... "Why didn't I listen to God's Word in that moment?"

Well, I think it's because I was rejecting the implanted Word; I was rejecting the new heart that God had given me.

It's like when someone receives a heart transplant. Their body is literally given a new heart. But their own body - their own immune system - can sometimes reject the new organ because they see it as a foreign object.

I think that's what's happening to me. In that moment, my flesh was rejecting the new heart that God had planted in me.

The world had already shaped my expectations and desires for how my life, and even wedding planning, should go. But God had planted a new heart in me. And yet, my flesh was rebelling.

So now, there were two voices in my heart: one from my flesh (which is self-centered), and one from the Spirit (which is Gospel-centered).

So it almost felt like there were 2 Jeffs in that moment...

<pause>

And if you're a Christian, that's what we'll often feel. Because Christ has saved us and given us the Holy Spirit, so we have a new nature with genuine desires to please him. But because of our sinful nature that remains within us, we still have desires to please ourselves and reject God's word. That's the struggle in every Christian.

James is reminding us that in those moments, we must choose to put aside the loud, filthy voice of our flesh. We must humble ourselves to hear the quiet whisper of God's Word.

In those moments, we're not to be quick to anger. We're to slow down, breathe, and humbly listen for God's voice.

By receiving the Word with humility, we allow it to transform us from the inside out. We let go of our anger and selfishness, and we make space for the power of God's Word to purify us.

So first, listen to the Word with humility.

II. Look into the Word with perseverance (vv. 22-25)

Let's look at verse 22 - James moves us one step beyond listening to the Word. He says, But... be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves

James is helping us see something crucial here: It's not enough to simply hear God's Word and be moved by it, even if we receive it humbly. But we're to respond and do what it says!

We're called to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. James emphasizes this because it's easy to deceive ourselves into thinking we're being faithful just because we've heard the truth. But hearing without doing is meaningless. If we listen to God's Word but don't act on it, it's like we're deceiving ourselves, thinking we're more faithful than we really are.

So now, James gives us a picture in verses 23-24 to illustrate this - He says that someone who hears God's Word but doesn't apply it is like a person who looks at themselves in the mirror and then walks away, and then immediately forgetting what they looked like.

Think about this for a moment:

What's the purpose of looking in the mirror in the first place? To check how we look, right? Maybe to fix our hair, or make sure there's no food in our teeth.

But imagine if there's something on your face - some dirt, or a piece of spinach stuck in your teeth - and you saw it in the mirror, but then you just walked away and completely forgot about it. What would be the point of looking in the mirror? It'd be meaningless, right?

James is using this analogy to challenge us - What's the point of hearing God's Word if we don't let it change us? If we hear it and then forget about it... Then it's as if we've never heard it in the first place.

So in the same way, hearing God's Word is not enough. True faith results in obedience and action. If we walk away from God's Word unchanged, then the hearing has been in vain.

<pause>

Now, let's look at verse 25 - James tells us what we should do instead. He says, "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."

James encourages these Christians to look intently into God's Word - the perfect law of liberty - and to persevere in it. This is what truly faithful Christians do: they receive God's Word humbly, but they don't just stop there; they keep looking at it, and they persevere in obeying it.

<pause>

Now, remember the context here - These Christians are enduring trials, facing temptations, and likely feeling worn out. They're struggling with frustration, possibly even angry at God for the hardships they're facing. It's easy in those moments to feel like giving up, or to get tired of doing what God's Word says. This is what some of us may be feeling.

But notice how James doesn't tell them to just keep going by their own strength. He doesn't say, "Hey, just push through. Keep going, no matter how hard it gets." Instead, he specifically points them back to one thing: looking into God's perfect law.

James is referring to the Gospel - the implanted Word - that James is now describing as the law of liberty. And this is significant. Because for Jewish Christians, this would've evoked thoughts of Old Testament laws.

But when you think of the Old Testament laws, you wouldn't exactly think of 'liberty and freedom'. Because if anything, the laws point to how far away we are from God's perfect standard of righteousness. If anything it points us as sinners to the eternal punishment in Hell that we deserve, not to freedom.

But here James reframes it. He refers to the law as 'liberty' because, for believers in Christ, the law has been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus has perfectly obeyed the law on our behalf. He lived the perfect life that we could not, and He died on the cross to take the punishment for our sins. Through His death and resurrection, we're set free from the condemnation of the law. That's why it's the law of liberty.

So, when James urges Christians to look into the Gospel - the perfect law of liberty - it's not a call to self-reliance or self-righteousness. It's a call to look at Jesus, to look at His finished work, and to persevere in living out our faith in response to what he's already done for us.

Then the Gospel becomes our motivation to do God's Word.

<pause>

Because the more we look into the Gospel, the more we see that God's actually not asking us to do anything that He hasn't done Himself...

Because if we remember the Gospel...

Then we remember that God is a God who is slow to anger...

Even when He's rightfully angry towards sin and evil - He's quick to show His people grace and mercy.

And instead of punishing us, He chose to forgive us through Jesus.

When we look at Jesus hanging on the cross, what do we see? We see that he was quick to listen to the will of His Father. He was slow to speak - He didn't lash out at those who were persecuting him. And He was slow to anger - He didn't destroy his enemies on the spot. Instead, He prayed for them, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

This is what our God is like! And this is the model that we're to follow as we seek to live out God's Word. We're not asked to do anything that Jesus hasn't already done for us.

<pause>

As believers, we don't obey God's Word to earn His favor - we already have His favor because of Jesus.

We obey as a response to His love and grace.

We obey because we've been saved.

We obey because we love the God who first loved us.

So, when James urges us to obey God's Word with perseverance, it's not about trying harder or mustering up our own strength. It's about remembering the Gospel, looking intently at God's Word, and living out our faith in gratitude for what Jesus has already done.

This is why it's such a privilege to obey God's Word - even in difficult times. Even when it's hard and uncomfortable, we persevere... and obey with a joyful heart because we're responding to God's love for us.

And when we do what God's Word says, our action is a message to God saying, "Lord, I love you too. I'm doing this for you and the sake of your Gospel."

<pause>

Knowing our members, I believe we genuinely do want to obey God's Word because we love Him. But then how come we don't always remember the Gospel and do what God says?

For us, I think it's easier to forget the Gospel because of our busy lives. Especially living in Jakarta, we're used to a fast-paced lifestyle - everything needs to happen quickly! And so we also look quickly at God's Word then look away and forget it, as we continue with our daily tasks. But James challenges us to slow down... To take a moment out of our busy day to just be still with God's Word in front of us; to look into the Word with perseverance...

Again, I think we truly do want to obey what God's Word says. But I think sometimes we can just get caught up in our daily lives, and we forget to remember the Gospel and forget to apply what we learned from God's Word. We move too fast from Sunday to Monday and to the rest of the week, so it's like we're taking a quick peek at God's Word and then quickly forgetting what it says.

So in order to look intently into God's Word, let's intentionally set aside time to be in the Word and prayer this week.

So what does it look like to be doers of God's Word?

First, listen to the Word with humility

Second, look into the Word with perseverance

III. Live out the Word in love and holiness (vv. 26-27)

Earlier, James spoke about the Gospel being implanted in our hearts - It's a powerful image that evokes a picture of a farmer planting a seed. And when a farmer plants a seed, he expects that seed to grow into a tree, and eventually bear fruit.

In the same way, when the Gospel is truly planted in our hearts, it should lead to spiritual growth, and it should also produce good fruit. And our actions can either be evidence of spiritual growth, or a lack of one.

So James now teaches these Christians how to distinguish between real growth and a lack of one; between true worship and a false one...

Let's look 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."

James addresses a potential misunderstanding. Because after he calls Christians to hear and obey God's Word, some might think that outward religious actions are enough. Some might think that just attending church, reading the Bible, or speaking about God's Word means that their faith is genuine. But James is clear: True religion isn't just about outward appearances.

He gives a specific example about someone whose tongue and words are not controlled. His point is: If you're not controlling your tongue, then your religion is worthless... Because the one who you're truly worshiping is

yourself, not God - since what you're obeying are your own emotions and desires, not God. You're essentially wild and untamed.

Then James mentions a bridle - Just as a bridle goes on a horse's mouth, to control a horse... so our tongues also need to be tamed and controlled.

Our outward acts of religion are worthless if it's not backed by an inward transformation that leads to self-control.

This is a strong challenge for all of us. Think about the words we use in our daily lives.

How do we speak to our family, our friends, our colleagues, and even strangers?

Are we quick to listen and slow to speak?

Or do we find ourselves speaking out our frustration, anger, or impatience?

James is calling us to examine our speech. If we find ourselves quick to anger, harsh in our words, or unkind in our conversations, it's a sign that we need to pause and reflect on the Gospel. Because true religion - true faith - results in a change in the way we speak.

So this is a call for each of us to intentionally assess our own lives. When we examine how we speak, we need to ask: Am I living out the Gospel in my speech?

<pause>

Now, let's look at verse 27 - James encourages us and reminds us of what true religion looks like. He says:

"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."

Here, James gives us two specific examples of what pure and undefiled religion looks like in God's eyes:

First, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.

In James' time, orphans and widows were among the most vulnerable in society (that's still true today as well).

Because orphans are children who lost their parents - they don't have their mom and dad to help provide them with food and shelter.

And widows are women who lost their husbands - they don't have a husband to support & take care of them, especially in a time of affliction and emergency.

These two groups represent those who are truly helpless and in need of care and support.

James is saying that true worship involves caring for the most vulnerable. It's not about performing rituals or looking religious on the outside - it's about tangible acts of love and compassion; it's about helping those in need, without expecting anything in return.

And when we do this, we reveal the Gospel to others - Because once, we were also spiritually orphaned; separated from our Heavenly Father because of our sins. Yet God, in His love, chose to adopt us into His family as beloved children of God.

Now, as those who've received such love, we're to extend this same kind of love to others who are in need of help.

As we reflect on this, we should ask ourselves: Are we looking out for the vulnerable around us? This might look different for each of us. Maybe it's reaching out to a neighbor in need, offering support to a coworker going through a tough time, or being more intentional about caring for someone in our church family.

It's not just about big acts of charity - it's about seeing the needs of the people around us and responding with love. So how can we be the ones to take the initiative to care for those around us?

This is the kind of good fruit that pleases God and makes Jesus smile.

<pause>

The **second** aspect of pure worship, according to James, is to keep oneself unstained from the world. This means that as God's people, we're called to live differently. We're not to conform to the patterns and values of this world. We're to live in holiness as God is holy, and we're to be set apart from the world's way of thinking and behaving.

James has already warned against the "filthiness" and "rampant wickedness" that comes from letting our emotions and desires rule us. Now, he expands that by warning us about being shaped by the world's values.

What's already rampant in our world are people who are slow to listen but quick to speak and quick to anger. In fact, our culture even teaches that it's ok to be angry because that's just a showcase of passion. Movies and TV shows can show bosses raising their voice at their employees and teaching us that that's how it looks like to exercise your strength, power, and dominance.

And the world teaches us many other things about money, relationships, success, and pleasure.

But if we truly have the Gospel implanted in us, then shouldn't we see signs of spiritual growth? Where we're becoming less and less like this world, and more and more like Christ.

Brothers and sisters, as we look into the Gospel and allow it to shape our hearts, we're called to live lives that reflect the love of God and the holiness of Christ. May we be a church that not only hears God's Word but lives it out with sincerity, showing love to those around us and being unstained by the world.

Conclusion

As we conclude, let's think back to that story that we heard in the beginning. When Jesus returns, what if he asks you: Have you received my Word? Yes? Good. So what have you done with it?

May our answer be one of genuine obedience and faithfulness: "Lord, we've humbly received Your Word. We've looked at it intently with perseverance, and we've faithfully done what You've said. Not because we had to, but because we wanted to. Because Your Word has transformed us, and we love You."

Brothers and sisters, let's not be hearers who forget, but doers who live out God's Word in love and holiness.

And may we look forward to that day when we'll meet Jesus face-to-face and hear him say, "well done, good and faithful servant."

The One Thing

***As God's people, let's not be hearers who forget,
but doers who live out God's Word.***

Let's pray.