



“Do What the Word Says”

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James 1:19-27

I was speaking with a young professional not too long ago about what services the church needed to provide to reach their peers. I've been thinking about what ministries we can provide the Milford and greater North Shore community. This young professional said that their peers were not looking for a Bible study or lesson from the church. What they were primarily looking for was authenticity.

Now, this person wasn't saying that those who provide Bible studies were “fake” people. They were saying that their peers were looking to spend unstructured time with people who could show, by example, the truths that the Bible describe. Their peers didn't want explanation of truths. They wanted to relate with those that were living the truths out in their lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an underground church leader in Germany when Hitler was in power addressed this same issue. He said that people aren't looking for church programs. They were looking for genuine relationships. He said, **“It is not ultimately important to us that this or that church leader wants. Rather, we want to know what Jesus wants.”** It's not that programs or sermons can't be Jesus' own words to us or through us. But, Bonhoeffer worried that we may make it too difficult for others to know Jesus. Too much of what others may hear from us might sound “merely human, institutional, or doctrinaire.”

In our passage today, James is trying to lead new followers of Jesus. He is trying to keep them focused on Jesus' word so as to ignore any obstacle that would separate them from that intimate relationship.

We remember last week that James was addressing the new followers of Jesus who were escaping persecution in Jerusalem. They fled to the neighbouring regions after Stephen was stoned to death for correctly pointing out the guilt of the religious leaders in Israel who were resisting God.

James attempted to calm the fears of these new followers by telling them that trials were normal for those that followed Jesus. He told them that if they remained faithful to Jesus' call, their faith would deepen and mature. He reminded them that if they needed wisdom, they should ask of God who would freely guide them to it.

In today's passage, James provides some wisdom from God to strengthen their faith. He will remind them that God's word to them, Jesus' call to them has been planted within their hearts by the Holy Spirit. He will then remind them to do what that word requires of them. They must be careful not to only listen to God's word. They must put it into practice. And lastly, James will remind them that God's word, Jesus' call will be to rescue those with the greatest need. Jesus' call is seen more clearly in serving the most vulnerable.

1.) Humbly Accept God's Word

In James 1:19–21, James reminds the new followers of Jesus that are scattered in the neighbouring regions to keep focused on the word of God that has been planted in their hearts. Jesus had said that he would provide his followers with God's Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and remind them of everything he had

said (John 14:26). So, James is reminding those scattered to humbly accept the words from God that the Spirit would show them.

But in the trials that the new followers faced, they may have ignored that word which was planted in their hearts. By ignoring it, they were being guided by their flesh, by themselves, which would lead to evil. James is asking the young followers to check themselves to see if they were ignoring the Spirit's work in their lives.

His check is to ask them if they are quick to listen to others and slow to speak or become angry. Remember Paul's letter to the church in Galatia. According to that letter, if the new followers were following the Spirit, if they were following the word in their heart, they would bear spiritual fruit. The fruit was love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). If the new followers were keeping in step with the Spirit they would quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

2.) Do What the Word Says

In James 1:22–25, James then tells the new followers not to mistake what he means by being “quick to listen.” He wants to make sure they understand that “humbly accepting” the word planted within them doesn't mean that they only listen. James wants them to keep focused, to “look intently” at the words that were planted within their hearts by the Spirit that Jesus sent them.

They are to do what the words require of them. They are to be like the servants that Jesus described in Luke's gospel account. There, Jesus tells his followers to keep forgiving those who repent. Jesus says, “Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them” (Luke 17:3–4). The followers know Jesus wants them to do this, this isn't a mere philosophy he is teaching them. They cry out, “Increase our faith?”

Jesus then tells them the parable of the servant. “Suppose one of you has a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Will he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? Won't he rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? Will he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

James is saying that it is the duty of followers of Jesus to walk with the Spirit and do everything that God would ask of them. If they don't do what the implanted word is asking of them, they will deceive themselves thinking they only have to listen or understand the word without putting it into practice.

3.) The Word Calls for Rescue

In James 1:26–27, James then says that if the new followers are only listening to the word planted within them and they don't do what it says, their walk with Jesus, their testimony of heaven will become worthless. If they aren't walking in obedience to God's word by being filled and guided by His Spirit they will not bear the fruits of the Spirit.

They will not have control of what they say. They will not have control of their emotions. They will be walking in the flesh. The fruit of which will be “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy” (Galatians 5:20). And they will become for those around them unable to point to the hope of creation: the glory of the resurrected life of Jesus within them by faith.

James gives us a hint at what the word of God within the new followers was calling for. James lets the new followers know what the Spirit of God was guiding them to. Glorifying Jesus was more perfectly made realized

when people followed him in rescuing those with the greatest need. Orphans and widows in their distress revealed more clearly to the world, the heart of Jesus. The new followers of Jesus were called to reject the flesh and focus on the word planted within them. When they did this, they would exhibit the fruits of the Spirit and keep themselves from being polluted by a corrupt world. And ultimately they would be walking in step with the Spirit's call to rescue those in deepest distress.

What is our application for today?

1.) Humbly Accept God's Word

Our hope, joy and path to godliness all lie within us. When Jesus prayed for us, he prayed for those that would have faith in him, he told his Father that he had given us his glory that we might be one as he and the Father were one. Jesus in us and the Father in His Son. All that we need lies within those that trust in Jesus and rely on the Spirit he has given.

This isn't to say that everyone and everything outside of ourselves are evil or not from God! We shouldn't think that the Spirit of God is only concerned with us! God so loves the world that he cares for it in every moment of its history. And God has given a variety of gifts in us so that we would be served by Him through each other.

If we think that God only speaks to us, we will not be able to humbly receive the word God has planted within us. When we do listen to the word planted within us we will hear this truth, "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made of one part by of many" (1 Cor 12:12–14).

The word that is planted within draws us to serve one another. It draws us to unity. It draws us to serve one another with the goal that we would know oneness with the Father, Son, Spirit and each other.

2.) Do What the Word Says

But it is not enough to listen only. It is not enough just to hear this word. If we only hear we will be like the one who looks into a mirror and then forgets what their face looks like when they turn away. It is not enough to hear, we must walk with the Spirit into action. We are to serve one another not merely understand the principle.

But often we know the truth but we justify our inaction. "I would serve others if they were worthy of that service. If they appreciated that service." But when we say this are we revealing the fruits of walking in the Spirit? Or are we revealing the fruits of walking by ourselves in our own effort? If we are revealing the wrong fruits, then may we let this serve as reminder to humbly return to the word planted within us that we have ignored.

This is not easy for us! When Jesus' followers were told to forgive and serve over and over again, they were like us. They asked for more faith. But Jesus then said that more knowledge wasn't needed. What was needed was obedience to his word. It is our duty as followers of Jesus through the Spirit to obey what he tells us to do.

3.) The Word Calls for Rescue

Jesus call is made clearer in us when we follow his word by the power of the Spirit he gave us to serve those with the greatest need. We are only 9 Sundays from this new year's Missions Programme. Over the next two months the Spirit of God will be working in our hearts to prepare us to walk with Jesus in rescuing those around the world who know nothing of Jesus salvation and coming kingdom.

The Spirit of God will be preparing our hearts to act on His word. He desires that we humbly accept His words and put it into action by the power and guidance of His Spirit. His desire is our joy as we walk with the Spirit. God desire is that we glorify “perfect religion” that seeks to redeem those in the most difficult circumstances.

I admit it is difficult to remember in our prayers those we support in various parts of the world. I admit it is easy to think that supporting these efforts can feel, in our flesh, like a never-ending call. But it is God’s call. God never tires of rescue. God never relinquishes from the pursuit to restore. The remedy for us when we feel like it is too much to bear is not more knowledge, but obedience. It is our duty to glorify and enjoy our oneness with God because of Jesus’ rescue of us.

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