

James 1:21-27 Sermon — Be Doers of the Word

James 1:21-27

[PPT → James 1:21-27]

James 1:21-27 “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. **22** But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. **23** For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: **24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. **25** But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. **26** If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. **27** Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

INTRODUCTION

- Before verse 21, remember the flow of James 1.
 - James begins with trials: the trying of your faith works patience.
 - If you lack wisdom, ask God.
 - He warns about being double minded and unstable.
- James then moves from trials to temptation.
 - God does not tempt us with evil.
 - A man is drawn away of his own lust.
 - Lust brings forth sin, and sin brings forth death.
 - James then points back to God, the giver of every good gift.
 - In verse 18, God brought us forth with the word of truth.
- Verses 19-20 tell us to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.
- **[SLOW]** Verse 21 begins with **Wherefore**.
 - Everything James has said about sin, the word, hearing, speaking, and righteousness leads to what comes next.
- **[QUESTION]** What will you do with the word God has given you?
- **[REPEAT]** What are you doing with the word you hear?
- You can sit in church, know the verses, agree with the preaching, and still stop at hearing.
- **James says the word must move into doing.**

I. RECEIVE THE WORD AND DO IT — JAMES 1:21-22

[PPT → James 1:21]

James 1:21 “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

- **Lay apart the filthiness and wickedness.**
 - Superfluity = an overflowing abundance.
 - Naughtiness here = wickedness.
 - Put away the moral filth that fights against the very word you are trying to receive.
- **Receive the engrafted word with meekness.**
 - Come humbly.
 - Be ready to be taught, corrected, and governed by what God says.
- **[QUESTION]** What does James mean when he says the word is able to save your souls?
 - Somebody may read that and say James is teaching salvation by works.
 - James is already talking to these people about the word of truth.
 - Verse 21 begins with Wherefore.
 - The passage moves into hearing, doing, continuing, and blessing.
- Romans 3-4, Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8-10, and Titus 3:5-8 are clear: eternal salvation is not earned by works.
- The strongest sense here:
 - The word can save, deliver, and preserve the hearer from the destructive course and consequences of sin as it is received and obeyed.
- **[WARNING]** Do not force save your souls farther than the evidence allows.
- **Do not turn James into salvation by works.**
- James now tells us what to do with that word.

[PPT → James 1:22]

James 1:22 “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

- **The problem is hearing only.**
- You can hear truth and agree with truth while never acting on what you heard.
- James says that person is deceiving himself.
- Jesus gives the same contrast.

[PPT → Matthew 7:24-27]

Matthew 7:24-27 “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: **25** And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. **26** And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: **27** And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

- Both men heard.

- One heard and did.
- The other heard and did not.
- The difference showed up when the storm came.
- Now go back to James.

[PPT → James 1:22]

James 1:22 “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

- Some people use this verse as though every failure in obedience proves somebody was never saved.
- James does not say that here.
- Works can show whether our conduct matches our profession.
- **Eternal life rests on God’s promise to the believer, not on whether our Christian performance has been good enough this week.**
- **[QUESTION]** What has God already shown you from His word that you know you need to do?

II. LOOK, CONTINUE, AND BE BLESSED — JAMES 1:23-25

[PPT → James 1:23-24]

James 1:23-24 “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: **24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”

- The glass is a mirror.
- The man:
 - looks at himself;
 - sees what is there;
 - walks away;
 - forgets.
- James says he really did behold himself.
- His problem was not that he never saw.
- **He saw and then forgot.**
- God’s word can show you exactly what is wrong, and you can still walk away without changing anything.
- Maybe the Bible shows you:
 - a problem with your temper;
 - your mouth is wrong;
 - bitterness;
 - dishonesty;
 - laziness;
 - worldliness.
- **[STRONG]** Seeing it is not enough.
- James gives the opposite response in verse 25.

[PPT → James 1:25]

James 1:25 “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

- This man looks and continues.
 - He stays with what God showed him.
 - He remembers it.
 - He acts on it.
- James calls God’s revealed standard the perfect law of liberty.
- **[QUESTION]** What is biblical liberty?
- **[SLOW] Biblical liberty is freedom from the bondage of sin so that we can willingly live according to the truth of God.**
 - It is not freedom from God’s authority.
 - It is not permission to do whatever the flesh wants.
 - God’s truth sets us free to live the way God intended us to live.
- James can put law and liberty in the same sentence because God’s commands and biblical liberty are not enemies.
- The man walking in liberty:
 - looks into God’s truth;
 - continues in it;
 - does what it says.
- Jesus connected continuance in His word with freedom.

[PPT → John 8:31-36]

John 8:31-36 “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; **32** And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. **33** They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? **34** Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. **35** And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. **36** If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

- Jesus tells us what the bondage is: sin makes a man its servant.
- He tells us where freedom is found: in the Son and in the truth of His word.
- **[REPEAT] Biblical liberty is liberty from sin’s bondage to walk in God’s truth.**
- Now look again at James.

[PPT → James 1:25]

James 1:25 “But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

- James says **blessed in his deed**.
- He does not say saved eternally by his deed.
- **Obedience carries real blessing.**

[PPT → John 13:17]

John 13:17 “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

- Knowing is good.
- **Doing what God says brings the blessing connected with obedience.**

III. LET THE WORD REACH YOUR LIFE — JAMES 1:26-27

[PPT → James 1:26]

James 1:26 “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”

- James gets very practical.
- A bridle controls a horse.
- To bridle the tongue means to control what comes out of your mouth.
- A man can seem religious and still let his tongue run wild.
 - He can attend church.
 - He can know Bible language.
 - He can still speak with anger, cruelty, gossip, or foolishness.
- James says his religion is vain—empty or useless.
- James comes back to the tongue in James 3:2-6 and shows how much damage an uncontrolled tongue can do.
- Verse 26 is not a side comment.
- **The word we hear has to reach our speech.**
- Notice exactly what James judges: this man’s religion is vain.
- The verse does not say his uncontrolled tongue proves he was never eternally saved.
- James is showing us religious practice that is not producing obedience.
- Verse 27 tells us what acceptable practical religion looks like.

[PPT → James 1:27]

James 1:27 “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

- James immediately gives us action.
- Visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.
 - In the Bible’s examples, that means practical care.
 - You see somebody vulnerable, hurting, or in need, and you help.
- James is describing what obedient religion looks like in practice.
- Good works belong in the Christian life, but they are not the price of eternal life.
- Then James says to keep yourself unspotted from the world.
 - Do not let the world’s corruption stain your life.
 - That does not mean hiding from every unbeliever or withdrawing from everybody outside the church.

- Jesus prayed about that distinction.

[PPT → John 17:14-15]

John 17:14-15 “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. **15** I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.”

- Jesus did not pray that His people would be taken out of the world.
- He prayed that they would be kept from the evil.
- Now return to James.

[PPT → James 1:27]

James 1:27 “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

- **[STRONG] Stay in the world. Preach the gospel. Work your job. Raise your family. Help people. But do not let the world put its spots on you.**

CONCLUSION

- James 1 asks us what we are doing with the Bible we hear.
- Receive the word with meekness.
 - Put away the sin that fights against it.
 - When the word shows you something, do not walk away and forget.
 - Continue in it and do the work.
- Let it reach your tongue.
- Let it change how you treat people who are hurting.
- Let it govern what you allow the world to put into your life.
- **[SLOW] You already know many verses. You have heard a lot of preaching.**
- **[QUESTION] Are you doing what you heard?**

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