

It's Time for a Read, Do

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[0 : 0 0] Please open your Bibles. We are going to be in the book of James, the book of James this morning. Kara is going to be reading James chapter 1, verse 19 through the end of the chapter.

Know this, my beloved brothers. Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

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. For he looks at himself and goes away, and at once forgets what he was like.

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.

[1 : 1 5] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 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.

Thank you. Let's pray. Father, as we approach this new year, and as we approach your word, we need your help.

We need your guidance every day to become more and more like our Savior Jesus. Father, help us to be passionate about loving your word, and about carrying out your word, because we know that this will bring you glory.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Lord willing, this will be the first of 52 sermons this year.

Think about that for a second. Ringing in the new year is a great opportunity for us to rekindle our love for God's word, to refocus, and to start fresh.

[2 : 3 1] And that's what New Year's resolutions are all about. For many Christians, a common New Year's resolution is to read the Bible all the way through this year, or to have a daily reading plan, or to memorize a certain number of passages.

And if you've made a resolution like that, that is awesome. But for what purpose? What is the ultimate reason to set a scripture reading goal?

Let's say that you make it at the end and you achieve this reading goal. What then? Was your goal of reading simply to achieve a reading goal?

Remember, last week, Jeremy showed us from Ephesians 2 that our arrival in heaven is not the ultimate goal, but it's a means to be living monuments to God's mercy and his glory for all eternity.

And the same is true for us on this side of heaven. Our salvation is not the finish line. It is the starting line.

- [3 : 48] Being born again sounds like a beginning, wouldn't you say? So once we've been transformed from dead in sin to alive with Christ, then our work begins.
- Jesus tells us in Matthew 5, 16, let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.
- So the question becomes, what are these good works we're supposed to do? Well, let's take a look at James 1, verse 19. Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
- Why? For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. And I think we need to hear that again. My beloved brothers and sisters, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.
- So according to James, one of the ways that we shine the light of Christ is to be a ready listener, to be careful in our speech, and to be slow to anger.
- [5 : 08] Now, I want to put something out there right away. Not all anger is sinful. But here's the test. If your anger is rooted in your own interests over the interests of others, then your anger is sinful.
- Think of 1 Corinthians 13. Love does not insist on its own way. Or Philippians 2. Let each of you look not only to his own interest, but to the interests of others.
- So James warns us here, if our demeanor is marked by more talking than listening, and by a short temper, both of these reveal a me-first attitude, then we are missing opportunities to bring glory to God.
- And why do I say this? Because we glorify God by shining his light to those around us. Psalm 103 says this, The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.
- So since the Lord is slow to anger, his children ought to be as well. But James pushes us even deeper. We are to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.
- [6 : 29] And then he says in verse 21, Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
- Now this is the key to where James is bringing us in this passage. As living monuments to God's glory on this side of heaven, we no longer walk in sin, but we walk in the Spirit, living out the gospel to which we were called.
- Now I look out and I see every face and I recognize every face. And so I can say this with confidence. You have heard the gospel. You have heard the gospel over and over again.
- And you may be saying to yourself, I do know the gospel. God's word has been planted in me. But look closer at verse 21. James calls the gospel the implanted word.
- And this is the only time in the New Testament that we see this word implanted. And it is important. The Greek word is *emphitos*, which combines the word for in and the word for spring up or to grow.
- [7 : 49] Now that's beautiful because the gospel that you have received is not meant to remain tucked beneath the surface.
- The gospel that's been planted in you has been done so with the intent of springing back out of you, bearing fruit. That's what that word means.
- Not long ago, Sylvia did a science experiment for school. She brought home some dirt in a styrofoam cup, and she told us that she had planted a seed in that cup, and she put it in the window.
- And every day, she ran to the window to see if anything had sprouted up. And she knew that the soil had an implanted seed because she planted it there herself.

So she fully expected to see something sprout up. But I didn't see her plant the seed. For all I knew, she brought home just a cup of dirt, put it in the window, and that was the end of it.

[9 : 01] I didn't know for sure that there was a seed in there until that first little green sprout poked through the surface.

And once that happened, Sylvia saw the fruit of her labor, and I saw the evidence that a seed had been planted there all along. And that's how the seed of the gospel works.

God knows who has received the gospel of salvation in a heart of good soil, but only God knows our hearts. No one else can see the heart of a believer. All we can see in each other is the evidence of the implanted word of salvation.

James cautions us not to confuse the knowledge of the truth or even our ability to recite the truth with living out the truth that's within us.

I've asked two volunteers to come up and help me with the demonstration. Elam, Audrey, would the two of you please come up front here? I brought a deck of cards with me.

[10 : 19] Okay, and I split it exactly in half. Okay? Now, some of you might be familiar with the game of war. Anybody? The game of war.

Okay, I'm going to teach you the game of war. However, we divided a deck of cards exactly in half. Okay?

And here's the object of the game to get all the cards. Simple. That's the object of the game. What you do is you lay down one card at a time, and whoever has the highest card gets both of them, and they go to the bottom of your deck.

Okay? Well, it's quiz time. Ready? Okay? If you lay down a four and you lay down a nine, what happens? You would get the cards because nine is higher than four.

Okay? What if you have a queen and you have a king? What happens? You get, well, no. You get the two cards. You win the battle but not the war.

[11 : 22] Right? Now, here's where it gets tricky. In the game of war, sometimes you tie. And so if you both lay down a seven, then you have to lay down three cards, and then the fourth one is laid over, and then the highest of that gets the whole pile.

You with me so far? You both know the game of war? Are you feeling ready? Okay? I'll take these. I'll take these.

You can go ahead and grab a seat. Okay. Okay. I hope that you're thinking with me, what was the point of that? I'm with you.

There was no point of that. Okay? Why did they learn the rules? They learned the object of the game. They learned the rules. They were quizzed. They proved that they knew what the game of war was to look like, and yet you didn't start.

You didn't actually play the game. And just like that, active faith is not the mere knowledge of Jesus or able to recite certain phrases or verses.

[12 : 43] It's not knowledge. It's union with Jesus. It's not just talking about him. It's walking with him. God knows if you have the gospel within you, and you may know.

But the question is, is that seed sprouting up out of you for God's glory in this world? And this is tricky, especially for a church who knows the gospel, because we know that we are saved by grace and not of works.

But therefore, since we know this truth, we may be in danger of undervaluing the role of good works in our lives.

Good works don't bring about your salvation, but your salvation will bring about good works. And how do you know which good works God has prepared for you?

Well, you hear his word, and you read his word, but remember, reading is not the goal. Think again. This year I want to read the word so that I've read the word.

[14 : 04] That can't be our goal. This is James' concern. Verse 22, Learning the gospel isn't the goal, but it's the means to a greater goal when we have received the gospel.

We don't just hear the gospel and tuck it away. We don't hear so that we've heard. We hear the word so that we can do the word. And outside of Sunday morning, we don't read scripture so that we've read scripture.

We read to do. We read to do. Having your heart of stone replaced with a heart of flesh is for your good, and it's also for God's glory.

Now let's take a moment and think of what God has done for you. He sent his one and only son to reveal the father to you.

Jesus lived a sinless life, and yet he died a sinner's death, bearing the wrath of God on your behalf. He gave his life for you.

[15 : 22] If you are his, then you have been crucified with Christ, and your old life is gone. Amen? And the life you're called to live now is by faith, in union with Christ.

And knowing all of this, and yet not living it out, is as pointless as learning the rules of a card game, and then never playing. James gives us another picture to hammer his point home here.

Verse 23. He brings up a good point.

If you look in the mirror and you see food in your teeth, you wouldn't walk away without taking out the spinach. We look into a mirror to check our appearance and to see if any changes are needed.

And scripture is the mirror for our hearts, not our faces. God's word shows us who he is and who we are.

[16 : 41] We see the love of God that causes us to love him back. And Jesus tells us that if we love him, we will keep his commandments.

And you probably know plenty of God's commands by heart. Let's see. Children, obey your parents.

All of us are commanded to love your neighbor as... You know it, right?

But maybe I shouldn't ask, do you know this scripture by heart, but rather, is your heart changed by the scripture? If we read but don't do, then we are engaging in, as the author of Ecclesiastes would put it, vanity.

It seems meaningful, but it's empty. If our speech and our parenting, our schoolwork, our interactions with others aren't impacted by the gospel, and if they aren't pointing ultimately to Jesus.

[17 : 59] Verse 25. You will be blessed in your doing.

It reminds me of the verse, In the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

And it should comfort you to know that you aren't expected to do all of this alone. Look around you.

You have brothers and sisters who have proven themselves as partners in the gospel to walk along with you. And what's more than that, God's own spirit is in you, patiently guiding you along, both to love and to imitate Jesus.

And his commandments are not meant to be a burden for us. We read in a letter of John, his commandments are not burdensome.

[19 : 19] In fact, did you catch that James calls the word of God the law of liberty? The law of liberty. Doesn't that sound like a paradox? Laws are usually designed to restrict.

So how can the law also be freedom? But since you know the gospel, you may remember that when we lived in sin, we were slaves to sin.

But Christ Jesus sets us free from our sin, truly free from our sin. And we are now liberated to live for him.

We are free to resist sin. We are free to put others first and to no longer be a slave to our own selfishness. Not just one time, but with perseverance.

This law is not burdensome. It's not a law where we do good works out of fear that it might not be enough. Jesus is enough.

[20 : 30] Have no fear. Jesus is the one who lived the righteous life and he offers you his righteousness. And I'll never get used to this.

He is alive right now in the presence of the Father interceding for us. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

This is amazing grace. And now we're called to live outwardly as people who know God's grace inwardly. And it's not only James who says this.

Jesus says it too. As he closes out his sermon on the mount, this is what Jesus says. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

[21 : 46] And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell. And great was the fall of it. Don't miss the warning.

Jesus is not contrasting those who know the scripture and those who don't know the scripture. Jesus is contrasting people who know the word and do it with people who know the word and don't do it.

Jesus is the rock on whom we build our entire lives. We don't just come to the rock, but we build our entire lives on the rock. This is ongoing faith.

We're always connected to Jesus, our foundation. Just like the seed of the gospel planted in good soil, will continue to bear fruit for God's glory, always rooted in the gospel itself.

Does this sound like another teaching of Jesus? Jesus' parable of the sower? This might sound similar to what we're getting at here, where Jesus teaches that there was a sower who went out to sow and he scattered seed and it fell on different types of ground, different types of soil.

[23 : 10] The seeds of the gospel heard by various people. And the word planted in the heart of the believer is a seed planted in good soil. If you are a true follower of Jesus, take heart.

Lean on the spirit. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. You will bear fruit for God's glory. And interestingly, Jesus finishes the parable of the sower by saying, he who has ears, let him hear.

Knowing the true gospel of Christ is our salvation. The truth does matter. No other gospel has the power to save. We must hear the gospel if we are going to believe the gospel.

And then James challenges us by saying, he who has heard the word, let him do. Verse 26.

If anyone thinks he's religious and doesn't bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

[24 : 26] You might find it interesting that James doesn't say, this is the true religion. Theology, theology, and more theology. He doesn't just say that. He doesn't compromise the gospel at all.

He's not saying, don't pay attention to theology. We must have a proper understanding of who God is and what the gospel is. And yet James' focus is that authentic Christianity Christianity is one that is lived out.

Today's reading doesn't just give us, doesn't give us every example of putting scripture into action, but James bookends this passage with a few strong examples that we should take to heart.

We've already heard that followers of Jesus who are doers of the word should be quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to anger.

Not just to know that verse, but to do it. And now he draws our attention to three more marks of authentic religion. And we'll close with this. Controlling our speech, caring for the weak, and living in holiness.

[25 : 35] I didn't even catch this until we were in the middle of the song, but we sang, to the Lord, bridle my tongue.

Did you catch that this morning? That was a nice little gift. Because that's in our passage today. That was not planned, by the way, by us at least.

Bridling the tongue. That's a horse term. A bridle is the leather contraption that goes around the horse's head that includes the bit that goes in the horse's mouth and then the two leather reins to guide the horse.

Isn't that a great picture? We should control our tongues like a skilled cowboy controls his horse. And if you aren't skilled in riding a horse, you are likely to be carried along wherever the horse wants to go.

But the horse is supposed to be directed by the rider. And our speech is like that. James says, if our religion is not worthless, we must take care to bridle our tongues.

[26 : 49] In self-control, we direct our speech rather than letting our words run about like an unbridled horse, like a wild stallion.

verse 27. Verse 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.

We hear the terms pure and undefiled describing the faithful Christian life, which includes caring for those who won't be able to pay you back.

Those whom the world sees as weak are valuable in God's sight, and so they must be valuable in our sight.

This is our faith in action. By the way, pure and undefiled, in the Old Testament, animals that were pure and undefiled were the ones that were chosen for sacrifices.

[28 : 05] The lambs brought for sacrifice were to be without blemish. And you're probably with me thinking, but we don't offer animals like they did in the Old Testament.

Exactly. Jesus is the pure and undefiled lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He offered himself as the perfect and final sacrifice for sin.

So the sacrifice that you offer to God is your life of obedience. This is pure and undefiled religion. Paul puts it this way in Romans 12 verse 1.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true worship. My grandma Ruby used to say, the problem with living sacrifices is that we keep wiggling off the altar.

[29 : 17] It's a good lesson in perseverance. When we love God's word and we commit not only to be hearers of the word but to be doers of the word, we offer real and pleasing sacrifices to God.

So our challenge this year is to be intentional. Let us love the word. Let us love God's word and let us be doers of the word to live in such a way as to be holy and pleasing to God and with the Spirit's help we will live on this side of heaven and for all eternity as living monuments to God's glory.

Let's pray. Lord, your words are perfect. The Scriptures give us all that we have and all that we need for life and godliness.

Would your Spirit produce the fruit of the gospel in our lives, Lord? Would the seeds that you are planting in us spring up in good works that bring you glory and that point others to your love and your mercy found in Jesus?

Lord, help us to remember that we are saved by your grace and by your grace alone. And let us not devalue your commands to carry out the good works that you have prepared for us.

[30 : 56] Would you help us to fulfill the words of our Savior Jesus to let our light shine before others so that they may see our good works and give you glory.

It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.