



MINISTRIES

A Ministry of the Athens Universal Life Church
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Welcome to Part Two of our series "City On A Hill". Our sermon today is called "Hearers and Doers: The Mirror Test".

Our scripture lesson come from James chapter 1 verses 19 to 27.

Starting at verse 19:

My dearly loved brothers, understand this: Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger,
for man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness.
Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save you.

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror.
For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.
But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but one who does good works—this person will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, then his religion is useless and he deceives himself.
Pure and undefiled religion before our[e] God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading of His Word!

Good morning, beloved family of God. I want to ask you a question this morning, and I want you to be honest with yourself. Have you ever read your Bible in the morning, felt good about it, closed it, and then by lunchtime couldn't tell me a single thing you read? Or maybe you've sat through a sermon like this one, nodded your head, said "Amen," and then walked out those doors and forgotten everything by the time you reached your car?

You see, there's a danger that we all face as followers of Jesus Christ—and it's not the danger of ignorance. It's the danger of knowledge without obedience. It's the danger of hearing the Word of God week after week and allowing it to go in one ear and out the other. It's the danger of being what James calls a "self-deceived" Christian.

The brother of Jesus, James, writes to us this morning with a sharp, loving rebuke and a clear call. And here's the big idea I want to plant in your heart today:

****As Christians, it is important that we do more than simply listen to and study the Bible—we have to apply its words to our life.****

Let's pray. *Father, we come before You with open hearts and open ears. We ask that Your Word would not merely enter our minds this morning, but that it would transform our lives. Speak to us, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

POINT ONE: PREPARE YOUR HEART TO RECEIVE THE WORD (Verses 19-21)

James begins with three commands that sound simple, but are actually the foundation for everything else he's going to say. He says, **"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."**

Now, why would James start here? Why does he talk about listening and speaking and anger before he talks about applying the Word? Because he knows something we often forget:

****The condition of your heart determines what you will do with the Word of God.****

Think about it. When you're quick to speak, you're not listening. When you're angry, you're not receptive. When you're full of your own opinions and your own agenda, there's no room for God's Word to take root.

James is telling us, "Before you even think about applying the Word, you need to prepare the soil of your heart."

And then he gets even more direct in verse 21. He says, **"Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."**

Did you catch that? He says to ****get rid of**** the filth. That's an active command. You don't just hope the filth goes away. You don't just pray that the filth goes away.

You become an active participant in removing it from your life.

Let me give you a picture. Imagine you have a beautiful garden, and you want to plant some seeds. But the garden is full of weeds and rocks and trash. What would you do? Would you just throw the seeds on top of the mess and hope they grow? Of course not! You'd clear the ground. You'd pull the weeds. You'd remove the rocks. Only then would you plant the seed.

Church, that's what James is saying. The Word of God is a seed. And if your heart is full of the world's filth—unforgiveness, bitterness, pride, lust, greed—that seed is not going to grow. You need to do some weeding. You need to clear the ground. You need to humbly accept the Word, not arrogantly approach it, not casually approach it, but humbly, like someone who knows they desperately need what God has to say.

****The first step to applying the Word of God is preparing your heart to receive it.****

POINT TWO: PRACTICE THE WORD—DON'T JUST HEAR IT (Verses 22-25)

Now James gets to the heart of the matter. Look at verse 22 with me: **"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."**

That's the theme verse of this entire passage. "Do not merely listen. Do what it says." Because here's what happens—and I speak from experience—we can become so good at listening that we think listening is the same thing as obeying. But it's not. The Devil believes the Bible. He quotes the Bible. But he doesn't obey the Bible. Listening is not the goal. Doing is the goal.

And James gives us this powerful illustration. He says in verses 23-24, **"Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."**

Have you ever done that? You look in the mirror in the morning, and you see something wrong. You see your hair is messed up. You see there's something on your face. But then you're in a hurry, and you walk away, and you completely forget. You go through your entire day with that obvious flaw, and you never fix it.

That's what it's like when we hear the Word of God and don't apply it. The Word is a mirror, church. When you read the Bible, when you listen to a sermon, you're looking into that mirror, and the Word reveals what's wrong. But if you walk away and don't do anything about it, you're forgetting what you saw. And James says in verse 24, you've deceived yourself. You think you're fine, but you're not. You think you've dealt with it, but you haven't.

But now look at verse 25. This is the beautiful promise: **"But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do."**

Did you catch that phrase? "The perfect law that gives freedom." Now, what does the word of God give us? Freedom. You know, some people think that obeying God's Word is restricting. They think it's a cage.

But James tells us the opposite. The Word of God is what sets you free. When you live according to God's design, you're not living in bondage—you're living in the freedom of being who you were created to be.

And I want you to notice the progression in this verse. He says "looks intently" and "continues in it." That's not a casual glance. That's not a "I read my Bible for five minutes so I feel better about myself" kind of approach.

This is a person who leans in, who studies, who meditates, who goes back to the Word again and again. And then—here's the key—they don't just look and move on. They ****do**** what it says. They put it into practice.

And look at the promise: "They will be blessed in what they do." Not just blessed in what they know. Not just blessed in what they believe. Blessed in what they ****do****.

****The second step is to practice the Word—because the blessing isn't in the hearing, it's in the doing.****

POINT THREE: PROVE YOUR FAITH THROUGH ACTION (Verses 26-27)

Now James closes this passage with a powerful test. He says in verse 26, ****"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."***

Wow. Look at that word: "religion." Not just "faith." Not just "belief." James is talking about people who are religious. People who go to church. People who read their Bibles. People who participate in religious activities.

And he says, if you're religious and you don't control your tongue, your religion is useless. It's worthless.

The tongue is the first test. Because of all the things we can control, of all the things we can do to fake it, the tongue is the one thing that reveals what's really in our hearts. You can fake a lot of things, church.

You can fake giving. You can fake attendance. You can fake prayer. But eventually, the tongue will give you away. The words that come out of your mouth reveal what's really inside you.

If you're reading your Bible and studying your Bible and hearing sermons and going to small group, but your words still tear people down? If your words still gossip and slander and lie? James says your religion is worthless.

Ouch. That's a hard word, but it's a true word.

And then he gives us the positive picture in verse 27: ****"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."***

Now here's what James is doing. He's taking the concept of "applying the Word" and he's making it concrete. It's not vague. It's not just a feeling of "I should be a better person." It's specific. And he gives us three specific things.

****First, pure religion is caring for the helpless.**** Orphans and widows. In James's day, these were people with no voice, no protection, no provision. They were the most vulnerable members of society. And James says, if you really want to know if God's Word has taken root in your life, look at how you treat people who can't do anything for you. Do you help people who can't repay you? Do you serve people who can't serve you back? That's the heart of God.

****Second, pure religion is keeping yourself unstained by the world.**** Now, what does he mean by that? He means we live in a world that is constantly pulling us away from God. And true faith doesn't just talk about holiness—it practices it. It makes decisions based on God's Word, even when the world says otherwise. It says no to things that used to trap us. It lives differently.

And ****third****, hidden in the middle of that verse, is the conclusion of the whole matter. James starts verse 26 with "If anyone considers themselves religious," and he ends verse 27 with "this is religion that God accepts."

In other words, there are two kinds of religion. There's the kind that's worthless—it looks religious on the outside, but it doesn't transform your life. And there's the kind the Father accepts—it's practical, it's real, it cares for others, and it pursues holiness.

Which one have you been practicing?

Church, let me bring this home. I want to give you three practical ways to apply what you've heard today. And I want you to actually do something with this. Don't just listen. Don't just nod. Do what it says.

****Application Number One: Before you read, prepare.**** Before you open your Bible, take a moment. Ask God to clear the ground of your heart. Confess any sin that has been lurking there. Ask Him to help you be quick to listen and slow to speak. Ask Him to humble you so that you're ready to receive His Word. Don't just rush in. Prepare your heart.

****Application Number Two: Ask the "Do" question.**** Whenever you read the Bible or hear a sermon, ask yourself this question: "What am I going to do about what I just heard?" Don't leave without an answer.

If the Word reveals something in your life that needs to change, change it. If it reveals a relationship that needs mending, mend it. If it reveals a step of obedience you've been putting off, take it. Give yourself a specific action item.

****Application Number Three: Look for the helpless.**** This week, I want you to intentionally look for someone who can't repay you. A widow. An orphan. Someone in need. And I want you to help them. Not because it's a duty, but because it's what the Word of God does in a life that's truly been transformed. That's what James would say. That's what Jesus would do.

Now, as we come to this time of response, I want you to search your own heart. Maybe today God has been speaking to you, and you realize that you've been a hearer of the Word and not a doer. You've known the truth.

You've studied the Bible. But you haven't been living it. And God is calling you to more.

Maybe the Word of God has been a mirror this morning, and you've seen something in your life that needs to change. A tongue that needs to be bridled. A habit that needs to be cleaned out. A ministry of mercy that you've been neglecting.

Or maybe you're here, and you've never actually surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. You've heard the Word, but you've never received the Word. Today is the day. Jesus Christ died for your sins. He rose from the grave so that you could be forgiven. He wants to give you a new heart that actually wants to obey Him.

I want to invite you to come forward. Come to this altar. Let's not just hear the Word today. Let's do what it says. Come and make it right with God.

Please bow your heads as we pray:

Father in heaven, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You don't leave us in our ignorance—You show us the truth, and You give us the power to live it out. Lord, forgive us for the times we have merely listened and not done. Forgive us for the times we've looked in the mirror and walked away. Forgive us for being quick to speak and slow to hear. Forgive us for allowing the filth of this world to crowd out the seed of Your Word.

Today, we choose to be doers of the Word. We choose to humbly accept what You have planted in us. We choose to look intently into Your perfect law, and we choose to remain in it. Help us, Lord, to watch our tongues. Help us to care for those who cannot help us back. Help us to keep ourselves unstained by the world.

And for the one here who is ready to surrender their life to Christ, we pray that the seed of Your Word would take root and bear abundant fruit. May we leave this place transformed, not merely informed. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Go in peace, and go and do what the Word says.

Go out this week and be a blessing and be blessed! For the more you are a blessing, the more you will be blessed!

Thank you for watching and listening and we will see you all next week!

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