

James Ch1v22-27 - Doers Of The Word

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Date: 10 August 2025

Preacher: Tyler Howard

[0 : 00] To preach, and as Tyler comes up, he'll be preaching from James chapter 1, from verses 22 to 27. So if you have a Bible, please turn to that.

And if you have a red church Bible, it's on page 1213. Thank you, Tyler. Well, good morning. Good morning. As Jonathan said, if you have your Bibles, I'd ask that you go ahead and open them up to the book of James. James chapter 1, and I'll be reading here from verse 22 in just a moment. But before I dive in, I just want to take some time to thank Johnny and the other elders for the invitation to come and open God's word with you today. Consider it an honor and a privilege. Super excited to be here.

And I bring you greetings from Carrick Tool Baptist Church, where my wife and I are members. So thank you so much for having us. It's really a privilege. Now, I haven't had the pleasure of meeting quite a few of you.

[1 : 06] So I just want to take a little bit of time to tell you about myself. So as you can tell from my accent, I'm originally from Donegal. No, I'm just kidding.

I wasn't sure how that would land, but that was good. That's good. So no, I'm actually, me and my wife just recently relocated from North Carolina in the United States. So down in America's Southland, I am one of four siblings.

So I have two brothers and a sister. And were you to ask my parents, they would probably tell you that out of all their children, I was the most energetic.

Well, maybe a better word is hyper, actually. But I don't think I was a particularly disobedient child or anything like that. I just had loads and loads of energy.

And one example from my childhood that I feel demonstrates this fact pretty well. It comes from a trip that my family took at the zoo when I was younger. So I was maybe four or five years old.

[2 : 13] So I don't have any real recollection of this event. But my mom, she swears that it happened. And so we're at the zoo. We're enjoying our time together. We're looking at all the wonderful animals.

But because of what I just told you, that I'm incredibly energetic, being the energetic child I was, I'm running around everywhere, just back and forth, like a ping pong ball going back and forth between the paddles.

And my mom, she's a wonderful mom. She's trying to rein me in. She's trying to stop me from causing a scene. And she runs after me. And she says, as the story goes, Tyler, stop running. And me, as I am jogging in place, I turn back to my mother and I say, I'm not running, mommy. And as I said, I don't remember this, but I can totally see myself doing it.

It's kind of funny to think about, I'm there, this little boy, I'm hearing what my mom's saying. I'm just doing a really poor job of the whole listening part. And I'm sure I looked pretty ridiculous, pretty silly.

[3 : 18] She's telling me not to run. I'm screaming that I'm not running as I quite obviously run in place. So it's kind of a crazy picture.

Well, James, in our passage today, he's going to paint another crazy picture. The absurdity of hearing God's word and failing to respond to it.

And if I were to reduce the central idea of this passage down to a single sentence, this is what I would say, that we must listen to and obey God's word, demonstrating the genuineness of our faith by our behavior.

I'll say that one more time. We must listen to and obey God's word, demonstrating the genuineness of our faith by our behavior. So for the rest of our time together, I want to unpack that idea.

And I want, by God's spirit, my prayer is that we would leave this place with a greater understanding of what the Holy Spirit was saying to James's original audience and what's more, what he intends to

teach us today.

[4 : 32] So look with me, begin reading with me here in chapter 1, verse 22. James writes, But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourself.

Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, he goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person 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 a doer who works, this person will be blessed in what he does.

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

Let's pray together as we open God's word. Dear God, thank you so much for the opportunity to come and open your word with these brothers and sisters.

[5 : 58] I ask that you would, by the power of your spirit, make clear the message that you have for us this morning. Not a word from me, God, but a word from you to your people.

And God, help us to be receptive to the message from your word, but would you also, by the power of your spirit, empower us to respond appropriately.

And God, I ask all these things in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen. So we've already noted that the idea James is driving at for his readers is that we must listen to and obey God's word, demonstrating the genuineness of our faith by our behavior.

But how is it that that unfolds throughout our passage? Well, to give a little bit of context, James has indicated in the opening verses of his epistle that it's primarily believers he has in mind as he writes. And he tells these believers that it is God, the one who's the source of every good gift whom they have to thank for their salvation. You can look in chapter one, verse 18.

[7 : 12] He tells them, by his own choice, by his own choice, he gave us birth by the word of truth so that we would be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

And now, at the outset of our text today, he begins to describe two individuals and their very different responses to the word of God.

So let's take a look at that first individual in verses 23 and 24.

James says, because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like someone looking at his own face in a mirror.

For he looks at himself, he goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. Here in verses 23 and 24, James uses this very interesting analogy to illustrate the absurdity of hearing God's word and failing to respond to it.

[8 : 21] He says that the one who hears it and fails to respond to it, it's like someone who stares at their own reflection, they walk away, and they forget what they've seen.

Now, when you and I read the word mirror, we think of this really nice and crystal clear, perfectly reflective thing that we probably have all of us hanging in our bathrooms now.

But when James's original audience would have heard this word mirror, something quite different would have come to their minds. Because mirrors in the ancient world, they weren't made of the glass as we know it today.

They were made from metal, which had been polished to offer a reflection. So rather than this crystal clear likeness and what we're used to today, these mirrors would have provided a murky image at best.

And if you manage to see yourself adequately in these little mirrors, adequately enough to find any sort of cosmetic flaw, well, then of course you would address it.

[9 : 23] And in this passage, James is highlighting for his readers how absurd it is to give one's attention to one's appearance in the mirror, recognize that an issue needs to be addressed, and then not do anything about it.

It's just not something that you would do. And I think that for most of us, this is an image that we can pretty intuitively grasp. But just to put it in more modern terms, I want to give you just an example here.

So imagine that you're out for a nice Italian dinner with your friends. And as you're eating spaghetti, some sauce that maybe drops onto your chin, and one of your friends notices.

And because they're a good friend, they point it out to you. So maybe you even head to the bathroom and you look in the mirror and you see you've got this massive glob of spaghetti sauce on your chin.

But instead of seeing the sauce, wiping it from your face, you walk right back out, you ignore the problem, and you continue to eat. This would be crazy.

[10:28] It just isn't something you would do. And in the same way, to hear from God's word and to recognize a problem but fail to do anything about it, it just doesn't make any sense.

And so after giving this example of the one who hears and fails to respond, James describes for his readers another individual. So let's look again at verse 25.

Verse 25 says, But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works, this person will be blessed in what he does.

Now there's quite a bit to unpack in this verse, but already at first glance, we can see the difference between this individual and the individual described in verses 23 and 24.

This person doesn't walk away from the word, failing to take action. This person looks to the word and acts appropriately in response, and James tells us that they're blessed for it.

[11:45] So let's revisit our analogy of the fancy Italian dinner. So remember while you're eating some spaghetti sauce, it's dripped onto your chin and one of your friends has noticed, right?

Then after you have been informed of this tragedy, you went to the bathroom and you check things out. But imagine that this time you see the sauce on your chin and instead of walking out without addressing the issue, you wipe it from your face and you return to the table.

This makes a whole lot more sense. Having looked into God's word and recognized a problem, this here that James describes for us in verse 25 has chosen to address the issue.

Now you may have noticed that James uses this very interesting phrase in verse 25. He says, perfect law of freedom. What does this mean?

Because I think that if you and I are honest, we read the word law and we start to get a little nervous here. Is James urging us to adopt some sort of legalistic mentality or encouraging us to keep some sort of checklist of behaviors by which we earn God's favor?

[13:05] Well, I don't think that's what James is getting at at all. In fact, I think that these words he chooses to use, perfect and freedom, I think they're intentional and significant.

Because by the use of these particular modifiers, James helps his readers to see the law in light of Christ's redemptive work. Christ's ultimate fulfillment of the law on our behalf.

In one scholar, he says it this way, though the Old Testament law was holy and righteous and good, it had no power by itself to enable sinful people to conform to it.

Thus, the Old Testament law, it did not liberate God's people, but it enslaved them, as Paul taught. But the law is one of liberty when it comes along with the word of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit to change hearts.

Now, if you're here this morning and you have placed your faith and your trust in Jesus Christ, I want to stop and take a few moments to remind you of something that if you're anything like me, this is something that you know, but you are so often tempted to forget.

[14:22] As we work through James' teaching in this text, the idea isn't that we look into the mirror of God's word, we grit our teeth, and we try harder to obey to get on God's good side.

Yes, we should desire to follow God's commands, and if you are in Christ, you will want to do so. But here's the thing. You don't do this to earn God's favor.

Believers have been made right before God by placing their faith and their trust in the only one who ever kept God's law perfectly, Jesus Christ. And now we desire to keep God's commands because we've been given an incredible gift.

We've been made right with God and adopted into his family. And what's more, we've been given the Holy Spirit who is day to day working to make us more like Jesus.

Paul, as he's writing to the church in Philippi in chapter 2, verse 13, he says it this way. It is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.

[15:41] We aren't doing this in reliance on our own strength. Now at this point, I want to pause briefly again because I know that there are likely some here today who have been trying to earn God's favor.

They've been relying on their own strength to get on God's good side. You've worked so hard to do all of the right things, to follow all of the rules, to get yourself into God's good graces, to tilt the

scales.

If you find yourself in that camp this morning, please hear me. You will never do enough. You can't do it. Because as James goes on to tell us in chapter 2, verse 10, if you've broken just one of God's commands, it's as if you've broken the whole lot.

You cannot keep God's laws perfectly. You cannot do it. But there is one who did. Jesus lived a sinless life in perfect obedience to the Father.

And he died a cruel and a painful death, a death that you and I deserved. But he didn't stay dead. After three days, he walked out of the tomb alive.

[17 : 07] And now, for those who would turn to him in faith, he offers forgiveness and restored relationship with God. He received sin's penalty on our behalf so we can now receive his righteousness.

Praise God. God. So having explained to his readers that the word of God needs to be acted on and not just heard and forgotten through the example of these two hearers in verses 22 to 25, James gets really, really practical.

He provides for his readers an example both of a hearer of the word and a doer of the word. Let's look again at verses 26 and 27.

James states, if anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, his religion is useless and he deceives himself. Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this.

To look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world. In these verses, James contrasts for us the one who has a legitimate and a God-honoring religion and the one whose religion is simply counterfeit.

[18 : 40] And how is it that you and I can tell the difference? We can tell the difference by examining behavior. So let's take a look at that example of counterfeit religion first.

James uses some pretty strong imagery in this passage to get his point across here in verse 26. He says that the one who claims to be religious, but they can't get a hold of their tongue, that person demonstrates that their religion isn't the real deal.

people. Now, if you're like me, it may strike you as a bit strange that an inability to control one's tongue is the example James chooses to use in this passage.

But throughout his epistle, he's reminded us of the importance of the human tongue and its great power both for good and evil. people. for example, in James chapter 3 verse 2, he tells us that one's ability to control the tongue is an indicator of their ability to control the rest of their body in a way that's honoring to God.

God. He says, for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he's mature, able also to control the whole body.

[20 : 10] And in James chapter 3, verses 9 to 12, this is how he puts it. That with the tongue we bless our Lord and Father and with it we curse people who are made in God's likeness.

Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth, my brothers and sisters. These things should not be this way. Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening?

And of course, the obvious answer to James' rhetorical question is no, it does not. Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 15 verse 18, he tells us that what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart and this defiles a person.

So we see that the tongue, though it's seemingly small and insignificant, it's actually incredibly powerful and what's more, it reveals the condition of one's heart.

So that's the counterfeit religion. religion. So how is true and legitimate religion manifested? Well, according to James, it's manifested by care for the widows and orphans of the world in moral purity.

[21 : 34] If you look again with me at verse 27, this is what James says. Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this, that we look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Widows and orphans had an incredibly difficult life in the ancient world. They were hard-pressed in almost every way, politically, socially, economically.

And God, throughout the scriptures, he demonstrates the importance that he places on their care.

So it's not really surprising that James highlights the importance of their care here.

I think it's important to remember, though, that James' intention isn't to give an exhaustive list of the ways a legitimate and a God-honoring religion is presented.

This can be thought of sort of a summary statement which gives some examples of behavior that's characteristic of a true and vibrant faith, but there are, of course, other ways.

[22 : 42] And it could be that James' focus on serving the downtrodden here, it sort of anticipates his teaching that he'll go on to do on favoritism in chapter 2, verses 1 to 9, because in that text there are indications that James' readers, they may have been giving preferential treatment to the wealthy.

So here, James, in presenting service to widows and orphans as evidence of true and God-honoring religion, he might be pushing back on that tendency among his readers. But at any rate, what's clear from James' comments here in verses 26 and 27 is that one's behavior is an indication of the genuineness of their faith.

God-nosed God-nosed So as we begin to bring our time in the word to a close, I want to leave you with a few more points of application.

And one of the things I love about this passage is you don't have to dig very deep to discover the application. What I mean to say is that you do not have to look very long and very hard at this passage before you start to get a pretty good idea of the response that James wanted from his original readers and the response that God wants from us.

[24 : 07] And I mentioned at the very beginning of our time the central idea and we must listen to and obey God's word. Demonstrating the genuineness of our faith by our behavior.

And brothers and sisters, this sounds so incredibly simple, but if we're honest with ourselves, this is incredibly difficult.

It's a battle that we fight every single day, a constant struggle for each and every one of us. In verses 22 to 25, we see that merely hearing the word of God and not doing what it says is foolish. It's as foolish as looking in a mirror, seeing that spaghetti sauce on your chin and choosing not to wipe it away, going right back to the table without taking any steps to address the problem.

But the person who acts appropriately to God's word, responds and does what it says, that person will be blessed. Friends, our desire should be not to just listen to the word of God, but to actually do what it says, to listen to the word and respond appropriately, demonstrating our faith to a watching world.

[25 : 28] So how does this play out in our daily life? Well, let's say that you're at work, you're reading your Bible, maybe on your lunch break, and you come across a portion of scripture that talks about having a quick temper.

Maybe you're in James 1, verses 19 to 21. You read the passage and you recognize that your tendency to blow up and lash out against your coworkers in anger is sinful.

It's not God honoring. It's not appropriate in the sight of God. Well, you have two choices. You can close your Bible and ignore the teaching of God's word on this issue, or you can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, take steps to address your anger.

In our passage, James makes clear which one of those is the appropriate response to God's word. And if we consider verses 26 to 27 of our passage, where James, he teaches us that our behavior, it demonstrates the genuineness of our faith.

I think that James' instruction in these verses, it highlights the need for self-reflection in our Christian lives. Because let's return just for a moment to that individual with an anger issue.

[26 : 53] What that person and every one of us needs to ask ourselves is, am I demonstrating that my faith is the real deal in the way I am living my life?

Does my behavior indicate that I possess a genuine faith? Friends, let us strive by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to answer yes.

Let's pray together. Dear God, would you confront us with the truth that we have met in this passage?

Would you forgive us for the many times when we've acted like this man who looks into your word and immediately forgets what it says? God, forgive us for the times when our words indicated that our faith was genuine, but our actions told another story altogether.

God, would you, by your grace, continue to sanctify us, making us more like Jesus every day? We ask all these things in his name.

[28 : 05] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.