

# Hearing and Doing

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[ 0 : 00 ] So we're week two on a series of looking through James. James is all about what we do with our faith. Last week John opened by saying that being a Christian means you act and speak in certain ways.

Ways that are motivated by what you believe. What you believe should result in certain actions and a way of living. Faith not accompanied by actions is dead.

We have to do something with our faith. That is what James says time and time again throughout his letter.

And the things that we do need to be according to what God has given us. To what God tells us are good things to do. Earlier this year when we did a series on Nehemiah, I was fortunate enough to preach on Nehemiah chapter 8.

When Ezra was asked to read God's word to the people. And I think there's a lot of similarity between three points that James talks about in this small section and what we saw with Ezra.

[ 1 : 10 ] James says that we need to hear the word. We need to hear what God is saying to us. There's no good having a Bible if it just sits on the shelf and we never open it.

But beyond that, we need to receive the word. What's the point in opening the Bible if we don't actually read it to see what it has to say to us?

And lastly, we need to do the word. There's no good reading the Bible, listening to sermons, coming to church if it doesn't change anything.

In Nehemiah it says when Ezra read the word, it transformed people. James talks about the things that we do after reading God's word.

Levinson and Tauraira, I don't know if that's pronounced right.

[ 2 : 11 ] They're significant researchers and authors in the field of psycholinguistics. They developed a model of how modern conversation takes place. The average person, when we're in conversation, is already planning what they're going to say before about halfway through what the previous person's speaking.

So we don't even wait for them to finish before we start planning. In a world where we're all busy, we want things to be quick and we want to move on to the next thing, that speeds things up, improves the flow.

That's great. But it's not very conducive to a good conversation. They suggest that both planning what you're going to say and listening to somebody, both of them take a lot of mental energy.

We can't give 100% to both things at the same time. It's just not possible. So often we enter conversations focused on what we have to say.

Not on what the other person is saying. This has been attributed to multiple people, but the philosopher Epictetus said, we have two ears, one mouth.

[ 3 : 27 ] That's so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. We live in a world where everyone has something to say.

And now for the first time in history, everyone has a platform with which they can say it. We have an open microphone to broadcast to the whole world.

We don't need to listen to anyone anymore. If the person you're speaking to doesn't agree with you, that's fine, because you can easily go and find someone else who does.

There's no need to listen to other people. If you know me, you know that I love the Marvel superhero films.

One of those films is called Doctor Strange, and there's a line in that film. Your problem, Mr. Strange, is that you always think it's about you, but it's not about you.

[ 4 : 28 ] That was said by a character called The Ancient One, who was trying to help Doctor Strange realize that he can be part of something so much bigger than himself.

But he was too focused on himself. Another film that's a little bit older, Hitch. Sarah says to Will Smith's character, you know what your problem is?

You think it's all about you. The world today has a problem with listening. So many long-term safeguarding problems.

This is Safeguarding Sunday. So many long-term problems that can be resolved much, much sooner. Escalate and go on so long because people can't listen.

They wouldn't do something like that. You can't possibly be right. Are you sure about that? Or the worst line that I've heard. But we can't do that because this could be harmful to God's work.

[ 5 : 35 ] We're too focused on ourselves that we don't listen to other people. We know that Jesus was a great speaker. He attracted crowds of thousands.

He was a great leader. But he was also a man who listened to people. Verse 19 said, Be quick to listen, but slow to speak.

And slow to become angry. James isn't just talking about the emotional outburst of anger. And I'm sure most of us could tell stories of times when that happened.

Actually, James is also talking about the anger that people hold on to. So many people hold on to anger. Hold on to a grudge.

So many people think, but you're wrong. And you need to know that you're wrong. When we're angry, it's usually about us.

[ 6 : 38 ] It's about our own agenda. It's about what we think should happen. Or about us being right. Especially against the other person.

Anger comes from being self-centered. Instead of being other-centered. So many, if not all, of the tragedies that are taking place in the world.

All of the conflict. The murders. Everything else like that. It happens because we think we're right.

So no one else can be. You may be aware that recently there was a tragic assassination in Utah and America. In the country that prides itself on freedom.

In the last 10 years, there's been at least 22 different assassination attempts. In all directions. This is not one side or the other. But these are just the ones that are politically motivated.

[ 7 : 47 ] The world says if someone disagrees with you, you don't have to listen to them. Because you're right. And if they're wrong, that's their problem.

And there are sadly people who take that to the extreme. There are people who decide, well, I'm right. And if somebody's going to get in my way of that, I'll get rid of them.

And there are people who don't. And there are people who don't. Tragically, that happens. That when people focus so heavily on themselves, other people become unimportant. The world is crying out for people who want to be the center of their own stories.

Who want to be the main character. Who want to be the person that is right. But recently, I've been re-watching some Doctor Who episodes.

Another show that you know that I love. But I've been watching them with a friend. And we've made it to the 60th anniversary episodes. And one of those episodes is called The Giggle.

[ 8 : 50 ] The Doctor comes up against an old adversary called the Toymaker. Who loves games. The Toymaker says in this episode, I just made it so that everybody wins all the time.

Imagine a world where everyone thinks they are right all the time. Perhaps it's not that difficult to imagine.

Scientific American, which is a scientific journal, they suggest that on average, we spend 60% of a conversation talking about ourselves. When we're on social media, that goes up to 80%.

Neurological studies say that when we talk about ourselves, it releases dopamine. So it quite literally feels good to talk about ourselves. But when we focus on me, myself, and I, it leads us down a path of selfishness, of greed, arrogance, self-interest, deceit, pride, anger, lust.

The list could go on. The vast majority of the sins that the Bible talks about could come down to focusing on us.

[ 10 : 14 ] Thinking, I'm more important than anyone else. But James suggests something completely radical. Turn your attention away from yourself.

Faith isn't about us. When we have faith like Christ, we give up ourselves. There's a story of a man who asked to be shown what heaven and hell were like.

So he was shown a vision, an image of hell. And he saw a room, and in that room was a banqueting table. And that banqueting table was filled with meats and cheeses and chocolates and fruits and all different kinds of delicacies.

And a bell rang, and the people came in, and they all had spoons strapped to their arms. They were at least two or three feet long. And all of the people were thin, withering away, barely keeping together.

And they crowded around the table, and they all went straight for the best foods, and they tried to feed themselves. But they couldn't get the spoons to their mouths. They couldn't reach their arms in that direction.

[ 11 : 26 ] And then he was shown a vision of heaven, and he saw another room, another banqueting table filled with meats and cheeses and fruits and chocolates and all different kinds of delicacies.

And a bell rang, and the people came in, and the people looked healthy and strong. And they had the same spoons strapped to their arms. But when they gathered around the banqueting table, they went for all of the best foods.

And they started to offer them to each other. And they reached the spoons strapped to their arms across the table. It's the difference between focusing just on ourselves and focusing on other people.

Those who focused on each other all got fed. You may have heard talk about a term called active listening.

Active listening is when you focus 100% on the other person. It's not about responding. It's got nothing to do with what you have to say.

[ 12 : 34 ] It's all to do with the other person. But true active listening, well, in today's world, it's inconvenient. What would the world be like today if everyone truly, actively listened to one another?

Should, shouldn't be difficult to imagine. But perhaps it is. Because that includes the people that we disagree with. The world says it's your story.

You're the main character. It's all about you. But the Bible says it's God's story. It's not about us. A song that we sung just a few minutes ago, Jesus, be the center.

That means we can't if Jesus is there. If you call yourself a Christian, you are giving up being at the center of the story. So we have to hear the word.

We have to listen. And take ourselves out of the middle. But listen, just listening isn't enough. In verse 22, it says, if you hear but you don't do, you are deceiving yourself.

[ 13 : 51 ] You might listen to preaching podcasts, watch sermons on YouTube. You might read theology articles online or use in-depth Bible study materials.

And you might take comfort in the fact that you are hearing people talking about and preaching God's word. Those things are great to do. But we can't stop there.

We can't just be hearers. We need to be doers. The person who listens to the word but does nothing with it is like the person who looks in a mirror and immediately forgets what they look like.

If this was an all-age service, I'd say if you have a smartphone, get it out and look at yourself in the camera. It's not, so I won't do that. Verse 23, the word that is used for looking or observing is the Greek word, I'm going to apologize for our pronunciation, katenui.

It means to look at intently, to consider carefully, or to study. It's not just a casual, quick glance in the mirror, but it is picking up on every single detail.

[ 15 : 04 ] And then we go away and forget what we've just studied. The person who looks in the mirror just to appreciate what they look like, to say, don't I look good, it's not a healthy lifestyle.

You look in the mirror to do something, to brush your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face, put on makeup, whatever it is, the mirror is there for us to do something.

In the same way, being a healthy Christian, it's not just about opening and reading the Bible. It's not about being fascinated by theology. Although theology can be very fascinating.

It's not about winning debates. It's about doing something with what we have read or what we have heard. How many people, how many of us listened to the video and to what I was saying earlier about safeguarding and said, it's great that somebody else is doing this?

Safeguarding isn't someone else's job. We don't do it because it's an obligation or it's an instruction, something we have to do. We do it because it's a ministry.

[ 16 : 20 ] It's a mission that God has given us that he talks about throughout the Bible. Look out for the vulnerable and for those in need.

Give a voice to those who don't have one. How many times do we look at Jesus telling us good things to do and say, that's great, but someone else can do that?

That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says, you do it. The feeding of the 5,000 is a perfect example. The disciples said to Jesus, Jesus is getting laid.

Everyone's hungry. Let's send them away so they can all go and get food for themselves. And Jesus says, no, you feed them. You do it.

Don't give the responsibility. Don't rely on somebody else. You do it. We have wonderful volunteers in this church who coordinate Alpha, welcome space, the prayer meetings, the youth and the kids work, our trustees who coordinate the safeguarding.

[ 17 : 27 ] But all of these things don't mean the rest of us can sit back and say, well, that's someone else's problem. They can solve that. Or someone else will deal with that. James is very strong on that.

That's not good enough. You read the Bible. You receive God's word. And you do something. Charles Spurgeon said, I fear we have many such in all congregations, admiring hearers, affectionate hearers, attached hearers, but all the while unblessed hearers because they are not doers of the word.

We're all familiar with the parable of the sower. It's easy to look at that and say, well, that's talking about people choosing to become Christian when they hear the good news. I think there's more to it than that because I think we all have times when we do not receive God's word well.

We all have times when it lands on the path and we say, well, that's not to do with us or I disagree with that or whatever it is. We all have times when it leads in shallow soil or among the thorns and we do nothing about it and soon we forget it or something else becomes more important.

In Matthew 7, Jesus says, the person who hears God's word and does nothing with it is like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. We can't just sit here and be a sermon appreciation society.

[ 19 : 00 ] Coming up in a couple weeks, we're talking about faith without action is dead. But that's not just one verse. That is the theme of everything James is saying. In verse 25, it says, when it talks about the mirror, it is, James is saying, when we look into God's word, not as a forgetful hearer but as a doer, then the things we do will be blessed by God.

So what are you? A hearer or a doer? So what does it mean to do the word? I believe the last song we've got this morning is build your kingdom here.

But God wants us to be part of that and that means we need to do. Verses 26 to 27 from the message translation I particularly like says, anyone who sets himself up as religious by talking a good game is self-deceived.

This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father is this. Reach out to the homeless and the loveless in their plight and guard against corruption from the godless word.

It's about being a doer of God's work. James says, bridle the tongue. Hold the tongue. This isn't just about holding back anger or profanity, though they are part of it.

[ 20 : 35 ] What about our temper when it comes to posting on social media or other things online? What about spreading lies or gossip? Using God's word to put down others or to win arguments?

What about focusing on what you have to say instead of listening to others? Self-control, we know, is one of the fruits of the Spirit. James also says that it's about giving time to those who need support.

He mentions the orphans and the widows, but he's not exclusively talking about orphans and widows. When those terms are used, they are typically used in that time to talk about everyone who is being neglected or mistreated or is losing out in society.

It's about reaching out to those who need help. Giving time to those who need companionship. Giving from our own pockets to those who are struggling financially.

Helping refugees, homeless, unemployed people. Welcoming people into our homes. Perhaps hospitality, putting on a good meal, or perhaps that is opening our homes for adoption or fostering or something like that.

[ 21 : 55 ] Giving sacrificially when you know you won't get anything back in return. Showing kindness to those who are rejected by others. Having a loving and compassionate heart.

And James says it's about being different from society. Society, the world, says you first. Nobody else matters. God's word says put others before yourself.

In Matthew 25, verse 40, Jesus says whatever you did for one of these least, for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. The world wants us to be foot soldiers of self-interest, self-convenience.

You don't need to inconvenience yourself when the world revolves around you. We don't like to be inconvenienced. We're busy.

We're tired. We have commitments. We don't have time. We don't want things to get messy. But guess what? Jesus was inconvenienced.

[ 23 : 06 ] In Matthew 16, Jesus spoke to the rich man. The rich man who lived a good life, who followed all of the rules. And he asked Jesus, how do I get into heaven?

And Jesus said, sell everything you have and give the money away to the poor and come follow me. That was an inconvenience and he didn't like it.

Jesus then, when speaking to the disciples, say, to get into heaven, take up your cross and follow me. You can't take up your cross without it becoming inconvenient.

It's God's story. It's not about us. Christian faith is about putting God first, putting others before ourselves.

according to the world, that is inconvenient. The New Youth Bibles that we have downstairs, the wording of verse 26, do any of you, do any of you think you are religious?

[ 24 : 06 ] So that's the question for you this morning. Do you think you are religious? The word religion has a bad rap today. It's connected to televangelists lining their own pockets, extremists using violence words to punish the sins of the faithless.

Words of discrimination and rejection. A demand to be perfect or to not be a certain way. A focus on winning arguments.

An attitude of feeling good about ourselves by listening to God's word, but never actually doing anything good for others. God's word is God's word for us.

James says real religion is lived out when we stop asking, what do I get? And start asking, who can I serve?

James calls us to a faith that rolls up its sleeves, cares for the vulnerable, and reflects the self-giving love of Christ. That's what James is saying here.

[ 25 : 12 ] Hear the word. Hear what God has to say. Receive it. Recognize that he has something to say to you. And then do something with it that puts other people before yourself.

Amen.