

VIXI. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“Effectual Hearers and Doers of God’s Word – Part 2”
James 1:22-25
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January 12, 2014 – Morning Sermon

We are in our ninth study of James and in the second section of the Gospel Maxim number 2. In order to understand the context I’m going to open by reading James 1:16-18 but our focus will be in James 1:19-25, having already covered James 1:19-21 in the last study. James 1:16-18 says *[16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. [17] Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. [18] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I’d like to start by making a confession. I can’t tell you how I am being drawn not only to content of James but to James, the author that shows his heart bleeding through this epistle. I’m drawn to him for a couple of reasons. The obvious ones are who wouldn’t be drawn to read something that the half-brother of Jesus wrote, after his conversion, after the resurrection? Who wouldn’t be drawn to the first book of the New Testament? Who wouldn’t be drawn to the first book written of the New Testament? Who would be drawn to the most often quoted book or the book of wisdom that takes the anticipatory wisdom books of the Old Testament to the fulfilment wisdom of the Gospel, the Gospel life in the New Testament?

I think I’m drawn to him most of all because of the display of his pastor’s heart. It will really come through in this study in the two things he says that take hold of my heart when he says “My beloved brothers...” You see his pastor’s heart as he talks directly to those who profess faith in Christ that are part of his church and Christ’s church as beloved brothers. He loves them. They are loved of God and they are loved of him. He also says “Do not be deceived...” and that tells you a believer can be deceived. He doesn’t want you to be deceived. Then he not only has a concern that they are not deceived but he’ll end up declaring what the blessed life is in Christ, not the life you live to get blessed by Christ but the blessed life in Christ. He will end it by saying “Blessed is the man...”

That is a pastor’s heart. I want you to know Christ clearly, accurately, growingly yet don’t be deceived for there are many false teachers. Those false teachers have more way to get to you than you can ever imagine in this technologically saturated world. Secondly, I want you to be blessed in your walk with Christ and for Christ.

James is doing that because he is writing an epistle that is basically a pastor’s book to those who profess faith in Christ. It is not an evangelistic book for it is written to those who have a Gospel foundation, Gospel motivation and now they want to live a Gospel life. The theme of James is the Gospel life is a life of persistent (not perfect) ministry and joyful maturation (always growing) in a sin-cursed world (with all of the trials) informed by the God-sent gift of ‘wisdom from above’ (not worldly wisdom from

below). To live the Gospel life they have to have a renewed mind which means they have to have Gospel wisdom from above.

How do you get this? We will get to how you get this but I want you to notice the benefits of it. We took James 1:1-18 to put together the Gospel wisdom Maxim number one which is the multi-faceted and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both “prove” and “improve” your Gospel life. Every Christian goes through trials of life and all the trials that hit unbelievers will hit believers, except the condemning judgment of God, but they are in the hands of a sovereign God. God takes them, designs them and uses them so count it all joy when (not if) you encounter various trials and you do that because Gospel wisdom told you something.

This is in my life to do three things. One is it will prove my faith. What do I know? It is just like an algebra test. The test tells you what you know in algebra. It didn't take long to find out what I knew about algebra. Then it shows you what you need to know. So the trials and tests of life show you what you know, prove what you know, and what you need to know, how you need to improve and grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. The third thing it does is the tests become temptations when they uncover within you the over-desires, James talks about, which are the strongholds of idolatry that are still in your life. The trials will uncover them in your life.

How do I get that Gospel wisdom? In James 1:19-27 he is telling you Gospel wisdom Maxim number two which is how to get Gospel wisdom. He has already told you that if anyone lack wisdom he is to pray, not double-minded which is unbelieving, but pray single-mindedly, which is believing, and God will give that wisdom liberally. Where does it come from and how do I get to it? Gospel wisdom Maxim number two that we started developing in the last study is the Gospel wisdom essential for the Christian life comes from above through persistent believing prayer and a prioritized receiving of God's Word with preparation and purpose. Do not be deceived beloved brothers for you need to know the truth of God's Word to live life for God's glory in the midst of this world and grow in grace. You get that wisdom through prayer and the Word.

How do you get the Word? You have to prioritize the preaching and reading of the Word. You have to prepare for the preaching and reading of it. You have to prepare and prioritize to receive the Word and you have to have a purpose or it's for naught. It is not enough just to hear it and be ready to hear it. There is one more thing that James says is crucial. To those who have been brought forth in the Word of truth, those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and the Word, now what does he say to you?

James just told them in James 1:16 not to be deceived and this is what keeps you from being deceived. James 1:19-20 says *[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* My systematic theology professor Dr. Ferguson says this is learning to dance with the Word. In the Carolina shag the rhythm was ‘quick, quick, slow.’ James is almost at the Carolina shag here. James tells us to be quick (to hear), slow (to speak), slow (to anger). So we are to be quick to hear and the dance with the Word requires us to be slow to speak and slow to anger.

You become quick to hear to be a receiver. You want to have the posture of becoming a learner. You can't learn if you're talking which is the one time you know you're not learning anything so be slow to speak but the biggest enemy to being humble

enough to hear and humble enough not to speak is the uncontrolled emotion of the anger of man. Anger is not wrong for it is a God-given emotion. It is there to even motivate the most timid of us to defend the defenseless and to attack evil. The anger of man is the emotion of anger to preserve ourselves, defend ourselves and promote ourselves in our arrogance and to defeat our supposed enemies. That kind of anger won't achieve the righteousness of God which is what you want to do. You who have been clothed with the righteousness of God now want to live out the righteousness of God and it doesn't come with the anger of man but from the wisdom from above.

So be slow to anger which will then make you slow to speak which will then make you quick to listen. Now having adopted that posture James says to do some preparation. James 1:21 says [21] *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.* So after doing what he is telling us in James 1:19-21 which is the posture we need to have, now we have to get prepared to get into the Word of God read. We have to put away all wickedness and one act of sin never stops there for it always leads to a rampant movement in your life. So put away all filthiness, evil and sin.

The 'put away' phrase in James 1:21 comes from a Greek word that actually was developed to describe the assigned task of some slaves for their masters. They were given a utensil and for a certain regular period they would use that utensil to pull the ear wax out of their master's ear. That's not a very pleasant picture is it, but that is where the root comes from. The reason I take time to tell you that is because that is really what has to happen. When you come to hear the Word you have to get the wax out – put away, pull out – so that your ears can hear. Pull it out of the heart and in the life and now you are ready to receive the Word with patient humility or meekness.

This is the Word that is implanted in your soul. How did it get implanted? When you were born again with the Word of Truth, the Word was implanted and the Holy Spirit was implanted. Now you are ready, by the Spirit, to come to the Word and now that Word preached is calling to that Word implanted. For some of you, I go to the hospital and visit you after your implants and now you can hear for you got something implanted in your ear. Now you can see after getting that implant in the eye. Now you can walk after getting that knee implant. There are others too but we'll stop there. You were dead in your sins and you were brought forth (which is the word that is used to describe Lazarus) from the grave and the Word is implanted in you. Now you have to take the grave clothes off. Put away all wickedness, evil thoughts for the Word is implanted with you and in you and now it is being preached to you. Receive it with meekness but we're not quite done.

Prioritize reading and preaching of the Word and there is one more step to get Gospel wisdom. He puts it in the positive. James 1:22 says [22] *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.* He doesn't say just be doers and not hearers only. You can't do what you haven't heard but don't just be a hearer only. Be a hearer to be a doer. That is what you're called to do. If you don't hear you can't do. If you hear and don't do what have you done? Let's look at the next phrase. You have deluded yourself. You have deceived yourself. He told you earlier not to be deceived. How bad is deception if you do it to yourself? He is saying to take a look at yourself for believers can not only be deceived but they can fall into a pattern of deceiving themselves.

What is deceiving yourself? It is hearing without doing. You can be deceived without hearing but when you hear you can say 'no' to the deceivers. If you hear and don't do now you start deceiving yourself. He is fully aware that you are not going to do it perfectly but you will do it with intention that you have heard to do. It is just like the hymn says; Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy (blessed) in Jesus but to trust and obey. Then he gives you an example of this.

Before I read it I want to set up the analogy that James is going to give. Here is the Word preached and read and here you are. Now he will take this Word and turn it into a mirror. In that day you could have lived your entire life and never seen yourself, except maybe in the reflection of a pool. What mirrors they did have were usually polished metal. He is going to set up you and the Word as you and a mirror. So now he is going to give you an analogy and two illustrations, a negative one and a positive one.

James 1:23-24 says [23] *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* (face of his birth – the way we are apart from grace and the Word lets us see that) *in a mirror. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.*

So the mirror is the Word and you have taken the posture of a learner. You are prepared. You are hearing the Word because you look into the mirror and more than that you look intently at the mirror. You are looking at everything in the mirror. Then it says you walk away and at once what he saw of his natural face. When you look in the mirror you see that you're a sinner. I'm hopeless and helpless. I have no hope in myself. Look at my sin, it's hideous. Gospel wisdom tells me that my hope is in Christ alone. It's not within me. I need a Savior. I can't save myself. I need to rely, trust and surrender to this Savior and I need to live that way day by day but we forget it because we walked away and forgot it. He looks and that's good. He looks intently and that's great. Then he walks away and forgets and that's bad. He forgot because he walked away from the mirror. Never walk away from the mirror. Take the mirror with you. How do I do that? Let's look at the next illustration, the positive one.

James 1:25 says [25] *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.* He goes back to the Old Testament language of authoritative teaching of Yahweh, the Law and not just what is in the Old Testament but the fulfillment of the Law, the New Testament and Christ which makes it the law of liberty. He says the Law is perfect and freeing. Then he perseveres in looking, stays fixed on it, stays with the mirror.

So how do I take the mirror with me? Isn't it amazing all the technology we have today? You can carry a Bible with you in all kinds of ways today – on your phone, your iPod, your iPad, your Kindle, on your blackberry, in your pocket. You can download all kinds of sermons, hopefully from those who are preaching Biblical sermons but the key James is getting at is this. The way you take the mirror with you is you live what you heard. You have it implanted in you and now it's embedded in your life. You are doing it, not perfectly, but growingly. You are saying, 'I'm helpless but my help is the Lord. I'm hopeless but my hope is the Lord. I am hideous but now I'm beautiful in the Lord.' Now I want to follow the Lord where I want to hate sin and love Him. I want to be an actual doer not an only hearer. That takes the Word with me into life, day by day. What is the result? James uses a beatitude. He will be blessed in his doing (James 1:25b). In

the doing, taking the mirror with you in life, you become blessed as you walk through life in serving the Lord.

I want you to see something here. James wrote this about 15 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Not many years after this, someone will write a book and it's right next to the book of James called Hebrews. What is the blessing of being a hearer and doer? You can't do without hearing but you're not a hearer only for you are hearing and doing, taking the mirror with you. What is the beatitude of that in your doing? Most are not sure of who the writer of Hebrews is but I'm sure and privately I'll tell you what I'm almost sure of but I love what the writer of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 5.

Hebrews 5:11-14 says *[11] About this (that is Jesus) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (Here is the fundamental issue of what keeps us being dull hearers.) [12] For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, [13] for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (You give milk to babies because they are not mature.) [14] But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*

When you become a hearer and a doer now you get discernment, maturity, insights and now you can become a teacher as well as a hearer. Now you move from milk to meat by doing the milk that you've heard. Now you're ready for the meat. That is how you move forward. That is how you move from being a dull hearer to an engaged hearer. I want to give you another one of these.

James is the half-brother of Jesus which means his lineage through his father and his mother goes all the way back to David, who wrote Psalm 1. Psalm 1:1-4 says *[1] Blessed is the man (who postures and prepares himself to hear the Word) who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates (ruminates) day and night. (He never leaves the mirror.) [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. [4] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.* So when you become a hearer/doer, not a hearer only, you not only get discernment and maturity, but you get to bear fruit and evidence that your root is in Christ.

I want to give you a third text. If David is James' ancestor, it's fair for us to say he grew up with a brother named Jesus. James is only restating what James has taught about wisdom, the relationship of hearing and doing. Let's look at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount and then I'll give you the takeaway. The Sermon on the Mount is from Matthew 5 through Matthew 7. As He gets to Matthew 7 He gives a conclusion with an illustration. I remember this illustration when I was growing up as a kid for we used to learn it in the Alliance Youth Fellowship. We used to sing this illustration in a song.

Matthew 7:24-27 says *[24] "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and **does** them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] 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. (When the trials of life came it stood for they heard and they would do.) [26] 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. [27] 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.”

So we are back to wisdom and foolishness. How do you gain wisdom? It is by prayer and the Word. As you gain that Word you not only hear it but you do it. Foolish people aren't just those who say 'no' to just hearing the Word for it's those who hear and then walk away from it, instead of receiving with patient humility. When you want to grow in grace and you want to hear intently you don't sit down at your quiet time and say "Jesus You have 120 seconds to give me something." When you're hearing God's Word you are ready to engage it. We don't sit telling God how long He has to bless us. We take hold of the Word, whether it's read or preached, and we receive it intently. That's why there's a section in every sermon called takeaways, so that you know how to take the mirror with you into life.

Here is my takeaway. The blessed Christian is the one who is a "hearer of the Word of Truth." They look into the mirror. They look intently into the mirror. They are prepared, they have the posture of being quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. They pull the earwax out and they have taken the grave clothes away. These who have been brought forth by the Word of Truth now want to come to the Word of Truth. Now they are ready to take the mirror with them. They can do this not only with technological means but by embracing what they have heard with a growing obedience by becoming doers of the Word with the perfect, not the imperfect, Law fulfilled in Christ that brings liberty. They see their natural face. They thank God for that Law that uncovers their natural face as it exposes the hideousness of sin, our helplessness and our hopelessness, but that Law fulfilled in Christ the perfections of Christ and the liberty we have in Christ. We embrace it in life and take it with us in life.

You will come to honor your father and mother which means I don't want to dishonor my father and mother. Do not murder which means I want to commit life. Do not commit adultery for I want to commit purity. Do not bear false witness for I want to tell the truth. Do not steal and take but I want to work and give. Don't covet. Be content. All of those blessed prohibitions and admonitions of the Law but there is something much greater in the perfect Law of liberty.

It not only shows you your helplessness, your hopelessness and the hideousness of sin but it brings you finally to Christ who is the fulfillment of the Law. See the One who not only honored His father and mother but who honored His Father to come for you. See the Law who displays the One who does not murder but the One who gave His life to give you life. See the One who does not commit adultery who embraces His bride and nothing will separate us from the love of Christ. See the One who does not steal and take but came and did the work of our salvation and then gives it to us freely. See the One who not only did not covet, was content in His Father for His glory and the task given to Him but see Him come for us to save us. Those who would want anything and everything but Him, He came and gave everything for us. It is that embracing of the perfect Law of liberty that brings us into the presence and glory of the Father and it is spread all over these 66 Books.

There was a very poignant moment the other day when Cindy and I were cleaning out the closet and we got to a shoe box. I had a cold sweat that came upon me at that moment. My wife and I did not date long. We courted for three months and then were in

engaged for three months. If I could have done it quicker I would have because I was not going to let her get away. While we were separated going to college we wrote to each other. We wrote just about every day and there still were not a whole lot of letters but there they were in that shoe box with rubber bands around them. We decided to look at them. I thought in my mind “Are we going to come across a letter that I didn’t open?” Thankfully every letter had been opened.

Then my mind began to go back as to what I would do with those letters when they would come. I would read them and think “What is she really saying? Does she really love me? Is she really wanting to come home this weekend?” As you read it you are looking at every verb, adjective and adverb. I know what she has written but what is she really saying? I learned the principles of exegesis long before I went to seminary and as I would read through those letters I would see the face and heart of her. At the time I had a job at a place called Johnson Motor Lines working the second shift. I didn’t leave those letters at home. I took the mirror with me and at every break I had I would read them and I would think about them.

There are 66 Love Letters of the Law of liberty, found in Christ, have been given to you in your Bible. Look at them. Look intently at them. Don’t leave them. Persevere in looking at them. Take them with you. The way you take them with you everywhere is you take them with you in your life. We are not hearers only but doers who are blessed with discernment, stability, assurance and fruit bearing by taking the Word with us in life. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Father, thank You for meeting with us this Lord’s Day. Thank You for the privilege and opportunity to look intently at a truth of the Gospel mirror that takes the Law to do its lawful work and brings us to Christ who does the perfect, liberating work in our souls. Now Father, as we leave here, help us to be hearers who look intently, prepared and prioritized with a purpose, of taking the Word already implanted and embedding it into our life every day that all of life would now be for the One who has given His all for our life forever, Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.