



## **James (Part 3) – Hearer/Doer**

Beau Hughes – February 22, 2015

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Hello, friends. Good to see you. Those of you in Plano and Dallas and Fort Worth, as always, it's good to be seen by you. I know you're there. For those of you who I have not had the privilege of meeting, my name is Beau Hughes. I'm one of the pastors and elders here on staff. I have the privilege of serving at our Denton Campus.

As always, I just want to bring greetings from our brothers and sisters up north. I'm just so thankful for the way continually... I know I've gotten to say this a few different times now, but just how you have just labored with us, cared for us, been mindful, and even remembered us in your prayers often as we're in these days as a campus of transitioning to a new local church up in Denton (The Village Church – Denton).

I'm just grateful to be able to be here and even convey that on behalf of our congregation, how deeply grateful we are, how much we love you and thank God for you. It's crazy days up there. You know, Matt has three sermons left with the Denton Campus, so we are right at the heart and really at the tail end of this transition preaching-wise. There's so much going on, but I'm always delighted to be here with you.

If you have a Bible, why don't you turn to James, chapter 1? We will be where the text you just saw on the screen had us. We'll get there here momentarily, but what I'd like to do is start in a bit of a different place with you this day. You know, one of my favorite seminary professors in seminary was Dr. Jonathan Pennington. He was one of my New Testament professors.

One of the most impactful things he had us as students do was he actually had us first of all read the New Testament in his New Testament class and not just different books *about* the New Testament. That was deeply impactful. Then every week, he actually assigned us portions of the New Testament to read, and he had us as we were reading them and re-reading them do an assignment

for each of those portions of Scripture where we would be looking for particular things he was asking us to look for.

We would look for things such as just various cross-references other Scriptures from the Old Testament or the New Testament that came to mind as we were reading through that passage, even just the author's big idea. We would take these chunks of Scripture and say, "Okay, zoom out. What's the big idea? Don't get lost in the weeds, but kind of zoom out. See what the big idea is."

Then probably the most impactful thing for me that he had us do with every assignment of the Scriptures we were reading in the New Testament was he would have us listen for and look for echoes of the teaching of Jesus in the text, especially in the texts that didn't talk about Jesus. We weren't looking for the name *Jesus* in Colossians. We were actually reading Colossians, and even where it didn't say anything about Jesus explicitly, we were listening for echoes of Jesus' teaching from the tradition of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

For every passage, he had us do this again and again and again. This is something that really stayed with me. I had never thought about this before. You know, Pennington's thesis was the fountainhead of all of Scripture is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (the Gospel tradition about Jesus...his life, his teaching, his death, his resurrection). This is the fountainhead of Scripture. The Old Testament leads there. The New Testament comes out of there.

We need to be listening for how that fountainhead shapes (especially in the New Testament) what is written. What's being taught? What's being said? What's being admonished? What's being exhorted by the writers of the New Testament? This is something that really as a pastor I have a burden. As we study books of the Bible (especially again in the New Testament), we get to continue to grow in as a church.

Even tonight as we're reading from the book of James, we would be listening for the echoes of Jesus, because James actually is an ideal place to start for something like this. Even in your personal Bible study, this series of the book of James could be a great place to start and read the Scripture with a greater ear toward perhaps the Lord Jesus Christ and his teachings and what he lived and modeled and said while he was among us.

Because James, even though it only mentions Jesus twice... I don't know if you knew that. It mentioned him the very first sermon we did. You know, verses 1 and 2 mention Jesus, and it

mentions him again at the front of chapter 2. Those are the only times you find Jesus as a name explicitly in the book of James.

If you're not careful, because of that, what you'll begin to do is read the letter of James or any other letter in the New Testament in this sort of moralistic or therapeutic way without even knowing it. It becomes wisdom but wisdom that's actually detached from the person and the work and the voice and the teaching of Jesus.

What's amazing about the letter of James is, even though it only mentions Jesus twice explicitly, the whole letter is actually like a little commentary on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. If you remember Matthew 5 through 7 and if you read the letter of James with that in your mind and really with that echoing in your ears and in your heart, you will begin to see and to hear the teaching and the imprints of the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry all over the book of James.

The book of James really is this long application letter of the Sermon on the Mount that, of course, James (the brother of Jesus and, more importantly, the servant of the Lord Jesus who became not just his brother obviously but his Lord and Savior) is reflecting on what the Lord taught, and he is applying that into the churches of his day.

I'm really excited, because even the sermon tonight, even the text we're going to be studying tonight from the end of chapter 1 of James, really does come forth out of the summary Jesus gave in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. If you're in James 1, we'll get there in a moment, but I just want to read this from Matthew 7. This is how Jesus concludes his sermon in Matthew 5 through 7. He says this. After he said everything he said, he 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. 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."**

You know, Matt mentioned a couple of weeks ago that the overarching concern pastorally of James as he was writing these letters to the churches is that they would walk in the way of wisdom. I would agree with that wholeheartedly but in the way of wisdom Jesus outlines and defines here.

What James is wanting is the churches to build their life together, to build their community together amidst persecution, amidst temptation, amidst all the behaviors they're still struggling with because they're not fully sanctified yet. They would build their life together on the rock.

Yet there *were* temptations. There were circumstances. There was oppression even persecution and suffering that was coming upon them that was actually threatening them from not doing this, from not hearing the word of the Lord Jesus and doing it but actually just sort of doing things their own way.

On top of that, even just the circumstances we talked about last week, the trials that came their way from the outside. There were also worldly desires from the inside of the church, from in their hearts, that were swaying them and pulling them off the road of wisdom as Jesus defines it here. There's anger and ungodly speech that are running rampant in the church. There's partiality and covetousness laced all throughout the community.

James is deeply concerned about this. This isn't a letter he is writing from an ivory tower. He is in the trenches, in the weeds, hearing the stories, knowing the lives of the people in these churches. He is concerned that what the church's circumstances and what their worldliness is revealing is their faith may not actually be genuine.

He is really concerned that they may actually be deceived about their relationship with God, that these churches James is writing to, just like these crowds Jesus was speaking to... James is concerned they may think they're building their life on the rock, but all the while, they're really building their life on the sand. That's James' concern throughout the whole letter.

As we move into really the heart of the letter today and where we'll be actually the next number of weeks, the next three and a half chapters really, we get a front row seat at the end of chapter 1 here to how the Holy Spirit inspired and led James to address these problems and these concerns about the churches of his day.

Echoing his Lord and his Savior and his Brother's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, what James is going to do is he is going to take the particular behavioral struggles, the particular circumstantial realities in these churches, and he is going to blow right past them, and he is going to make a pathway straight to the heart of the problem.

The heart of the problem is whether or not these churches, whether or not the people who are gathering in these church gatherings, actually have faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ or not. Let me pray, and then we'll look at what he wrote as he was carried along by the Spirit of God.

Father, we thank you that your Son has come, and he has lived, and he has died, and he has rose, and he is one day returning again and going to make all things new. We thank you that he has left us the Spirit who even now as we gather will lead us into truth, will give us ears to hear, eyes to see, faith to believe, hope to enjoy.

Spirit of God, we ask now as we read these words you inspired so very long ago, you would make them come upon us in ways that transform us from the inside out, that leave us changed. We love you, Lord. We thank you. We draw comfort even now that you're with us. We don't read this letter together tonight in isolation. We read it together, and we read it most of all led by your Spirit. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.

If you're with me, let's look in James, chapter 1. Matt covered through verse 18, but we're going to start in verse 16 and go through verse 27. We're going to start in verse 16 because I really think verses 16 to 18 are actually sort of a hinge for this first part of the letter here. Let's look at verse 16. This is what James wrote.

He said, "**Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers** [and sisters]." Again, if you remember last week, deceived about...what? Well, they're in the midst of their trials. They're in the midst of their temptations. They're in the midst of wrestling and really grappling with sinful, selfish desires. He is saying, "I don't want you to be deceived. God is not the one who is tempting you to sin. That's not what's happening here."

He said, "**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.**" I just love verse 17 because James says, "Listen, God is not tempting you to sin. We have a good Father in heaven who never changes. He is a good Father, and that means he only does what's good. He only does good things to us who are his children, and we experience everything good and everything perfect because it comes from his very kind hand."

If you're tempted to believe God is the reason you're tempted to sin or you're bailing on your faith, let me just speak to that and say that's not true. The opposite is actually true that we have a good

God, a good Father who gives us everything we experience that is good in this life. He said most of all verse 18 is an example of how good God is. **"Of his own will [this good God and Father] brought us [who are Christians] forth by the word of truth [the gospel]..."**

Circle that "Word of Truth." That word *word* is going to come up again and again here as we go through today. **"...he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we [as the people of God] should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."** This is a majestic statement that our God, our Father for those of us who love and trust Jesus Christ, not out of compulsion but of his own goodness, of his own love, of his own grace, brought us forth. He caused us to be born again.

We were dead. All of us were bad seed, and yet he brought us up as the firstfruits of his harvest of salvation. That's an amazing, majestic statement. I know most of us in our Home Group this week weren't talking and really exclaiming about the fact that we're firstfruits. "We're the firstfruits." Does anybody talk like that in your relationship? Is that something...? You know, maybe we're saints. We're sons and daughters.

What he is saying here is, "No, no, no. Your identity as a church is you're firstfruit of God's creatures." What does that mean, and why would he say it? What it means is God has decided to redeem and reconcile all things to himself. That's the story of the world. That's the drama we're caught up in, whether we know it or not. God is moving things toward salvation, and salvation is that day when God is fully going to make all things new. His will is going to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Even as is exclaimed in other passages of Scripture, through the death and the resurrection of his Son, he is reconciling all things to himself...things in heaven, things on earth, making peace by the blood of his Son. That's what God is doing. That's where the world is headed...toward everything that's sad becoming untrue. What James is saying here is we as the church God has chosen for his own good pleasure, for his own good wisdom, for the church to be the firstfruit of that.

The church, as dim as it may be, is meant to be a snapshot of where God is taking the rest of the world. That's our identity. As one theologian said, the church is the model home of the community that will one day be in heaven. We're the model home of what the neighborhood of heaven is going to look like. This is what God is doing. We're the down payment. This is beautiful news, because this is our identity.

In his own wisdom, he has started his work of salvation by sending his Son and reconciling a people. One day it will be a people of every tribe and tongue and nation, but right now what James is focusing this church on is, "Listen. You're a firstfruit." Here's why he wants them to know that. Here's why this is so important. He wants their vision of their identity and their destiny to transform their character in their present circumstances.

He is pointing them to their identity, and he is saying, "This is who you are. You're a firstfruit." He is saying, "This is your identity. This is your destiny." A firstfruit of what? Salvation. All things being made new. He is pointing them to this identity and this destiny, because what James knows is that in order for people's character to be truly changed and transformed (especially in the midst of temptation, especially in the midst of trial, especially in the midst of us grappling with our indwelling sin), what we need is a vision, a picture, a narrative of where our life is headed.

If we don't have a picture, if we don't have a vision, if we don't have a narrative of who we are and where God is taking us, then we *will* struggle. We will fall. We will drift. We will not finish the race. What James knows is what changes and motivates people, what actually transforms character, is beauty. You don't start with rules. You don't start with details. You start with beauty, and you start with an attractive vision or a narrative of what is to be.

I mean, you even think like this outside of the spiritual realm. You know, if you want to really give a child a vision of playing the violin well, do you start with the rules of violin, or do you go and take her to a concert and let her watch a master violinist and get a vision for what playing the violin is? Or do you start and say, "Well, this is what the rules are. Let's just walk through this. Let me just tell you all the details about it"?

It's not either/or. You have to eventually get to that, but if you really want something that's going to compel that little girl when her hands get tired and her fingers are done with plucking that violin and playing that violin when they're sore, what's she going to need? She is going to need more than a rulebook. She is going to need a vision, a beautiful, compelling vision, that in the midst of that trial, in the midst of that weariness, in the midst of that discouragement, in the midst of that failure, is going to compel her to persevere because she has a vision of what could be.

It's the same way for us in Christ. Only beauty transforms. Rules don't transform. You know this, which is why some of us for years just came to church services. We tried to do the rules. We came week after week, year after year, and we just didn't see very much transformation in our life. We

were trying. Maybe some of you are still here. You're trying to follow the rules of faith, but your heart was never stunned or transformed by the beauty of God and your identity, our corporate identity, as the firstfruit of God's salvation.

When your heart gets stunned by that, it changes. It transforms! It doesn't mean everything gets better. It doesn't mean everything gets easy, but it does change us. Moral instruction without a captivating vision of beauty will only produce whitewashed tombs and rebels. Beauty transforms. James right here at the beginning of this letter, right here as he is introducing what he is going to introduce, sets down this beautiful vision in verse 18 of their identity as the firstfruits of God's salvation harvest.

Then he spends the rest of the letter, in light of this beauty, admonishing them how they're to live like that. But you have to get this. This is who you are! This is who we are (those of us who are Christians). What that means is if we're the firstfruits, then there's a certain way God has ordained not only for them to be brought about (which is by his own grace and mercy, not because of our works), but there's a certain way also that now that we've been brought about, he expects our faith to work itself out in our day-to-day living.

He gets into it here in verse 19 in the specifics that are going on, but he does it again in light of this vision of their identity and their destiny. He says (verse 19), "**Know this** [be aware of these things], **my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.**" These are behaviors if you're going to stick around for the whole series (which I hope you will) James is actually going to address in this letter again and again and again.

One of the more pronounced and really concerning ways the community was not living in light of their identity and their destiny as the firstfruits of God's salvation was they were struggling with speaking and listening and anger. James wants them to know this anger (especially here as we'll come back to it) that's working itself out in their mouths is not pleasing to God. He says that very plainly in verse 20.

He says, "**For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness** [or the justice] **of God.**" James' point here is really simple. "The behavior going on in your life together is not something God approves of. This anger, this way of speaking..." You know, Jesus again from the Sermon on the Mount puts it even just more straightforwardly. "This is not good fruit. This being quick to speak, slow to hear, quick to anger is not good fruit."

That's essentially what James is saying here, and he is afraid this is actually spoiling their health and their witness as the firstfruits community they're supposed to be. Friends, when James (just like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount) is talking about anger here, he is not only talking about the external outbursts and fits that happen in our lives that may have happened in your life today or yesterday or this week. He is talking about that for sure. Let's not pretend as if our preschoolers are the only ones who have fits of anger or jealousy or whatever.

He is also talking about the deeply settled anger underneath the behavior as well. He is talking about the deep-seated lusts and fears and entitlements and pride of our heart that creates the outbursts, that energizes the outbursts. It's where the outbursts come from. That's what Jesus said, right? Oh, you say, "Don't murder anybody," but you hate in your heart. James is saying the same thing.

They are actually saying these things with their mouths, and he is saying, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Maybe you're not murdering," even though it seems like maybe they were if you look at chapter 4. But he is saying for sure this behavior is not okay. He is actually getting deeper than that as well. Don't miss that. Listen, friends. As one who has battled with anger his entire life, I feel like I can in humility (and maybe even humiliation) just say to many of you in this room tonight that there are so many, I believe, here who you are more angry than you've ever dared admitted.

You're enslaved to it. You are an angry person, and you've been denying it. You've been justifying it. But you're enslaved. You're enslaved to the lusts of your heart and the lusts of your flesh. You're terrified. You're entitled, and it comes out. In some of you, it comes out really violently. Others of you, it comes out really passively, a violent passivity even. You're angry.

I think part of the invitation tonight (just so you know) is that if that's you, as we talked about, God loves you. He has brought you here even tonight to invite you to be... Just like he is saving me, he wants to save you from that. He wants to heal you from that. He wants to transform you from that. I know that because he says it in verse 21. That's where the Holy Spirit goes. He says, "**Therefore...**" Because these things don't please God and because they enslave you, "**Therefore, put away** [or take off] **all filthiness and rampant wickedness...**"

That word there to take off all filthiness is this image of these just filthy clothes that he is saying, "Take off. This behavior, this filthiness, this wickedness in your heart that's coming out in your life

that you're walking in, take that off." This is an invitation and an exhortation and admonishment, a command. Take it off.

You know, it reminded me of these days they have mudrooms in houses. I don't know if some of you are homebuilders or whatever. It's like they're actually putting mudrooms in houses. Back in the day, though, you just had to strip on the front porch. It was just, "Hey, you're dirty." You go out. You've been playing. You get muddy. It's, "Hey, take off those clothes before you get into this house," because Mama said that, and we're going to do what Mama said to do. If that means I'm going to streak a little bit on the front porch before I get in and keep a clean house, that's fine.

The reality, though, is if we're this worried even about our own homes, how much more the household of God? "Are you saying you just think you're going to run about and you're going to smear this stuff all over my household? Take those clothes off." "...[put on or] **receive** [pick up and embrace] **with meekness the implanted word** [the gospel], **which is able to save your souls.**"

This is the whole point of this passage we're reading tonight. This is the exhortation. If you're taking anything away, this is what he is saying. Take off all manner of filthiness and wickedness, and receive (put on, welcome, absorb, submit yourself to). Meekly humble yourself, and receive the Word of God. Believe the gospel. Submit your life and your heart to it.

Don't miss what James just did. Listen. He just took the concerning behavior (the angry hearts and the angry words), and he took it straight to the heart of the problem. He went straight to their submission of the gospel. He didn't stay talking about their anger and, "Let me give you some techniques for how to sort of cool down in that moment." Those things aren't necessarily bad, but he didn't do that.

He said, "You're angry. You're speaking in a way that's ungodly, that's not producing the righteousness that pleases God. So you need to receive the gospel afresh. You need to submit yourself to the Word of God, which is able to save you. It's able to save you from these behaviors. It's able to save you from your sin that's indwelling, and it's keeping you from pleasing God." He is saying, "Listen. Humble faith in the gospel is what pleases God."

This is the type of righteousness that goes deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees. It's submitting yourself, believing and receiving the gospel of grace. This is what saves us. It's what contains all the power God would give us that we need to live and persevere in this life of wisdom

and hearing and doing what we've been told to do. This is how, friends, we build our lives on the rock. We put aside, we take off, these clothes, and we put on or we embrace and receive the gospel...the truth of God's grace he has given us.

Turn away from your sin. Put on these. Embrace Christ, and obey him. Listen. Some of you here have never done that. You wouldn't even profess to be a Christian, and I'm so thankful you're here. If you're going to take anything away, this is the message of Christianity that, left to ourselves, we can't and don't please God. But God has made a way for us to bring him pleasure and to be accepted by God. That's through what Jesus Christ has done, what he is talking about here, the gospel.

Jesus has come, and he has lived. He has died, and he has made a way through his wrath-absorbing death for you to be set free and for you to know God and for you to actually be able to please God as a firstfruit of his salvation. If you're not a Christian tonight, that's the message I would just admonish you to think about and to believe and to embrace just like he is saying here.

What's interesting, friends, is this letter is not written to those who aren't professing to be Christians. He is not talking to those who are saying, "I'm not a Christian." He is talking to those who think they're Christians. Why does James do this? Why does he go right here right at the beginning of his letter? Why is he concerned about this? Why does he go here so quickly and then stay here for three and a half chapters?

Because he is just going to beat this drum again and again and again. He is going to take different behaviors, but he is going to do the same thing again and again and again. I think what we're left to ask is, "Why?" I'm grateful because he tells us why. He doesn't leave us wondering. In verse 22 he says, "Do this. Receive this word." **"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."**

Ah! So there's his burden that the people in these churches (professing Christians) are deceived about whether or not they have genuine faith. This is why he gets here really quickly. There are men and women in the church who think they're pleasing to God. They think they're in right standing with God, but they're not. They think they're right with God because they apparently (verse 22) are hearers of the Word.

That means they receive it. They profess to agree with what they hear preached. They come to the church's gatherings. They hear the elders teach. Even though they're nodding to the creeds and

singing the songs, their lives are filled with bad fruit. Their lives are void of obedience and meekness to what they're hearing and nodding and singing about. Their hearts are filled instead with anger and jealousy that's spilling out into their words in all manner of filthiness and wickedness.

By definition, these professing Christians are blind to their self-deception. They are unaware that they are building their life on sand. They are convinced they're building their life on the rock, and they continue to chug along, falsely believing they're building their life on the rock. This is why James goes here, because James understands that what he said in verse 21... Meekly receiving the Word of Truth means more than just hearing it and nodding to it. It means to embrace it and to actually, in faith, act upon it.

What he is saying is the one who merely hears the Word and has a lifestyle that is characteristically against doing what he hears, that person has not truly received the gospel. As James looks out upon the congregations in his mind's eye that he is writing to, he sees places in the church that what they're doing is characteristically (that's an important word...*characteristically*) not aligned with what they've heard.

As one preacher once said, they're satisfied in the church with the buds of hearing without the fruits of obedience. This is why he goes here. This is why he stays here. This is what the Holy Spirit intends for us to pause and really think about together I think tonight as a church. I'm grateful 2,000 years or so later, church services and college ministries and youth groups are no longer filled with people who are deceived like this, especially in the Bible Belt. I'm thankful. There's no longer any sort of deception like this that goes on, not even in this room.

We're not deceived, but let's just do a little group exercise for fun. Let's just imagine for a moment what it *would* be like if church services were still filled with people who were deceived in this way. Even better yet, let's imagine for a moment what it would be like if you and I were deceived. You personally. Just imagine.

What would it be like if you were deceived like this? What might some of the indicators be in your life? *Your* life. How would you know whether you really were building your life on the rock or sand? How would you know you've not only heard the Word of Truth (the gospel of our Lord), you've not only agreed with it in sort of mental assent, but that you've actually submitted your life to it? How can you tell?

For the rest of this letter, what James is going to do is he is going to help us think through and answer these questions. The Spirit of God invites us to pull up a seat and say, "Hey, let's just look in the mirror." That's actually the example he goes to in verse 23. He gives this illustration. He says, **"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."**

That's a pretty good illustration, Spirit of God. Thank you. What's amazing is unlike today, mirrors in the time James is writing were not everyday objects in the first century. Let this blow your mind. People were generally unfamiliar with what they looked like. I thought about this. I was like, "That is crazy!" You know, I read some stat that people as high as eight times a day (sort of the average)... One of the studies said this is how often we're looking in the mirror.

These people who James is writing to didn't look at the mirror. They didn't have a little compact. When their babies were born, they weren't looking up at themselves from day one just sort of fumbling about. They did not have a mirror. Even the mirrors they did have, it wasn't smooth glass that had a really clear reflection. It was metal. Even the reflection, if they did see it, was distorted and sort of blurry.

When they saw themselves even in a mirror in that day and age (the few times they might be able to see it), it didn't leave a lasting impression on their hearts about what they looked like. They would see it, and it would be sort of blurry and distorted. Then they'd leave, and they'd walk away and forget because they weren't seeing it often enough. They couldn't keep the image with them. He is saying that is exactly what those who hear the Word and don't do it are like.

He says you gather with the church on Sunday. You hear the Word. You receive some moral or therapeutic comfort for about an hour, and then you walk out the door. As soon as you walk out the door like we'll do in about 30 minutes... Some of us are going to do this tonight. We do it every week. Some of you have been listening to Matt for years, and every week you do this. You do this before we even celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Before the service is even over, you're up. You're gone, and you've forgotten (maybe before you even get out the door) what you've heard. This is what James is saying. He is saying you do this, and you completely forget. That word *forget* doesn't just mean to not remember. It also means you

discard. You purposely don't give attention to it. You come, and you hear, and you leave. For the rest of the week until you gather again the next Lord's Day or whenever it is, you forget and discard everything that's been said.

James is saying this doesn't please God. If you think this pleases God, if you think you're right with God because you come in here and you do that and then you leave and you forget it until you come back, then you are unbelievably deceived. That's what he is saying! Then he gives the contrast in verse 25. He says, "**But the one who looks into the perfect law...**" The word *law* here is synonymous with the phrase *Word of Truth*.

If you've been following about the phrase *Word of Truth* or *Word* in verses 18, 21, 22, 23, it's sort of a driving motif through this whole section. This is a synonymous word for it that it's... He is talking about the gospel. He is not talking about the Old Testament law. He is talking about the lordship of Jesus and the demands the lordship of Jesus makes on our lives (loving God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, loving our neighbor as ourselves). That's what he is talking about here.

He is saying the one who looks into this Word of Truth, this gospel that compels us and demands we live life a certain way, which is actually a freeing way to live life... He says, "**...the law of liberty...**" It's liberating to do that. The one who does that and perseveres in looking at it, "**...being no hearer who forgets...**" This is a different type of hearer. He is not a "**...hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.**"

How that's for a beatitude? This is the blessed man (Psalm 1). This is the man who has his roots set bounded by the stream who is ever flourishing because he has his life rooted in what God has done for him through his Son, through his life and his death and his resurrection in the gospel, in the Word of Truth, in this law of liberty he is talking about that he'll come back to in chapter 2. This is what genuine faith looks like.

He says this is what pleases God. True faithfulness is doing this. Again, you back up, and you go, "Okay, so what's changed?" His point in all of this, church, is the same as Jesus'. Look at these two hearers (the one who hears and forgets and the one who hears and does). Examine yourself, and humble yourself before the Lord. Ask him to reveal where you're at, and receive the Word of Truth. Let it rule you. Let it liberate you.

This is what James is saying. Do what you've heard! Don't be deceived! Are you deceived? If you are, I'm thankful you're here. What God is saying is you shouldn't be anymore. Know who you are before God, and humbly receive the Word of Truth. Of course, again, this is the very thing that is not happening in these churches, which is why James comes full circle in verse 26. Look at it.

He says, "**If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion...**" *Religion* is not a bad word like it is today. Religion then is faith. He is talking about genuine faith. That's a synonym for religion. He says if anyone thinks he is religious and has genuine faith and he doesn't bridle his tongue, he is right back to where he started, coming back down to the earth here.

He deceives his heart. This person's religion and faith are worthless. It's not faith at all, which is where he is headed for the next three chapters. After getting to the heart of things, James comes back to the behavior, and he says this is why your day-to-day way of speaking... Listen, church. Our day-to-day way of speaking to our roommates, to our spouses, to our classmates, to our children, to our parents...

He is concerned. He is looking at how they're speaking out of an angry heart, and he is saying, "I don't even know if you're a Christian. I don't care how many of the songs you have memorized or how much of the Scripture you've hidden in your heart. If you're still speaking like this to people who are brothers and sisters or even enemies, you may not be a Christian. I'm really concerned...concerned enough to write this letter and tell you that multiple different ways."

This is unbelievably sobering what he is writing here. He is saying true faith... Verse 27. This is where he ends. "**Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father [this good Father who has brought us forth out of his Word], is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.**"

The kind of faith that pleases this good Father who has brought us forth as a firstfruit, James says, is the faith that is bearing the fruit of love. We'll come back to this verse next week, but a love for our neighbors (especially the most vulnerable of our neighbors) and a single-minded love and devotion to God, this is real faith. This is true faith, and it's going to work itself out in a million different ways. But let's just catch our breath, zoom out, and think together for a minute.

You know, one of the pastoral tensions I (I know I don't get to interact with you as much, but) just generally walk with (and maybe most pastors walk with) is the tension (especially when you're preaching a sermon like this or from a text like this that calls us to examine our faith) of wanting the right people in the congregation to hear the right thing.

In other words, with a passage like this, as much as it depends on me, what I'm wanting to do is to avoid causing true Christians (especially those of you who may be very vulnerable right now in your faith) from doubting when you don't need to be doubting whether or not you have genuine faith. I want to avoid that. I want to comfort you and encourage you while simultaneously I actually want to very explicitly confront those of you who need to be confronted because you are deceived in the same way James is talking about. You think you're a true Christian, but you're not.

I don't know if that made sense, but that's kind of the tension I always feel. I want to encourage the right people and confront the right people. That's out of your control to some degree, but that's always an angst you have when you're up here. It's sort of like my kids right now. There's one of my daughters (and if you know my family, you would know which one) who, in terms of discipline, she is kind of internalizing the wrong things. It's kind of sad, kind of funny at the same time.

Somebody will wrong her (one of the other children or myself). We'll wrong her. We'll sin against her. When it comes time for the moment of reconciliation (we're trying to model that from an early age), we're bringing the offender (not the one who has been offended) to them to apologize. We'll ask the offender, "Okay, what do you say?" My daughter who didn't do anything will say, "I'm sorry." You know, she'll just jump out ahead of time and go, "I'm so sorry" while the one you're trying to get that out of is just sitting there silently.

They're internalizing the wrong thing in this exchange. I don't want that to happen. It's like, "No! You shouldn't be sorry. You didn't do anything. *You* should be sorry, and the fact that you're not, we're going to go have another conversation." You know? It comes back. But that's kind of the tension you could feel when you walk through a letter or a passage like this where, okay, how do you know who is talking to whom here? Some of that you just have to leave to the conscience of the person who is standing before you. You want to be careful pastorally.

What I thought would be helpful was just to maybe end with some questions we can all think through together and trust the Spirit of God here to minister to your hearts. Maybe just close the

text if you have your Bible open. I just want to ask you a number of questions, and then we'll transition. If you want to close your eyes, if that helps you listen... Sometimes it helps me listen.

Are you a Christian? Thinking about *you*...not your spouse, not your friend, not the neighbor you brought. I'm talking about *you*. Are you a Christian? Are you one who has humbly received the gospel, the Word of Truth, about Christ? If the answer to that question is *no*, I would just follow and ask you, what's keeping you even today from receiving and worshiping him? What's the hurdle?

I'd admonish you, I'd invite you, I'd encourage you, believe on Christ. He loves you. This good God, this perfect God, has made a way for you to be loved by him and to become his son or his daughter. He did it by making his only Son an enemy so you who are an enemy of God right now could become his son or his daughter.

If you answered *yes* to the first question, if you answered, "Yes, I'm a Christian," is this evidenced in your life? Would other godly people affirm that about you? Are you even willing to ask them? Does your daily life, professing Christian, characteristically speaking, align with your profession of faith? Are you a doer of the Word when you leave this room...maybe even *before* you leave this room every weekend?

Would people in your family or on your team or at your job actually be surprised to learn you're a Christian? If you told them you were a Christian, would they be surprised? Is there any chance that you're self-deceived about what your relationship with God is? *Any* chance? Any chance that you might be the one who looks in the mirror and walks away and forgets what you see?

Even if your answer to that question is *no*, I would just say, "Okay, then. If you're pretty assured that you're a believer, praise God. In what ways, Christian, are you not living in light of your identity and destiny as a firstfruit of God's creation, God's salvation?" In what ways are you trying to obey the law (which is not a bad thing...it's actually a really beautiful thing)? You're trying to obey the law without the beauty of God's character and the beauty of the vision of who you are and where you're headed in Christ as your motivation.

Are you enslaved to anger like I was enslaved to anger and sometimes still am? Are you enslaved to your desires, your wants, what you perceive to be your needs? Are you controlled by your mouth instead of controlling your mouth? What are the areas in your life where, man, you're saying you're an apple tree, but you're bearing oranges?

Look to Christ whatever category you're in. However you answered these questions tonight, look to Christ. This is the invitation. Take off those clothes. Look to Christ who stands ready to save you and love you, who has a table set before you, whose goodness and mercy want to follow you all the days of your life. Charles Spurgeon, preaching on this text, said this (and I'll end with this tonight):

"What would you say of a cook who prepared dinners for other people and yet died of starvation? Foolish cook, say you. Foolish hearer, say I. Are you going to be like Solomon's friends the Tyrians, who helped to build the temple and yet went on worshiping their idols? Sirs, are you going to look on at the table of mercy and admire it, and yet refuse its provisions? Does it give you a thrill of pleasure to see so many taken from the highways and the hedges and brought in [to the family of God], and will you stand outside and never partake yourself?

I always pity the poor little boys on a cold winter night who stand outside a steaming cook-shop window and look in and see others feasting, but have none themselves. I cannot understand you." Why would you want that? "All things are ready, and you are bidden and persuaded [again tonight] to come, and yet you are content to perish with hunger. I pray you bethink yourselves, and I ask the Spirit of God to make you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Jesus, we thank you that you are a high priest for us because you heard and you did everything your Father said. You did it all the way to death on a cross so we could be brought in, so we wouldn't be left with our faces pressing against the window on a cold night outside of the bakery, but we could come in and taste the Bread of Life.

Spirit of God, even as we just began tonight, where we are building our lives on sand, help us. Reveal that to us. Forgive us. Change us. Empower and teach us how to live in light of the identity and the destiny you have said is true of us. Continue to conform us into your Son, O God we pray, sons and daughters who hear and do, not just hear. We ask in Christ's name, amen. Amen.