

Hearing and Doing

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to read from James chapter 1, picking up at verse 16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,¹ coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
- Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Know this, my brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
- Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- 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.
- 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. If anyone thinks he's religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.
- [1 : 3 0] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
- Well, let's pray as we meditate on this word together. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you that you give us your life-giving word and help us not to be double-minded in our hearing of it, but help us to hear and obey.
- We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. I don't know if you've read much Charles Dickens. The books are long and there are various threads and themes that weave through them.
- And there's a number of famous books, but one of the famous books is Bleak House. And you may be aware of the character in Bleak House called Mr Turveydrop.
- Anyone know Mr Turveydrop? Okay. Well, Mr Turveydrop is a man of little substance, but he pretends to be someone who is sophisticated and belongs to the up class.
- [2 : 3 7] And so he will lean on the mantelpiece and talk about the deportment. All right? That the way someone should stand, the way someone should hold their cups, the way someone should fold their gloves, the way someone should wear their hats and all that kind of thing.
- He's all about the outward show. He has the words. He's all about show, but he has very little go in his life. And Dickens is exposing the shallowness of this man.
- And he's very good at showing us the shallowness and the pretense of those who would think themselves great in the eyes of sophisticated society, refined, but actually quite repugnant to anyone who knows them.
- He loves to expose the bankruptcy of those who'd like to be recognised as the well-to-do in society. Now, if there's one thing that people can sniff out from a mile off, it's the lack of integrity.

It's hypocrisy. Pretending to be one thing, but really another. And there's nothing that makes the media happier either, is there? That when there's some religious scandal, they'll say, ah, they shouldn't be like that.

[3 : 54] Especially if it's got anything to do with Christianity. And deception is a theme that runs through this section of James. It says here in verse 16, And then in verse 26, he says, So being deceived is to believe that something is true when it really isn't.

And one of the overarching themes of James is that of making sure that what we say and what we believe is how we live, that there's no deception, there's no double-mindedness in our lives.

And James is a book that keeps calling us to see things God's way and to do things God's way. Last week, we were challenged to count the trials as pure joy because, well, they produce steadfastness.

And steadfastness, when it's finished its work, gives us the crown of life. Strangely then, even trials are good things from God. So we're not to be deceived there in verse 16.

Now, James is addressing his beloved brothers or fellow believers, which includes sisters, beloved brothers and sisters. We're all included here. And he calls us to hear the word in verses 16 to 21 and then to be doing the word.

[5 : 15] You see there in verses 22 to 27. In order that we are not deceived by others or deceived ourselves by ourselves.

So don't be deceived there in verse 16, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there's no variation or shadow due to change.

Which means that it's possible for us to be deceived, doesn't it? See, when we now hear the word, right, we mustn't think that we can have any good gifts given to us from anywhere else than God himself.

Every good gift comes from the Father of lights. He is the one who gives generously in Mark chapter 7. Which one of you he says, Jesus says, if your son asks for bread we'll give him a stone or if he asks for a fish we'll give him a serpent.

If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father who is in heaven give us good things to those who ask him? It's God who gives the good things.

[6 : 29] Satan does not give any good gift. Nothing he gives is perfect. Nothing good comes from Satan. He's the deceiver, promises gravy but gives gravel.

God on the other hand is the one who dwells above and he is the Father of light. He's the creator of the sun the moon and the stars and everything in the universe and he doesn't change.

That is, he is perfect. There's nothing in him that needs to change. He is perfect. God is the Father of light and truth. Satan is the Father of lies and darkness.

Some hold that God continues to be changing as history unfolds and God develops its openness of God idea. No, God is the Father of light and he is not double-minded.

He doesn't change. Nothing can overshadow him. Nothing can get in the way of his light being brighter than any other light. Nothing can get in the way of his light coming to the world.

[7 : 29] Good gifts come from him. Even trials are good gifts from God. And notice what else we're not to be deceived about here in verse 18.

Our salvation is from God and that is the greatest gift that God gives. Hear the word. There's nothing intrinsically good about us that caused us to be one of his people.

We didn't bring about our birth into the kingdom. Have a look at verse 18. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

It was God's own will. He was not influenced by us. We didn't choose God. God chose us. He's the one who calls us to respond to the word of truth.

The word of truth is the gospel. Let me show you in the word of truth. In Ephesians 1 verse 13 Paul writes in him you also when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation and believed in him was sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

[8 : 43] The same again in Colossians chapter 1 verse 5 Paul prays giving thanks to God the Father for their faith in Jesus Christ and love for the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of this you have heard before in the word of truth the gospel.

Christians we have been brought to new birth through the word of truth. Now let me tell you we all have two birthdays right one birthday when we were born you were born I guess you're here my birthday was the 28th of January very good day to be born 28th of January if you want to have a baby that's a good day to have it but we have another birthday right when we are born anew right when we're given new birth when we're brought forth by the word of truth when we come to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as our saviour and submitted him as our Lord then we have been brought to life brought into God's family brought into being and then we are a kind of first fruits of his creatures that is the standard way of talking about Christians the first fruit are the promise of the harvest to come there's a new creation to come but right now we're the first fruits of the kingdom of God which is about to be revealed the harvest is yet to come and we'll be gathered up into it and be part of the new creation not only that remember that righteousness don't be deceived righteousness matters verses 19 to 21 no this beloved brothers

James says not just brothers equally brothers and sisters righteousness matters and here we get to one of those major major works in James that he had us have here's the take home let every person right every person not some not a particular category but every person one be quick to hear you see it there be quick to hear verse 19 slow to speak slow to anger now we could spend all morning couldn't we on this verse and maybe we should and I think this is probably the verse I and we all need to keep hearing daily I've got this verse planted on the wall behind my desk at home just so you know it was sort of a thing for me to be reminding myself of and be curious about things so if you want to get on with your husband or your wife you want to get on with your kids you want to get on with your workmates you want to get on with your brothers and sisters in Christ this is the verse to remember to memorize right let everyone every person be quick to hear slow to speak slow to anger for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God quick to hear well I know my standard operating procedures like this to be slow to hear we're not that interested really in hearing what others have got to say we're not curious to find out what other people are thinking and feeling we're just not naturally we think we hear what someone says because we give them five seconds to say it and then we readily jump in to say what we want to say what I want to say rather we need to be slow to speak all too often we are the opposite quick to speak

I want to tell you what's on my mind I want to tell you what you need to hear even if you're not listening even if you're not listening slow to anger or possibly slow to wrath some people are prone to get angry faster than others but God would have us all be slow to anger getting angry quickly is man's anger it's selfish anger if you've upset me then I'm angry with you about that you frustrate me I get angry with you about that there's such a thing as righteous anger be angry but don't sin we're taught in Ephesians 4 but we are rarely angry about the things that God's angry about you can feel the wrath of an angry person by their outbursts their punishments their put downs their contempt their critique their backstabbing their judgmentalness their taking the place of

God in the situation but God is after righteous outcomes in our lives so we put off all rampant evil depravity which is all around about us the discords the conflicts the never ending fighting the gossip the debauchery the drunkenness the whatever it is we rid ourselves of all that and receive the implanted word you see it's a very strange phrase don't you think receive the implanted word how can that be you've got no say over it it's already in you you can't receive it if it's in you it's been stuck in there how do you receive the implanted word it's already been foisted upon us well the idea of receiving is the idea here of welcoming right what the implanted word would say to us not rejecting what the implanted word would teach us and so far we've been hearing what the implanted word is saying to us we need to receive

[15 : 08] God's word humbly submitting to it recognising that the implanted word is to rule is to guard is to direct my life and it's changing me God it changed me from the inside out the implanted word is again the gospel word of the new covenant which is that Jesus is Lord it was promised in Jeremiah 31 33 when God promised a new covenant you remember written on the hearts of his people that is the implanted word Jeremiah chapter 33 verse 33 31 33 for this is the covenant that I'll make with the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord I will put my laws within them and I'll write on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people and which the writer of the

Hebrews says has now come about through the finished work of Jesus on the cross the writer of the Hebrews loves Jeremiah 31 he quotes it twice in Hebrews chapter 8 in Hebrews chapter 10 about the new covenant coming in the Lord Jesus Christ and it's this implanted word we see look at this this implanted word which is able to save us in verse 21 and to have this implanted word work in us because it's this implanted word which is able to save us save our souls the idea of saving us me personally we need to put off the old ways of life and be transformed by humbly being ruled by the Lordship of Jesus who is both judge and saviour and we do that by welcoming!

receiving the word of God as he works in us ruling us see righteousness matters it does living how God have us live matters and James presses home the point some more in verses 22 to 25 and he shows us how we can be deceived in two specific examples we can deceive ourselves when it comes to the place of God's word in our life and we can deceive ourselves when it comes to being religious and it tells us what real hearing looks like and what real religion looks like so we're on about doing the word in verses 22 to 25 it says but be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving yourselves for anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer bottom line real hearing will lead to real doing as we read in

Romans chapter 2 it's not the hearers of the word who are justified but the doers of it hearing the word of God without doing the word leads to us being self deceived and James sets up to illustrate what he means the hearer who is no doer is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror now the debate is is this a serious look or not serious look well I think it's a serious look it's not a superficial look it's a serious look he looks to see what he looks like but the problem is he then forgets he forgets what he looks like when he goes away from the mirror and the very act of looking into the mirror does nothing to help the man at all but in what way would this be deceiving ourselves well I think in the context of

James the deception is thinking that we are blessed we are saved we behave rightly when this is actually not the case the truth is faith is really dead and we're not saved there's no blessing if we only hear the word and not doers of the word for the word of God calls us to action repentance from unrighteousness and then living in loving service of the Lord our God and his people forgetting what the word reveals what the word teaches is of no value to me or to anybody else the contrast though is the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty now psalm 19 verse 7 teaches us the law of the Lord is surviving the soul the testimony the Lord is sure making wise the simple the one who looks into the perfect law the law of liberty and perseveres that is the one who has the word of God continue to shape and to rule our lives their actions is the one who is the doer and who acts in accordance with the perfect word of

[20 : 20] God this one is blessed and will be a blessing in doing it that's God's promise to us now here's a couple of implications here one is the assumption that we are hearers of the word so can I encourage us all to keep reading God's word scriptures reading it ourselves carefully reading it ourselves or having it read to us from the countless ways that we can work on our devices these days because blessing comes from hearing and heeding the word of God the blessed life is one that is lived in obedience to his word and the challenge that we all face is the doing of it not just hearing it and forgetting it and then the other way we can deceive ourselves is thinking that we're religious when we're not if anyone thinks he's religious see there in verse 26 if anyone thinks he's religious and does not brighten his tongue but deceives his heart this person's religion is worthless now you know you know you know you told us that you're not into religion and you're right

I don't want us to be religious that's true but the religiousness I'm equating with is the religion which is ritualistic which is unexplained regular routine observance dumb turning up the church and thinking that just by going through the motions is pleasing to God that kind of religion is a turvy drop religion let me tell you but religion that James is talking about here is a rare word in the Bible it's the idea of standing in awe of God that's the religious word we're talking about here that is the one thing that I and you and we all need to do more and more stand in awe of the true and living God the father of lights who created the heavens and the earth the sun the moon the stars and filled the earth with people and everything in it now if anyone thinks he stands in awe of

God right then we'll see it in at least three ways you think you stand in awe of God well we'll see it in at least three ways one in our speech two in our love for the vulnerable and three in the way that we actually keep ourselves spotless from the world around us in our holiness so firstly bridling our tongue interesting quick to listen slow to speak it means to bridle our tongue not to rule our tongue there's much more to say on that in chapter three and four but our speech is to be controlled if we don't bridle our tongue if we don't hold our tongue in check we deceive our heart we actually think our heart is something that it's not we think I'm in awe of God but I'm actually in rebellion towards God so let's look into the word of

God intently to see what he says about the heart Jesus says that the heart is the fullness of the heart the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks Luke chapter 6 verse 45 the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of the evil treasures produces evil for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks our real relationship with God will be visible we recognize by how we speak praise of God will be on our lips cursing of people won't be we'll pick that up in chapter 2 cursing of God won't be on our lips wholesome words will be on our tongues that which is useful for building up will be on our tongues not what's tearing people down so the the first will be our tongues declaring the praises of

God if we're living in awe of God if that's true religion real religions in awe of God but will also be seen in our care for the love for the vulnerable and the vulnerable that James highlights are the orphans and the widows the children without parents who lack the love and security of a loving family the wives who've lost husbands and so face destitution and the visiting of them is not just turning up to say hello to see how they are but actually going with the intent to work out how to care now our society has all kinds of services these days they were all started by Christians but now run substantially funded by the government and the thing that can be seriously lacking right in them now is the gospel of the

[26 : 23] Lord Jesus Christ the heart the gospel motivation the gospel hope of salvation which began these good things to care for the vulnerable the essence of love for the vulnerable the heart of love for the vulnerable is the heart of God over and over again God is the one who cares for the vulnerable people he cares for the widows and orphans of this world Exodus chapter 22 verse 22 you shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child Deuteronomy chapter 10 verse 18 he executes!

justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the sojourner giving him food and clothing provision was made for the poor and the destitute in the Old Testament in the land by leaving some of the crop for them to glean for themselves Deuteronomy chapter 24 speaks about how to sow the crop and we read about in Ruth where they glean in the fields God is the father of the fatherless and the protector of the widow we read about in Psalm 68 now over the years I don't think I've done so well in this area but my wife Karen is deeply convicted by this verse and does it far better than me in her heart to care for people who are vulnerable and I know that others here do so this as well it's as we care for the least in this world that we honour Jesus in Matthew chapter 25 when Jesus is speaking about the final judgment it's really good to hear this in

Matthew chapter 25 when Jesus is speaking about the final judgment he speaks about people standing before him who he welcomes in right into the kingdom kingdom and this is what he says in Matthew chapter 25 picking up at verse 34 come you who are blessed by my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world and what does he say for I was hungry and you gave me food I was thirsty and you gave me drink I was a stranger and you welcomed me I was naked and you clothed me I was sick and you visited me I was in prison and you came to me then the righteous will answer him and say Lord when do we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you drink and when do we see you a stranger and welcome you or naked and clothe you and when do we see you sick in prison and visit you and the king will answer them truly I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers you did it to me first and foremost we are to care for the family of God the brothers and sisters in Christ who are the oppressed and the downtrodden that love starts at the home first and true religion will true fear true awe of God will one day be rewarded by Jesus and true religion awe of

God we're seeing by our love for the marginalized the vulnerable and the oppressed and those who truly live in awe of God will have a heart like his and thirdly importantly true religion will be seen in motion by our righteousness in our holiness by being separate from the filth of the world by keeping ourselves unstained from the world constantly saying no to sin and yes to righteousness as we receive the implanted word as ruler of our hearts there was a really old ad on tv once before you may have seen it you might be just telling my age where the woman puts the chalk into the coloured water and when she pulls it out and she breaks it in half she says she was advertising fluoridated toothpaste see the fluoride really gets in right we'll keep ourselves righteous by being separate from the godliness of this world we're not going to soak ourselves and plunge ourselves into the world there's some things that we're just not going to partake in because we stand in awe of

God and fear of him who will judge the secrets of our hearts because the world will really want to get in our worship of him will mean that we'll say no to sin and yes to righteousness so then brothers and sisters authentic faith god calls us not to be only hearers the word but doers the word as well we can put off all we're to put off all filthiness and rampant wickedness we'll keep ourselves abstained from the world as we receive the implanted word of god he will rule our hearts and so our lives and having a heart like god's we will then care for the marginalized the vulnerable in society remembering that god is one who saved us and he will save us from the wrath to come and that this way of life goes on to demonstrate that we are not just hearers of the word but authentic believers of the word and so reveal our authentic faith let's pray our father in heaven as we have heard your word this morning we pray that you would actually continue to work in us that we would live in awe of you and that would be evident to everyone around about us by our speech and by our actions and by our heart we pray in jesus name amen