

James 1:22-24 February 4, 2007

Alright good morning. What a great day to be at Fairway! Praise God for what He is doing among us. Grab your Bible and let's go back to the book of James chapter 1. Last week we looked at verses 19-21 and I told you to add verse 19 & 20 to the verses you are memorizing out of this chapter. Today we'll look at **verses 22-24** and I want you to add verse 22 as well. Let's take a look, James 1 beginning in verse 22.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves, do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word and does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, and after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."

Now let me give you fair warning today. This morning's message may be short – but it also may be the most important message from James so far – and maybe for the entire book. You may want to pick your feet up off the ground, because God chose to wear his toe-stomping shoes today.

I'm glad we got to celebrate baptism this morning. It's a great picture of the reality of life in Christ – that we were dead in our sins and were raised to walk in a new life by the power of Jesus Christ. And the question that we've mentioned the past three weeks comes back again – Do you honestly believe that that life in Christ – a life of discipleship and following Jesus – is the best life you can possibly have?

Here's why I ask again this morning. Because if you do, then it follows that you believe this Bible is the incredibly valuable Word of God – that this is not the great leather bound suggestions for life book – this is the author of life's commandments and principles for how to live that life of discipleship.

In fact, how you view this word – how much time you spend in it – how you respond to it - how it shows up in your life – is directly related to how you view Jesus.

It is impossible to love Jesus and not love His Word. Don't tell me you are a Christian if this truth has no real place in your day to day life.

Which is what we saw James say last week – in verse 21 – look at it again – he said at the end – "humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you." That word we saw in verse 18 is the word of truth – the truth of redemption – which boils down to the fact that God is who He says He is and God will do what He has promised to do. And that basically is a summary of this entire book. So now in verse 22 James builds on that understanding by expanding the word that can save you to be the word that teaches you how to live because remember, no one can be justified – saved – made right with God once and for all without also being sanctified – becoming more and more like Jesus every day.

So James says, "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says." James is especially concerned about our response to the public reading of Scripture and the hearing of the Word of God. You can see that from he says here – "do not merely listen" and "anyone who listens." James is not talking about reading the Scriptures at this point – though what he writes will apply to that too. **James is addressing people who are in a state of self-deception because of their failure to respond properly to what they are hearing week after week.**

Listen to me – James was written between AD 45 and 50. And yet this statement describes the reality of our day like it was written last week. So please hear me – James is addressing possibly the greatest problem and greatest threat not only to THE Church but to THIS church today and it would be a mistake for you to check out mentally and miss this.

You see it isn't that these people are sitting under false prophets. They are not hearing wolves in sheep's clothing. They are hearing the truth – and they may be hearing it from exceptional preachers. They are hearing what James calls in verse 25 the perfect law that gives freedom preached through the very Holy Spirit of God. And yet there were many people going from the services who were absolutely untouched, but they did not realize it. They thought all was well – but they were deceiving themselves. James says they were in an appalling condition of false peace.

Listen to me – these people were absolutely orthodox in their faith. They believed in the doctrines of the New Testament. They did not go away shaking their heads in disagreement. Yet they went away deceived.

They sang the choruses and sang them wholeheartedly. They enjoyed seeing their friends there. But they were deceived. There will be people who are lost for eternity in hell who heard the greatest preaching in the world and were stirred by it – but their souls were still lost. **What you have got to deal with today is the question, “Can I be deceiving myself while I listen week after week to the Word of God.?”**

The first and most dangerous and most common deception in this situation is thinking you are saved when you are not.

They thought they had a relationship with God merely because they got out of their houses and went to a meeting place and sat under the Word. They watched the preacher, they sang the songs, they gave their money, they listened to everything – but that is exactly as far as it went.

There is nothing wrong with sitting and listening to the Bible. It is good to be here every Sunday. What is wrong is basing your hopes of heaven on this fact.

When Jesus preached the sermon on the mount he ended it with the parable of the two builders. One man hears everything that Jesus says but he does nothing about it, and our Lord says that he is like a man who builds his house on sand. It is a fine house. It is indistinguishable from many other new houses. There is no indication that it lacks a foundation. It is only when the storm comes that the whole house collapses.

This was a man who called himself a disciple, who sat on the mount and heard Jesus preach that sermon, but that is all he did. He wasn't moved or convicted. He didn't repent. He didn't pray for mercy. He didn't entrust himself into the safe keeping of Jesus Christ. The whole foundation of his safety was that he'd been there on the mount listening to Jesus.

One day there will be that greatest of all the storms which we will ever meet as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Will you stand in that day? Will you have a foundation? Or will all your life have been built on sand?

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

Mark 3:33-35 And answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” 34 And looking about on those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold, My mother and My brothers! 35 “For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

I want to make sure that you understand that I am not saying that you can be saved by doing good works. You can't do anything you hear until you trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. But in trusting Jesus Christ you can and you must do what you hear. **For those who hear and never do, no matter what they claim, they are not true believers. They are merely hearers, deceiving themselves.**

There is another way that hearing without doing leads to our own deception. Remember there was a time when the Israelites thought that merely to be in the presence of the Ark of the Covenant was bound to put them on the winning side. So they carried the Ark into battle with them, but they were soundly defeated by the Philistines, and the ark was taken as plunder by their enemies and put in the temple of Dagon their god.

The Israelites had rebelled against God, refusing to listen to the Word of the Lord. They were doing what was right in their own eyes, but they thought that carrying about a religious talisman would bring them luck. That is magic. It is not Christianity.

There is very little difference between that and basing your hopes of a righteous life on being in a certain church at a certain time on a Sunday morning and hearing a certain preacher. **Mere listening to words, however true, never changed anyone and never will.**

It did not save Judas. He had the Bread of Life right there every day but he never ate the living bread himself. He had it in his hands, as it were, and rejoiced that it was so accessible to him, but he never did anything about it. See, being present at the means of grace is not the sum of Christian duty.

In other words, listen to me, **going to church is not a good deed that wipes your slate clean.** Being in a worship service on Sunday is not the giant weight that tips the scales of judgment away from the sin all week long caused by not doing what the Word says. Never be satisfied with that. **Yield your heart and your life to the power of the Word that is preached. Otherwise, you're just deceived.**

The third way that we can deceive ourselves is really brought home in verse 24. Look at it again – James says “anyone who listens to the word and does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and then after looking at himself he goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”

Now that sounds real benign. But think about what James is saying with that illustration. When you look in the mirror, what are you basically doing? You are looking to see if everything is ok – if everything looks alright – or at least as alright as you can get it, right?

I mean, if you look at your face in mirror and you see that you have some huge nasty green thing hanging off the end of your nose, what do you do? You fix it – you wipe it off – you get rid of it as fast as you can.

What do you say about someone who looks in that mirror sees the big gross green thing, and then walks away and does nothing about it – just forgets that it's even there? You call that person a moron. That's what James is saying here only it is much more serious.

That when you hear God's Word and it holds up a mirror to your life and character that shows not only what you are but what you could be and should be – what God wants you to be – and you walk away and ignore it, you are a moron. Or to use a more biblically serious term – you are a fool. **When you hear God's Word and you walk away and ignore it, you are a fool.**

The look in the mirror was useless; no change was effected. There was no repentance. You walk away and avoid the problem. The consequence of this is that you dull your conscience. Doing this again and again, after hearing the Word and reading God's will in the Scriptures, eventually makes it possible for you to convince yourself that you are all right after all. Thus, the inner process of deceiving yourself takes place. You build for yourself a very different picture of your life than others have. And especially, a very different picture of your heart - your inner person - than God has.

Basically you forget who you are in light of the truth – and then act as if the truth does not govern your life. Folks it does. **God's truth governs your life – my life – and every life that has ever walked this planet – whether we acknowledge it or not.**

Look at **Galatians 6 with me- verse 7-8.** “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

You can pretend that what you hear from the Word doesn't apply to you – you can find people to compare yourself to who make you feel good about you – but God's Word will always be proven true. Which means to hear the truth and through it get a glimpse of what needs to change in your life in order to live the best life possible – in order to exist in the glory of God – and then to ignore it makes you a fool.

When we started this study of James, God warned us that it was going to be honest and blunt and even painful. And it has been. And there is a reason for it which I want you to glimpse at before we

wrap up. Read ahead with me in verse 25: “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.”

The reason one of the highest values **we pursue here at Fairway is a life that is changed by belief into obedience every day is because without it, there is no life in Christ.** And since that life in Christ is the best life possible – a life where we are blessed in all we do – let me say again what I said when we began this morning.

How you view this Word – how much time you spend in it – how you respond to it - how it shows up in your life – is directly related to how you view Jesus.

So this morning if we – **if you – claim to know Jesus – if you claim Him as your Lord and your hope of heaven – then what are you doing with His Word?**

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Will you pray with me?