

James 1:25 February 11, 2007

Alright Good Morning! Let's get our Bibles out and though we will end up in James chapter 1, before we go there I want you to look at Matthew 13. This is the parable of the sower and it can remind us of where we were last week.

Matthew 13:3

What we see here and saw last week is that how you receive – how you respond to the word is everything. The seed is the word of God. All of these people in this parable heard the same thing but their response is what was different. The truth that falls on hard ground produces nothing. The truth that falls on rocky shallow ground ultimately produces nothing. The truth that fell among the weeds ultimately produced nothing. But the truth that fell on good soil produced a crop 30, 60, 100 times what was sown.

We saw last week in verses 22-24 how not to respond to the word of God. Today in verse 25 we see not only how TO respond but we see the incredible result of doing so – a life that is blessed by God. Let's take a look and see together. James chapter 1 – let's begin again in verse 22.

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says. The man 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; he goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues to do so, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in all he does.

The key to verse 25 is the contrast to verse 24. James says **look intently** which is a whole different word for “look” than he used in 24 when the man just looked and went away and forgot. This “look” means to **literally stoop down and examine with precision and care**.

When you look into the word of God carefully, precisely, closely it implies a stooping intently with an eager effort to see the truth of God. To let the word of God reveal you to you.

When you look intently and long and it's not haphazard or routine or a quick look and then a distraction and your gone – when you look long you are going to remember what you saw. And you're going to be able to apply it. And you're going to be blessed. And this little analogy we started last week finds its meaning or key today in the next phrase – ***the perfect law that gives freedom***.

That is a really unique phrase. It is only used by James and he uses it twice. But to catch its power, remember who James is writing to. Jewish Christians scattered among the nations – these people are believes who are Jews – who embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ and because of it have been forced into exile by the very leaders they used to follow and listen to.

The Jews of the first century were taught to keep the law in order to earn favor with God. The law was basically the 10 commandments plus the rest of the OT rules and regulations plus all the additions and definitions and application added by the Pharisees. To these people James is writing to, the law was anything but a perfect source of freedom. Strict adherence to the law had become an end in itself.

And then Jesus comes. And as Jesus taught – you go back and read the gospels – as he taught about the law, 2 things are firmly lodged in his teaching:

- 1) **The principles at the heart or the intentions of the law take precedence over literalistic adherence to it.**
- 2) While concentration on outward acts is not wrong, **to concentrate on actions alone opens us to the danger of mistaking the good for the best.**

That's why Jesus emphasizes the matter of the heart and of human character. This is why we've seen James put so much emphasis already on the "word" in these verses. The purpose of the law is to move us in accordance with God's will. It is a *means*, not the *purpose*. For Jesus, strict adherence to the letter of the law is not radical obedience. Jesus taught a higher standard of ethical obedience that can't be enforced by any law. **Jesus taught an ethic that flows from hearts in tune with God's heart – a growing innate sense of God's purpose and pleasure in a given situation.**

That law of the heart – where the word of truth – the word planted in you – the word that can save you – is in you through the person of the Holy Spirit.

The perfect law then is nothing like the unbelievable weight and fear and difficulty of legalism that James' audience was used to. **This perfect law is the very truth and word of God that reflects the heart and character of God** and is not an end unto itself but is a means of growing into a relationship with that God and into the life that God intends us to enjoy.

And what began with just the teachings of Jesus – as he redefined and explained the Old Testament and then showed a new and better way – was grown by the inspiration of God into the word we now hold in our hands. So even though James nor any other author of any of the letters that make up the New Testament could have had any idea that what God was inspiring them to write would end up as the very word of God for every generation to follow, God's intent to guide us into the life and relationship for which He made us for His glory means that, today – this is the perfect law that brings freedom.

This book – the Bible – this is the perfect law that brings freedom – and if you don't get that today, **you'll never be able to experience the blessed life James is promising unless you see the Bible as the perfect law that gives freedom.**

So let's look at that. The next phrase – both for the Jews James is writing to and by extension to us who God is speaking to – is the clincher. The perfect law the *gives freedom*.

Jesus said in **John 8:31-32**

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

The perfect law – the teachings of Christ – the Word of God – gives freedom. **How?**

Two major ways:

- 1) **By embracing the perfect law that gives freedom** – the truth of God – what we saw in verse 18 and 21 – the word of God that declares He is who He says He is and will do what He promised – **we are set free from slavery to sin.**

Augustine penned a famous theological phrase – non posse non peccare – it means “not able to not sin” – and that’s us – outside of Christ – without the power to live right – to be who we were designed to be – enslaved to the power of sin.

Embracing the truth of God – like we talked about the past several weeks – sets us free from the tyranny of selfishness – free to be good, free to do what we ought, free to enjoy doing it.

2) By living according to the ethic that flows from the heart of God, we are set free from the consequences of sin.

Now that we are free to choose not to sin, we don’t have to endure the consequences of it. We saw last week in Galatians 6 that when you sow to please the sinful nature, from that nature you will reap destruction.

We have the choice to live free from:

Guilt	Hopelessness	Worry
Regret	Joylessness	Self Doubt
Shame	Lack of trust	Self Hate
Stress	Fear	

Free from the damage to relationships

Free from the damage to our bodies and minds

Free from the pain every one of us has been through because we chose what seemed better to ourselves in the moment than what God said.

The perfect law that gives freedom – the word of God and the principles and examples and commands it contains create for us a series of boundaries around a wide open space free of those things. And in that space is the life of abundance Jesus promised. The life of purpose God intended. **God’s rules are not there to restrict your freedom, but to protect it and enable you to live in it.**

Galatians 5:1 says “It is for freedom that you have been set free, so do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

And the way we live in that freedom is what James is explaining here. Look intently into the perfect law – the word of God – the mirror that shows not only who you are but who you can be and should be.

And then look at how James defines this – “And ***continue to do so not forgetting what you hear, but doing it.***”

See all that we are talking about today – that we talked about last week – is not a one time event. Not a one time commitment. It is a surrender of life – a continuous pursuit of God by faith through his word.

Please don’t be satisfied with a few verses, old clichés, and a thought for the day. **God has more to say to you and show you and to teach you than you could ever learn in a lifetime.**

And all that you hear and see and read and learn **isn't meant to make you a smart Christian – it is meant to make you like Jesus.**

DL Moody once said – the Bible wasn't given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.

So James again says – that **looking intently and remembering what you hear only has value if you** do it – if you **put it into practice** – if you pursue the image of you in the mirror that God want you to become. God's word is full of that sentiment:

Back in **Luke 8:15** in the parable of the seeds – God commend the man who “with a noble and good heart, hears the word, retains it, and then by persevering produces a crop.”

Paul tells one of his churches to “hold fast to that which is good” (**1 Thess 5:21**)

To another he says, “You are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain.” (**1 Cor. 15:2**)

We saw in our study of Philippians – in chapter **3 verse 16** say “only let us live up to what we have already attained.”

All of these are saying keep doing what you know even when you learn more.

And when you do, catch this last phrase, “**you will blessed in all you do**”.

That sounds like it is separated from what has gone before it – it's just this little bonus that God gives you for being good – but that couldn't be further from the truth. **The being blessed in what you do is directly related to doing what the word says.**

All through the very Word that James is saying we must study and listen intently to are the promises of the very blessing that fulfill us – that bless a life.

Peace	Provision	Purpose	Value
Hope	Safety	Joy	Courage
Love	Healing	Discernment	Power
Security	Wisdom	Rest	

Those blessing reside within the boundaries laid out by the word of God for life because **the blessings themselves are linked to a life lived by the ethic of the heart of God.** I know that makes sense to us – we know that – but how many of times do we ask for one of those blessings without being willing to live the command or principle from the Word that it is linked to?

We want wisdom but we won't ask for it without doubting like James 1 says.

We want peace but we won't present our requests to God with prayer and thanksgiving and leave them there like Philippians 4 says.

We want forgiveness but we won't forgive others like Matthew 6 says.

So listen to me today – this is crucial for us to understand.
The only way to live in those blessings is to obey the Word of God.

And the only way to obey the Word of God is to know the Word of God.

And the only way to know the Word of God is to continue to look and listen intently to what God has said.

You can't get the blessing of God without living by the Word of God.

So let me just make two really practical suggestions this morning. On your notes there is an acronym for SPACEPETS. This is a really nothing new but it is a good way to help you take more than a casual glance at the Word of God. Many of you already know this. But as you read a passage or chapter of scripture or even just a couple of verses, walk through these 9 questions to dig into what God might be saying. And then respond accordingly – in other words, do what you discover.

Is there a SIN to confess?

Is there a PROMISE to claim?

Is there an ATTITUDE to change?

Is there a COMMAND to keep?

Is there an EXAMPLE to follow?

Is there a PRAYER to pray?

Is there an ERROR to avoid?

Is there a TRUTH to believe?

Is there SOMETHING to thank God for?

Secondly, and I don't often do this, but I want to recommend a book to you. It is called [Bible Study Methods: 12 Ways to Unlock God's Word](#). Last week it was on sale at Mardels for less than \$3.00. But this is just a tool to help you learn some great ways to let God's Word come alive in your life – to get beyond hearing a sermon or just reading through the Bible and instead to look intently into this perfect law that gives freedom.

But like Alex Motyere wrote when it comes to reading the Bible or listening to sermons – “Frankly there is little point to schemes and times if we have not got an attentive spirit. It is possible to be unflinchingly regular in Bible reading but to achieve no more than to have moved the bookmark forward. The Word is read but not heard.”

It still comes down to where we started this morning. How do you respond? What do you do? The only value of being in here is if it changes you out there. **The only value of being in this book is if it makes you different everywhere else.** And as you choose to do what you hear and learn – you can be described as a man or a woman who is blessed in all you do.

What you have to decide is if that is the life you want. If you do, here's how to get it:

Look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom

Continue to do so

Don't forget what you've heard

Do it

Let's pray.