

JAMES

LIVING FAITH



Hearing and Doing

James 1:19-27



Introduction

The Titanic was a massive tragedy that could have been avoided. On April 14, 1912, several ships traveling on the same route as the Titanic sent warning messages about the dangerous icebergs. A British ship sent a warning at 9:00am, a Greek ship sent another at 1:42pm, a German ship sent one three minutes later, and other warnings came at 7:30pm and 9:40pm. The final warning came at 10:30pm by the Californian, but the Titanic continued the journey at almost top speed until it struck the fatal iceberg one hour and ten minutes after the last warning from the Californian. The Titanic operators heard the words of warning but they did not recognize the significance of those words. The words were ignored and had no effect of the actions the crew.

It is easy for us to say, “How could the Titanic operators ignore such important warnings?” But we do the same thing, week after week if we fail to recognize the importance of God’s word. We can be unaffected by God’s word and do not understand the significance that the truth has on our lives. James says that we are like people who look in a mirror and immediately forget what we look like. But when we hear the word, allow it to inform our heart and mind, then our actions will follow as we become doers of the word who are following Jesus.



Study

Context: This passage describes how the “firstfruits of his creatures” (v.18) act and behave. James also connects the theme of blessing from 1:12 to 1:26—those who are blessed will persevere under trial and will be a doer who acts in faith. In the following section the focus turns to partiality of the wealthy in the local church. This is connected to 1:26-27 since James is instructing his audience to let their righteous lives be seen in the mercy they offer to the marginalized in society. The worldly pattern of partiality (in chapter 2) is expected by the culture, but the gospel pattern of caring for the outcasts is certainly not—yet this is the way to remain unstained from the world.

Intently looking at the law of the Lord (1:22-25)

3. Read 1:22-24. What is the result of being a hearer of the word and not a doer? How does the example of the mirror prove the reality of deceiving yourself?

APPLY → If we simply hear the word of God without acting upon the truth of it, we deceive ourselves. This is a dangerous possibility. We would never say that reading the Bible on our own, hearing faithful gospel based sermons, and attending Bible studies could be dangerous. However, there is opportunity in each of these activities to deceive ourselves, especially if we simply hear the word without acting upon it. How can we resist deceiving ourselves from thinking that we are doing God's word when in reality we are simply hearing it? How does James describe a 'doer' of the word?

4. Read 1:25. What is the perfect law, the law of liberty? See James 2:8-12 as it speaks of the royal law of loving your neighbor as yourself, the whole law of the OT commands, and the "law of liberty."

APPLY → We are to look into the gospel so that we can persevere in our faith. God has provided everything that we need in his word. The result of his word is freedom, endurance in this sinful world, and blessing from God. If you are feeling discouraged, look to the words of Jesus in John 6:29, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." This is how we persevere—keep believing by looking at the gospel! How does the gospel help us to endure in our faith?

Positive results of looking at the law of the Lord (1:26-27)

5. Read 1:26. How does this serve as a summary statement of 1:19-25? (Hint: tongue connects to v.19-21 and deceiving the heart to v.22-25)

6. Read 1:27. What is the example of pure and undefiled religion? Why do you think this is so?

APPLY → James offers 1:26-27 as a test of genuine faith—doers of the word will follow this gospel pattern of mercy, compassion, and love to all people. The grace of God causes believers to be gracious. We have been created in Christ Jesus for good works through true religion by the gospel law of liberty. These are not “dirty” words, but should free us and cause us to live wholly for God’s glory. We must be doers of the word and not only hearers. In light of these truths, how does James 1:26-27 inform how you live? What is one tangible thing that you can do to reflect the compassion of God?



Connect

Gospel Connections. In verse 21, James encourages his audience to put off the un-Christian clothing of filthiness and rampant wickedness and to receive with humility the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. God implants his word in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which is our greatest hope and salvation for our souls. This is the gospel—we put off our sinful past and we receive the word of God through Jesus Christ. Salvation occurs in this wonderful transaction, our sin is taken off of us and given to Jesus on the cross. There it is atoned for by the holiness of Christ, and in turn we receive his perfect righteousness. This allows us to hear the word of God and to see it as a mirror to our souls and to do what it says. Therefore, obedience to God’s word brings freedom, persevering faith, and ultimately blessing.

Whole-Bible Connections. Romans 2:13 uses similar language to our passage when Paul writes, “For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.” Paul and James are certainly connecting hearing and doing as it pertains to the law in their letters. They both affirm that simply hearing the law is not enough and that the doers of the law will be the justified (or righteous) ones. Paul affirms that the ones who are justified are ones who are “doers of the law.” This is a direct connection to James encouraging his audience to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (1:22). Saving faith requires obedience to the commands of God. Grace inspires effort to live a holy life of obedience.

Theological Connections. The Bible is full of examples of God’s people simply offering lip service to God. They “honor [God] with their lips, while their heart are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13 & Matt. 15:8). The words of James 1:26-27 serve as an allusion to Isaiah 1:11-18 where God is renouncing empty pietistic words. God directs his people to “remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, please the widow’s cause” (Isa. 1:16-17). God’s desire for his redeemed people is to direct them to compassionate acts toward all people.

Praise Connections.

COME BEHOLD THE WONDROUS MYSTERY

Come behold the wondrous mystery
in the dawning of the King.
He the theme of heaven’s praises
robed in frail humanity.

In our longing, in our darkness
now the light of life has come.
Look to Christ, who condescended
took on flesh to ransom us

Come behold the wondrous mystery
He the perfect Son of Man.
In His living, in His suffering
never trace nor stain of sin.

See the true and better Adam
come to save the hell-bound man.
Christ the great and sure fulfillment
of the law; in Him we stand.

Come behold the wondrous mystery
Christ the Lord upon the tree.
In the stead of ruined sinners
hangs the Lamb in victory.

See the price of our redemption;
see the Father’s plan unfold.
Bringing many sons to glory
grace unmeasured, love untold.

Come behold the wondrous mystery;
slain by death the God of life.
But no grave could e’er restrain Him;
praise the Lord; He is alive!

What a foretaste of deliverance;
how unwavering our hope.
Christ in power resurrected
as we will be when he comes.

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