

Faith Works: Living What We Claim to Believe

Faith Obeys
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FAITH OBEYS James 1:19-27

It is good to be a part of the Body of Christ. I want to risk being transparent with some things that God has been doing in my life and my family's life over the last year and culminating over this last week as we study this text. And we're only going to go James 1:19-25. I'd planned on us going all the way through verse 27, but we're going to stop at verse 25 this morning.

James 1:19. I want us to read this text, then I want to share some things that God's doing in my life that hopefully will help us to understand this text. James 1:19,

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but 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. 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 (Jas. 1:19-25).

God, we pray that you would help us even in this room this morning not just to hear the Word. Help us to look intently into it, but God, help us to take the next step and to obey it. And God, we pray that you would make us a faith family, a body of Christ that is marked, not by listening to the Word, but marked by obeying the Word that we listen to. And we pray that you would bring faith to life in us, in this church, in this city and in all nations, in light of James 1:19-25. By your Spirit, we pray you teach us this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I can think of a variety of reasons not to share a couple things that I want to share with you all at the beginning. And one of those reasons, among many, is I know that some will be at least tempted to take what I want to share, that God's been doing in my life, will be tempted to take it prescriptively instead of descriptively. And here's what I mean by that when we come to Scripture, for example, there are some things in Scripture that are prescriptive, they prescribe what we should do, how we should live, commands, imperatives. When Scripture says do this, it's prescribing. But then there are other parts of Scripture that instead of prescribing what we should do are describing events that happened. Now, often times they have implications for what we should do, but just because something is described in Scripture, it doesn't mean automatically we need to do that. Does that make sense? There's some stories in Scripture...Take Old Testament, Balaam talking

with a donkey, okay? Descriptive. All right? Not a prescription. Not prescribing us to go talk and have conversations with donkeys as the people of God.

So we have to be careful in our interpretation of Scripture any time to make sure to interpret rightly as we dive into different texts. Well, when it comes to what I want to share with you this morning, the last thing I want is for you to hear this prescriptively, hear this as me, as pastor saying, this is what I think everybody should do. This is simply describing God's work in your pastor's life over the last year—nothing more, nothing less than that. Just God's work in my life and in my family's life. Just imagine listening to a donkey for the next few minutes, and you take that for what it's worth. Okay?

Then the other thing, it is so appropriate that this text would come on this Sunday in light of the last couple days in my life because it's the culmination of a journey. But I in no way want to imply that I've got this text figured out, that I've got this one checked off. There are so few things I have figured out, and by God's grace, I have a lot to learn about this picture. But okay. Enough precursors. Let me dive in.

You know about a year ago I shared with this faith family, it was the beginning of the Radical Series, just about some things that God was convicting my heart about when it came to some areas of my life that were not in alignment with His word, especially when it comes to the needs of the lost and the poor around the world. And they were things that I'd been thinking about for a while, but I had ignored the voice of God. I had put God off. And by His grace, He had continued to walk faithfully with me even in spite of a disobedient and often hard heart particularly when it came to the resources that God has entrusted to me. In light of the needs of the lost and the poor, He was showing me very clearly that the way my life and the way I spent my resources, led my family to do that, was not alignment with His Word.

Four years ago at this time, we had our life turned upside down by Katrina. And our house in New Orleans had gone under water, and we'd lost pretty much everything we had except for a few things that were in the attic. And we really had a chance, a golden opportunity, in a sense, to start over and from the beginning, to build wisely when it comes to our resources. And the reality is a year after that hurricane we were living in Birmingham, Alabama with more stuff than we had ever had before. And thus, began a process where we were settling in, everything was running smoothly until God began to speak and say, "These things don't add up with what you believe and what this Word says in some of the ways you're living." And so all that to say about a year ago it came to a head, and God, by His grace, softened my heart and began to show me, okay, this is what you need to do.

And there's a variety of things that are involved with that picture, but one of the big things was we needed to be better stewards when it comes to a home that we lived in because the house that we lived in was not the best stewardship of God's resources. And so thus, I began preparing for a nice conversation with my precious wife to begin talking about this. Now, you know, if you've been in a church for a long time, I mean, say you've been at Brook Hills for a long time and things start to change or the pastor starts leading to make changes, like I'm guessing people feel, oh, man, not another. Why are we doing this change? Well, if you've ever felt that at Brook Hills, let me just offer you this word of encouragement at least you don't have to live with me. Okay? Like be blessed in that word of encouragement.

My precious wife is a gem who, by God's grace, I do not deserve. And so I sat down with her on the couch one night, I remember it distinctly, and began to talk about some of the things that God was teaching me and began to talk about the practical effects of those, and

began to talk about how I felt we needed to sell the house. And it wasn't the, you know, most pleasant, easy conversation we've ever had. I don't want you to get the wrong impression. Not because my wife is not on the same page and wanting to follow God's Word or is carnal and in love with stuff. The picture is my wife had spent the last two years up to that conversation after her previous home had been taken away in a hurricane pouring her heart into establishing a home that would be a refuge for me and the two boys we had. And I was basically coming and saying, I think we need to change all of it.

And so we began to pray together. And over the next month we started the process where there's a for sale sign in our yard. Now, I'm not sure if you realize, but this has not been particularly the best season for selling a house over the last year. It set all kinds of record lows when it comes to selling a house this year. The reality is we bought our house at the height of the housing market in Birmingham, and we were selling it at the low point of the housing market in Birmingham. So buy high, sell low. Ingenious! Right?

As a result, there were questions at every turn. Should we really be doing this? Is this wise? Is this the best time? And there was temptation at every turn just to say, no, let's not do this. And it was so ironic because little things would happen in the house that would need to be fixed, and it would be like, oh, we don't want to put any more money into the house when we want to sell it. We're not going to be able to recoup any of this. And it was inevitable. Every plumber, every electrician that came over, when they came in the house, the first thing they would say to my precious wife, the first thing they would say is. They'd walk in and they'd say, this is such a beautiful house. Like why are you selling it? And I'm thinking, come on, guys, you're not helping me at all. And that was our house, and we began to look at houses. In that whole journey we would go to the internet and look at the houses and we'd kind of come together with our lists. And let's just say, not a lot of overlap between our lists.

And I think my thinking was, maybe we'll call it a little more rustic. That would be a kind word. I mean, one house that I said, hey, let's look at this one didn't have floors or countertops in most of the house. Like who needs floors? Who needs countertops? Not that important. I remember another house...And she would just humor me and go to these houses. I remember one house, and you walk in and you were greeted with a wall of must and mold. Five seconds, my precious wife in that house, and she was running out literally gagging. So these were the kind of houses I was leading her to. And through this whole process, there were questions, often times unanswered. Ups and downs, trying to figure out this and that, wondering if we were doing the right thing at every step.

And it came to a culmination this last week when the last two days I spent packing up one house and moving into another house that is a whole other story how God has provided really more than we ever could have imagined and done it in line with the goals that we believed He had set for us in what we wanted to do.

And so all that to say, again, again, not to prescribe, "The pastor thinks everybody should sell their house." And like nobody's going to invite me over to their house now. No. Not to say that. Not to prescribe in any way that everybody should do this. Describing. Describing. And not even to say that...I mean, there are stories across this faith family that are even deeper than that.

There's a family in this faith family with nine kids sharing one bathroom in a downsize. There is Danny, who is leaving tomorrow, who was just baptized and is going to a place in Uganda where he will have no water, no electricity in a little hut. Like we still got water and electricity. I mean, yeah. So anyway, there's all kinds of stories. Frank and Rebekah who we

prayed for, I remember Frank and Rebekah saying, "We've just come to the point where we've decided are we going to believe this word or not? And if we are, then we need to do this." So the point is do not merely listen to the Word, brothers and sisters. Do it. Do it. It's a lot easier to listen than it is to do it.

And we live in a church culture today that delights in listening, but runs from doing. And this is particularly dangerous for us. I was burdened as I was studying this text this week for this faith family. Because of your hunger for the Word, and the way I hope when we study the Word when we come together, we dive into the Word, we make it a priority. But we need to be really careful, because if we are a people known for listening to the Word and studying the Word, then we will have missed the whole point. I want to be a part of a community of faith that is known for doing the Word. And if all we do is listen, then we're deceiving ourselves, and our religion, Church at Brook Hills, is worthless.

Three Ways We Respond to the Word

So what I want to do is I want to encourage you, I want to come alongside in your life in whatever God is doing in your life and based on James 1:19-25, I want encourage you to put the Word into action. I want to share with you three ways that we respond to the Word. It's really interesting here in verses 19 through 25. The Word is mentioned over and over and over again. Like in verse 21, just circle it every time you see it. "*Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*" Circle it there at the end of verse 21, "the Word planted in you." Verse 22, "*Do not merely listen to the word.*" Circle it there. Verse 23, "*Anyone who listens to the word.*" Circle it there.

Then you get down to verse 25. And we'll talk about this later. He switches up the terminology, but it's the same picture, "*The man who looks intently into the perfect law.*" Circle "Law" right there, and we'll see why he switches terminology there. And even go back to the last verse we looked at last week, verse 18, "*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth.*" Circle it there. You see a theme over and over and over again. And basically, what James is doing in Chapter 1 here is he is showing us how to respond—that's what we looked at last week—showing us how to respond to trials, then showing us how to respond to temptations. And now he's going to show us how to respond to truth. Trials, temptations, truth, the truth the of God's Word. How do we respond to the Word in our lives?

Receive the Word Humbly

Three ways to respond, and I want to encourage you. And these – I'll just go ahead and let you know they are simple, but if these three truths would take hold in our hearts, then it would radically change the picture of Christianity in our culture and in this church. Three ways to respond to the Word, number one, receive the Word humbly. Receive the Word humbly. We receive the Word humbly. "*Everyone should be quick to listen*" (Jas. 1:19). "Hurry up and listen", literally is the language. "Hurry up and listen to the Word." Slow to speak. Be quiet and listen. "*And slow to become angry*" (Jas. 1:19). To listen humbly, not with our defenses up that leads to an anger and a resistance to the Word. You think about it. Don't we often approach the Word talking instead of listening? You know what I mean by that? Maybe not outwardly verbally talking, but we come to the Word already with our minds made up about how we want to live our lives and our thoughts about what we should do in such a way that if Scripture goes counter to those thoughts, then we decide maybe that's not as inspired as these other parts that we really like in the Word.

Or we begin to twist God's Word to fit our lifestyles instead of coming humbly, slow to speak, not with our defenses up, but ready to listen. This is the history of God's people resisting listening to the Word like this. It's the prophets in the Old Testament proclaiming the Word, and the people not listening humbly. It's the way the people of Israel responded to Jesus. It's the way Jewish people responded to Paul. He would come into the synagogues and begin proclaiming the Word, and they'd drag him out and stone him.

I'll be honest, I was not very encouraged this week thinking back through the history of God's people. What God's people do with people who proclaim God's Word is not particularly encouraging for a preacher. What they did to prophets, or Jesus, or apostles. And the picture is the history of God's people reminds us that there is a temptation at every turn, not to approach the Word of God humbly—to listen to it. We come to a verse like Luke 12 when Jesus says, "Sell your possessions and give to the poor." And immediately our thinking is, "How do I get around that?" We've got to remember the goal is not to get around this Word. The goal is to receive it. How do we receive it? James says, verse 21, "Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent." Get rid of, literally "take off", like you take garments off. Take off moral filth—evil that is so prevalent. We bring so many ideas from this world, sinful ideas, selfish ideas to our study of the Word to put them off, to put them off, to come before the Word with a blank check and say, "I want to receive this humbly. I want to receive it humbly. And listen to what He says." I love this language, "Humbly accept the Word planted in you."

Now, we're going to do a little turning here, but you've got to see this. Hold your place in James 1. Go back with me to Jeremiah. Jeremiah Chapter 31. If you need to use the table of contents, feel free to do that. Jeremiah, Chapter 31. I want to show you a passage that if you don't have underlined in your Bible, you need to have it underlined. It's one of the most important passages certainly in the Book of Jeremiah, I would say in the Old Testament because it's a prophecy from Jeremiah to the people of God about the New Covenant that's coming, how everything is going to change in Christ.

Jeremiah 31:31. Here's the picture. Got this image in James 1, the Word is planted in you, rooted in you. Now that whole imagery is based on what God had promised to do in the Old Testament. Listen to Jeremiah 31:31, "*The time is coming, declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD*" (Jer. 31:31-32). Listen to verse 33. This is the key verse when it comes to this picture in James 1. "*This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people'*" (Jer. 31:33). Did you catch that? "I will put my law in their minds, write it on their hearts."

Turn over to the right two books to Ezekiel 36. Let me show you one more place. What God is saying through Jeremiah is, "There is coming a day when my Law is going to be written on the hearts of my people, inscribed on their minds and on their hearts." And then listen to how Ezekiel picks up on the same imagery. Says it a little different, but listen to this picture. Ezekiel 36:24, again, one of those really important places in the Old Testament that gives us a picture of the New Covenant to come.

I (God saying to His people) will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your

impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. (Listen to verse 27) And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezek. 36:24-27).

Did you catch that language? Powerful language. "I'm going to put my law on your heart, my spirit on your heart, and the Spirit of God through the Word of God is going to move you." This is powerful. This is what Old Testament saints longed for that James is saying, "The Word of God, Christian brother, sister, get this...The Word of God is planted in your heart. And His Spirit resides, dwells, there to move you into action!"

And so what James is saying...Come back to James 1 now with that picture. And we've talked about, this book is written to predominantly Jewish Christians. With that picture in the background, humbly accept the Word that's planted in you. This Word that is in you, receive it. He's put His Word in your heart. He's written His law on your heart. So when you hear it, when you hear it, this feeds your heart like blood fuels your heart, like oxygen fuels your lungs. So this Word fuels your life.

"Do not underestimate the importance, the power of the Word of God, which can save you," he says. This Word. This Word. And it's what he had talked about in verse 18, "*He chose to give us birth to the word of truth.*" This Word in our hearts brings us salvation. "Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). This is how we are saved, by the Word of God taking root in our hearts, opening our eyes to our sinfulness, to God's glory and sufficiency of Christ, and trusting in Him, the Word saves us.

This is cherished, treasured possession. So receive it humbly. Don't come to this Word looking for a Christian spin on the American dream, looking to twist it into your or my lifestyle. Come to this Word humbly and receive it for what it says, not for what we prefer. Humbly receive the Word, which is planted in you, which can save you. You don't want to twist this Word. This is the Word that saves you. Receive the Word humbly.

Remember the Word Constantly

Second, we remember the Word constantly. We remember the Word constantly. Now, I want you to see these last two in verses 22 through 25. And they're intertwined together. Remember the Word constantly. Look down in verse 25 when he picks up on the end of this analogy that he's contrasting, which we'll get to in a second, but he says, "*The man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom.*" "Looks intently." This is a great word. In the original language of the New Testament, it literally means...One author said, "it is to look out with penetrating absorption." This is basically to investigate, to study, to gaze on, to look into.

The picture is like when my three-year-old, Caleb, is walking down the sidewalk, and he loves bugs, and he'll find any bug there is. He can spot them. And he'll see the tiniest bug on the sidewalk. He will stop dead in his track, get down on all fours and look at that bug, as tiny as it is. And they will have this moment there. And he'll stay there just gazing. The bug's doing nothing. It's just sitting there. And he's just sitting there looking at it. And that's the picture.

Look intently at it. Stop. Stop amidst the busyness of your life. Stop dead in your tracks. Open the Word and look at it. Look intently. Don't be content, people of God, for a little word from God for the day, a little devotional thought to get you by. No. Look into the Word intently. Study it. Remember it, not forgetting. This is the picture. "*Looks intently into the*

perfect Law that gives freedom, and continues to do this," lingering there, "not forgetting what he has heard" (Jas. 1:25). Letting it absorb into you so you don't forget it. Now, this, again, history of God's people, one more time to the Old Testament. Go to Deuteronomy 6. Fifth book in the Bible. Deuteronomy Chapter 6.

Now, remember Deuteronomy, that word Deuteronomy means the second law. And the picture in Deuteronomy in the history of God's people is right before they're going into the Promised Land. It's a recounting of the Law. And so this is a picture of the Law here in Deuteronomy, recounted among the people of God before they go into the Promised Land. Again, this is one of those passages, if it's not underlined in your Bible, let me encourage you to underline it. Huge passage in the Old Testament. Judaism. The picture of the Shema, is what it's called. This is like a picture of faith among the people of God right here. Verse 4, Deuteronomy 6:4. And think about how this relates to remembering.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. (Listen to this imagery) Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut. 6:4-9).

Put it everywhere. Word saturated, absorbing in. But listen to verse 10:

When the LORD your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Deut. 6:10-12).

Remember, remember, He said. In fact, go over two chapters to Chapter 8. I want you to listen to this language as God tells His people not to forget to remember His commands and decrees. Listen to Deuteronomy 8:10.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability

to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today (Deut. 8:10-18).

This would be the constant temptation for the people of God to forget the Word of God. And this is exactly what James is talking about in James 1. He uses this deliberately ridiculous analogy of a man who looks at himself in the mirror and then walks away and couldn't even pick himself out of a police lineup. He doesn't have any clue what he looks like. It is that outlandish to look into the Word and walk away and forget it. Remember the Word. Remember the Word. Hide it on you. Absorb it into you.

This is where we are...Let's just put it all on the table and be honest with each other. We will spend a good portion of our time together in God's Word this morning, but let's be honest. By the time we get to lunch today, we will have forgotten a lot. By the time we get to dinner tonight, forgotten even more. And by the time we get up to go to work in the morning, start our week, most of it will have faded away, unless we work to remember the Word. This is so key.

Now, what concerns me, what alarms me is that in our day people have said, okay, people are not retaining as much, so when it comes to preaching or in a sermon, don't try to do a lot. Just a little. Short, sweet. Make it one thought because that's about all people can remember. And I'm just convinced that the best way for us to absorb God's Word is not to spend less time studying it. The best way for us to absorb God's Word into our hearts and our minds and our lives is to saturate ourselves with study when we come together and not just when we come together, but to go back to it all week long.

Remember it constantly, constantly, constantly. This is why we do Scripture memory like we do. This is why in service to our faith family, we want to have the on the website every week a memory verse that is most often from the passage we are studying that lodges that truth that we have studied, the truth we have studied into our minds and into our hearts so we can memorize that. For those who are a little bit more industrious to have a passage as we go through a series you can memorize the Book of James.

And people say, "I can't remember, I can't memorize Scripture." I disagree wholeheartedly. And I want to be careful here because I know that across this room we all have different learning styles and different abilities to memorize. No question. And some have greater memories than others. It's just a picture. It's our diversity across this room. No question. At the same time, Psalm 19 says the Word is more precious than gold, than much pure gold.

So let me ask then, what if I were to tell you that I would give you a \$1,000.00 for every verse you can memorize between now and midnight tonight? You could learn to memorize really quick like. "*Jesus wept*" (John 11:35). A thousand bucks! "Be joyful always." We're just rolling now. Yes. Yes. And we would be so clever. We could find...We would pull together and we'd be Twittering all the easiest verses. I mean, we would memorize all day long, would we not? Do we believe this Word is more precious than gold then? So the question is what kind of value do we place on the Word? Remember it. As your pastor, I want to encourage you in every way possible to practice the spiritual discipline of scripture memorization, knowing that we have different abilities, but to make this...I am convinced that it radically changes our Christianity when His Word is soaked into our hearts and our minds. It changes everything.

It changes our prayer life, as we're praying according to His Word. It changes our temptations. Jesus tempted three times in Matthew 4. Every time what does He do, He

quotes from the Word, "It is written." Do you think Jesus had to do that, Jesus had to quote scripture in Matthew 4? No. Jesus was the kind of guy who could say anything He wanted and it would become what? Scripture. He was that good.

He talks and you got red letters written in your Bible. I mean, He had that kind of power, but He's showing us this Word...*"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"* (Ps. 119:11). Let this Word soak into you. Men, lead your families to memorize Scripture together. Single parents, lead your children to memorize Scripture. Students, memorize Scripture together. Do this. Do this. Hide it in your heart.

Remember it. Don't forget it. Remember it constantly. If we don't, if we don't, we walk out forgetting what we have heard. This is dangerous. I would even go so far as to say it's damning because we are convincing ourselves...And this is what he's talking about when he uses deception. James is saying, you think you're right before God because you've listened to the Word, but you forget what it said, and you're not putting it into practice. The reality is you're deceiving yourself and your religion is worthless.

So big deal Church at Brook Hills, you gather together for a long time on Sunday mornings to study the Word. The reality is if you're forgetting it and not putting it into practice, what is written over the picture, the frame of us is, "Deceived and damned." That's the picture. We've got to be careful to remember this Word. And we would be shocked...This is the whole picture. Put aside the world—moral filth, evil. Put it aside. Put aside all reality TV shows. Put aside this bit of time on the internet. Put aside a movie. You'd be shocked at what you can do, in the Word, to hide in your heart in the two hours that is spent on a movie. If we would just look at the Word like this. Men, men, I challenge you, I challenge you this fall to know this Word better than you know statistics of nineteen-year-old boys playing a game. Know this Word. Let it hide in your heart so that you talk about it with your sons and daughters all day long.

Obey the Word Wholeheartedly

Where you hide it on your hearts. It's on your minds. Doorpost of your house. Don't forget it. Hear the Word. Receive the Word humbly. Remember the Word constantly. And then obey the Word wholeheartedly. That's the third way we respond to the Word. We obey the Word wholeheartedly.

Verse 22 is really the theme verse of the entire Book of James. *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says"* (Jas. 1:22-23). And the bottom line is what James is saying is the Word invokes action. And if there is no action, then there has been no acceptance of the Word. If there's no action from the Word, there has been no acceptance of the Word. And the picture of this...Oh man, this goes right in the face of what we have created when it comes to Christianity today, this idea you can accept Jesus, but not obey Jesus. No.

You've not accepted anything if it's not coming to life in action. Now, obviously, none of us is perfect, but the picture is when you accept the Word of Jesus, when you receive Jesus humbly, His Word is planted in you and it is moving you to action. And you can tell the Word is in you by what's happening outside of you. And if there's nothing happening outside of us, then the question is, is there anything inside of us? Because the Word is powerful. Stop blaspheming the Word and say, "It's in me, but it's not doing anything." No this Word has power.

This is what God has promised in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. I'm going to put my Word in you, and it's going to change everything in your life. So as you accept it, you will apply it. That's

the picture. This sounds eerily similar to Jesus in Matthew 7, Sermon the Mount, which we've talked about. All kinds of illusions. But when Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who," what? "*Does the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matt. 7:21). That's why He closes out the whole Sermon on the Mount when He says, "*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock*" (Matt. 7:24-25).

Heard and applied. However, to those "*who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice*"—this is not talking to the pagan out here who doesn't even want to hear the words. This is the religious people who hear the words of God and do not put them into practice. "You're building your house on sand," Jesus says. When the "*rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash*" (Matt. 7:27).

Don't miss this ladies and gentleman. If your life is built on listening to the Words of Jesus alone, then your life will ultimately and eternally end in destruction. If your life is built only on Sunday after Sunday listening to the Words of Jesus and that's all it is, that's where it stops, then your life will ultimately and eternally end in destruction. James is saying there's another way, verse 25, "*The man who looks intently into*" – I love this language. We've talked about it. How he switches around. He doesn't say a word here. "*Into the perfect law that gives freedom*" (Jas. 1:25). Yes.

That phrase, "The perfect law that gives freedom"—He's not referring to Old Testament Mosaic Law. This is a law perfected in Christ, the Words of Christ and the truth of Christ that liberates and frees us. Now, this is where we talked about this last week. As soon as you start talking about obedience in contemporary Christianity, obedience to laws and commands, people throw up the hands, "Legalism" and they're running away. James is saying, no. You don't run from the Law. Run to the Law that brings freedom. It's what Psalm 119 tells us. We heard it last week from a sister who was baptized. "*I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free*" (Ps. 119:32). The beauty of it is this is where we do guard against legalism, because we realize it's not what we can muster up to try to obey the Law. It's the Word planted in us, the Spirit in us, that by the grace of God in us, moves us to follow the Law. But he doesn't move us to run from the Words of Christ. He moves us toward the commands of Christ in such a way that James would then say, looks intently in the perfect law, continue to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.

"That sounds like the blessing of God is conditional on obedience. Are you saying that God's blessing in my life is conditioned on my obedience?" I am not saying that. James is. The Bible is. Jesus does. We create this picture of Jesus as if He is not the sovereign King who deserves and demands total worship and obedience, as if obedience is optional because Jesus loves us just the way we are. Now, I in no way to undercut the grain of truth here, but His love for us is undeserved, and there's nothing we can do to deserve that. We don't live to earn the favor of God, but the reality is, Jesus said in John 15, "*You are my friends if you do what I command*" (John 15:14). If you do what I command. "*You are my friends if you do what I command.*"

John 15 He said, "If you obey my word, you will remain in my love" (John 15:10). Now the picture here, and the beauty of it...1 John 2, 1 John 2, he says, "If you claim to know Christ, you don't obey His commands, you're a liar and the truth is not in you" (1 John. 2:4). This is a strong language. So what does it mean? How do we put all this together? How do we

avoid legalism—thinking we're going to earn our way to favor, earn favor before God, earn our way to God and give ourselves...This is the beauty. Don't miss it. It's where all this comes together. When you saw back up in verse 21 and it said, "Humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you," did you catch that right there? Listen to this verse from James 1:21, "*Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.*" Salvation coming in James 1:21 by receiving. By receiving.

This is the picture. God, by His grace, puts His Word in our hearts, His Spirit in our hearts, all that we've seen. He moves us to obey so that salvation necessarily involves obedience, but it's obedience that's grounded in the grace and work of God and His Word in our hearts. And so now it's not what can we muster up to earn the favor of God. The reality is He's doing all the work, but it's playing out in this kind of action right here. And this is where we experience the blessing of God, when we receive the word humbly, plant it in us where we remember it constantly, what it is absorbing into our life and it's coming out and obeying it wholeheartedly.

This is in Psalm 1. It's the blessing of God upon a people who are walking by His grace in His Word for His glory. God may that be so. Obey the word wholeheartedly. One of the phrases that most concerns me as a pastor that I hear Christians say along these lines is, "What's most important is that I am willing to obey the Word." And, again, there's a grain of truth there because a willing heart, God will not despise. The picture is yes, God desires a willing heart that has surrendered to Him. No question. That honors Him in the same way that a listening heart honors Him. But God nowhere calls us to stop at being willing to obey Him. He calls us, commands us to obey Him. He doesn't say, "Be willing to help the poor." He says, "Help the poor." He doesn't say, "Be willing to share the gospel." He says, "Share the gospel." He doesn't say, "Be willing to turn from impurity and seek holiness." He says, "Be holy." So we have to be careful. We have to be careful not to hide in our lives behind a willingness to obey when, God has said, "Do it. Do what it says. Don't just listen. Do what it says. I've put my Word in you. I've planted it in you. I've put my Spirit in you to move you to accomplish it. I've called you to obey, I've command you to obey, so do it." This is the Christian life.

I have been praying this week, particularly burdened last night and this morning, because I am guessing that there are brothers and sisters around this room who have areas of your life that maybe for a day or two or three, maybe for weeks, maybe for months, maybe even years God has been telling you to do something in this particular area of your life. I don't know what that might be in your life. It could be an area of disobedience that you have just continued to give yourself to. And by the grace of God, I pray that His Spirit would awaken your heart this morning, open your eyes to say, "I need to obey God, and God has given me grace to obey Him, He's given me everything I need to obey Him."

Turn from that. Maybe it's an area of delayed obedience. Maybe it's something, a relationship at work or at home or some decision you need to make. It may be small, it may be huge. And I in no way want to encourage you just to run without thinking and avoid any godly council, anything like that, but I do want to encourage you if God has been speaking to you to let this morning be a marker in your life where you say, "Okay, I'm going to do it." I'd encourage you as a pastor to do it. You know what the Spirit of God has been saying to you according to His Word. We can get so stalled, so stagnant. "Oh, I'm not positive, not for sure. What will other people think? Is this really best?" And these are good questions to ask, but if we're not careful, they will stall us when it comes to obedience to the Word of God.

One of the books that had an impact on me when it comes to the house church in China, it's a book called *Back to Jerusalem* written by three Chinese pastors. And at the end they were talking about the difference, they called it, between believers and disciples. People who just say they believe in Christ and people who are really following Christ. And I think it's akin to hearers and doers. Listen to what they say, "True disciples are usually people that few understand. They are viewed as potentially unstable fanatics." That's good. Like let's do it. Fanatics. "Often the same governments that tolerate the existence of mere believers will stop at no ends to completely eradicate any disciples within their borders." You catch that? They're saying the government in China really does not care about people who are listening to the Word. People who are doing the Word, we got to get those folks in prison around the country.

Believers, listeners try to follow God, but their prayers and commitment are clouded by indecisiveness. If they ever hear the King's call to go somewhere and do something for the sake of the Kingdom, they feel they need extra encouragement before they can safely step out. "First let me check with my wife, my pastor, my boss and my mother-in-law to see if it's okay with them." These guys are like taking a little jab at us. "A believer always seeks assurances that nothing will go wrong if they step out for Jesus. Only when they are convinced that the coast is clear and no harm will befall them are they willing to take their first step."

Don't we so often find ourselves right there, worried that we're going to make the wrong decision? Here's the beauty: I want to encourage you, believers, brothers and sisters, Christ is in you. His Word is planted in you. As you abide in Him, His Spirit moves you. So continue to abide in Him and trust His goodness. Trust His grace, His leadership, His Word in you to lead you toward what is best. He wants obedience to happen in your life more than you do. He's going to lead you. "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight*" (Prov. 3:5-6).

This is the beauty of the Word planted in you, the Spirit planted in you. Take heart. Be encouraged by this. And that's when they say, disciples have a different attitude. In China many disciples beg God to give them just a little of His dynamite power. They pray, "Oh, God, if you will lend me just a little spiritual dynamite, I promise I will take it to the darkest area I can find, place it there, and pray you will send your fire from heaven to explode it." And God always does. This is how the gospel has spread so quickly in China. The gospel has spread with breath-taking speed throughout China not because a bunch of people are listening to the Word. It's spreading at breath-taking speed because a bunch of people are listening to the Word and obeying the Word. So what happens when we are a community of faith... We have to be careful for us as a church. We have to be careful, especially our size, because we can get stalled. We want to make sure everything's set. If we're not careful, we'll fall into Numbers 13 and 14 where we need a committee to decide whether or not we're going to trust God on this or that. And the reality is when God speaks, people obey. Period.

And this happens with individuals and families across this room are carrying this out in our lives. So what area or areas of your life has God been saying, "Do this," that you've not done? Maybe, maybe this morning God has brought you here for the first time to realize that you are deceiving yourself spiritually. And you may have only been here a time or two or you may have been in the church context all your life, but your Christianity has consisted in listening and hearing. And sure you do some things, you do the things that fit with your lifestyle and the things that line up with what you think is best, but when the Word confronts you, challenges you, convicts you, changes you, you put it aside. If that is the

case, then there is great need to look inside of your heart and ask the question, is the Word really planted there in you?

Religious people all throughout James' day and Jesus' day who were avid in their knowledge of the Word, and yet it was not planted in their hearts. So I ask you most importantly this morning, is the Word planted in your heart? Has the Word given you birth from the inside out? Have you had your eyes opened, your heart opened to the fact the supremely holy God of the universe looks upon your sin with wrath due toward it. And by His grace, sent His son Jesus Christ, God in flesh to die on a cross for your sin, in your place, rose from the grave in victory over that sin, ascended to heaven, and by His Spirit has opened your eyes to this reality such that you don't say, "Well, I believe in that," and your life doesn't change. That's not what this kind of gospel warrants. This kind of gospel warrants from you a radical surrender of your entire heart and life to His lordship to say, I trust you with everything I am.

Has that happened in your life? And if it has not, then I encourage you this morning, however young or old you might be, however long you've been in the church, do not be deceived anymore. Let His Word plant in your heart and change you from the inside out. It has eternal ramifications. And then when that Word is in you, to say, "Okay, my Christian life is not about listening and hearing. It's about obeying everything I've heard."

What I want to invite you to do is take the back of that note sheet, and over the next few moments, here's what I want to invite you to do. I want you to start by praying, and I want to invite you to pray and say, "God, what area or areas of my life have you been telling me to obey, to do this and I've not done it?"

It may be small, it may be big. I want to encourage you to write that out. And then begin to write out action steps for how you're going to begin to obey. But in your mind be very careful to realize this is not about what you can muster up, "Okay, I'm going to do better next time." This is about you trusting God by His Word and His Spirit to make that obedience a reality in your life. You need the grace of Christ. And so I want to encourage you to write that down on the back of that page and to pray through "How am I going to obey starting this afternoon? What do I need to do? I'm going to do it." I want to encourage you to write that out, and that'll be something that you can remember constantly throughout this time, your time in the Word this week between you and the Lord.

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