

The Inseparable Virtues of Hearing the Word and Doing What It Says

James 1:19-27

The Book of James #3

Not everyone who says to me “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 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 and waters rose but it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears the words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain came and the waters rose and it fell with a great crash.

My first experience on stage before a live audience occurred when the Junior High Chorus I sang in performed a rendition of the Soundtrack to the movie “Grease.” I wanted to sing “grease is the time, is the place, is the motion. Grease is the way we are feeling.” But I didn’t get to sing that one. I also wanted to sing “I got chills and they’re multiplying. And I’m losing control. Cause the power you’re supplying. It’s electrifying.” I didn’t get to sing that one either. I got to sing the one with the ridiculously hard to memorize lyrics instead: We go together like rama lama lama ka dinga da dinga dong. Remembered forever as shoo-bop sha wadda wadda yippity boom de boom. Chang chang changitty chang sha-bop. That’s the way it should be. Wah-oooh, yeah! We’re one of a kind like dip da-dip da-dip doo-wop da doo-bee doo. Our names are signed. Boogedy boogedy boogedy boogedy. Shooby doo-wop she-bop. Chang chang changitty chang sha-bop. We’ll always be like one, wa-wa-wa-one.

Life has a way of teaching us what things go together. Peanut Butter goes with Jelly. Macaroni goes with Cheese. Spaghetti goes with Meatballs. Corn beef goes with Cabbage. Today, I want to talk to you about two virtues that go together like “rama lama lama ka dinga da dinga dong.” They are the inseparable Christian virtues of listening and doing. “Inseparable” means “incapable of being disjoined from the other.” That’s a pretty important word to remember when thinking about listening and doing. Because from James’ perspective, it isn’t enough to be a hearer of the Word. We must also be doers. And busying our lives with spiritual activities and exercises without ever listening to the Lord and letting your words be few is inconsistent with the message of Christianity.

Here is why you need to listen this morning: the greatest lessons that God has for us in our lives right now aren’t abstract biblical ideas that exist somewhere in the sky by and by. Instead, they are simple to understand. They are black and white. They are coffee and tea. They are chocolate and vanilla. But they are extraordinarily difficult to stir in your soul and pour into your life’s cup because they are quite challenging to apply. And learning from God what it means to be a “hearer” and a “doer” is one of those lessons.

Turn with me to James 1:19-27. I skipped it intentionally last week because I wanted to save it for when the time is right in this series. And today is that day.

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ 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. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do. ²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and

faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Hearing the Word and Doing What It Says Requires:

1. A Pliable Temperament (19-21)

- **Granite vs Marble:** (1) Rock sculptors are amazing; (2) The most talented ones can make beauty from granite, like Mt. Rushmore; (3) But they prefer marble. Why? Marble is softer to quarry. (4) After the sculpture is finished, it hardens into the form the artist intended with time.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** To be a listener and doer of the Word, you must first be pliable and moldable, marble instead of granite. For following Jesus starts with listening.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: The Diaspora Shaking of the Fist** – (1) James writes to Jewish Christians “of the Diaspora” (2) After the Romans conquered Jerusalem, the Jews lost their land again; (3) The result was raging at (a) God and (b) Neighbor
- **The Progression:** (1) Quick to listen (only emotion “quick” in the Scriptures to react on is listening (in this case “what’s the message in the Diaspora); (2) Slow to speak (let your words be few...for many words mark the speech of a fool Ecc. 5:2); (3) Slow to become angry for anger doesn’t produce righteousness (you have to act wisely in light of it); (4) Humbly accept – Diaspora was a bitter pill to swallow.
- **App:** Noise nuisance; guard your Words; listen to His.

2. A Personal Reaction (22-25)

- **Caught Posing in Front of a Mirror in a Bathroom Restaurant:** (1) The bathroom mirror at Ruby Tuesday’s has seen a lot of poses from ole Derrick West over the years. (2) I like to go in there and flex in the mirror when no one else is in there. (3) I must warn you, though. (4) Because such an approach is prone to some strange moments when someone comes in during the middle of your pose. (5) It makes conversations real interesting.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** James equates being a doer of the Word with viewing the Word of God like a mirror. You read it to see the reflection of God so that you can emulate the image. It follows listening.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Acting on What You Hear** – (a) In negative example, James compares an apathetic listener as someone who looks at himself and then forgets. Dropping it from his/her mind. It’s listening without faith. It enters ear but doesn’t change the heart. (b) In positive example, describes someone who absorbs God’s Word. Hears with genuine faith. Wants to receive from God and do what he says. This person is blessed in life. The other’s curse is the curse of listening without faith.
- **App** – Greatest spiritual battle is the short distance the Word of God travels from the head to the heart.

3. A Proper Application (26)

- **One of the Worst Experiments in the History of the World:** (1) When European settlers in South Africa saw herds of zebras and a little light bulb went off to try to tame them. (2) They figured they looked and behaved like horses. So why not ride them? (3) It turned out that zebras are actually quite different from their cousins with the same long faces. (4). They found out the hard way that a zebra’s temperament is much more hostile. (5) They also freak out under stress. (6) Because the colonizers made the mistake of thinking they could tame zebras, they didn’t bring their horses with them. (7) And ended up walking without transportation.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The tongue is like a zebra. It’s nearly impossible to tame. But it absolutely must be. For according to James, the surest sign of useless religion is a tongue that behaves like a zebra.
- **Main Textual Emphasis:** (1) For James, the “taming of the tongue” is the sign of signs for someone who really knows Jesus as their Lord and Savior; (2) In this book, he calls it something that is dangerous when rudderless. Set on fire by hell when unbridled. And something that we praise God with and curse others. (3) For James, the fruit of someone who really knows the Lord is always control of the tongue. (4) Those

who can't control it or don't even think about it should reevaluate their standing before God For many say "Lord, Lord" and not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

- **App:** The first step of being a doer is being a tamer.

4. A Pure Religion (27)

- **The Joy of Watching Little League Basketball Games:** (1) Isn't found in looking to be the first to spot the next Michael Jordan or LeBron James. (2) Instead it is found in watching the kids who don't play as much as the others get into the game and make a shot when it counts. (3) Every single one of those kids looks up into the stands after they make their shot for a reason: to see if dad and mom noticed.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The type of religion that gets noticed by God has an outward component of helping those who cannot do anything for you and an inward component of keeping oneself unstained by the world.
- **Main Textual Emphasis:** God only considers two things profitable when it comes to religion: (a) Does it "plead the case of the orphan and widow?" // In the OT, the people of God were judged by how they treated those who they couldn't benefit from. (b) Does it produce interior holiness in your lives that makes you look less like the world and more like Jesus?
- **App:** - External things God looks for aren't in appearances, or saying Amen, or Ouch. It's how you treat those who you can't benefit from. Internally, it's setting apart Christ as Lord in decisions, in ethics, in private and public. Those are the only two things that matter before God. Period.