

FAITH THAT WORKS // James 1:19-27

James tells us in our passage today is that this, being doers of the word, is the pathway to spiritual growth, to maturity, to becoming like Jesus and doing the things that Jesus did. James gives us the pathway to becoming a person of significant impact—the type of person that makes a real tangible difference in the world, a person with a faith that works.

James 1:19-27, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

Now these seem like a few different subjects: anger, bridling your tongue, self-awareness, visiting orphans and widows, caring for people in need... and even though it may feel disjointed, James says these are all very connected.

PRIDE

James 1:19, “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

James says, be quick to listen, slow to speak... but you know what anger does? It makes us slow to listen, and quick to speak. James is saying, don’t be a quick-tempered person. Don’t blow up on people. Don’t lash out. Don’t cut people down with your words. But you know what this passage doesn’t say? It doesn’t say “don’t be angry.” Jesus got angry... Paul says in Eph 4.

Ephesian 4:26-27, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."

The bible teaches that there is a world of difference between productive anger and destructive anger. There's a righteous anger, and a sinful anger. There is a prideful anger, and a purposeful anger.

You know, Jesus got angry. All throughout the gospels, Jesus got angry when people were being hurt or led astray. He got angry at sin. He got angry when the Temple was turned into a marketplace to exploit the poor. He got angry when He saw injustice. He got angry when he saw the legalistic practices of the religious elite alienating people from His Father.

But the type of anger James is writing about here is born out of PRIDE, of total self-absorption. It's not caring or considering its impact on anyone else. Its only concern is SELF. Preservation of self. Anger that is born of pride is an anger that defends self at all costs... even if it means the destruction of others. It lashes out, it cuts down. It destroys. It is the antithesis of love. Even how God describes love....

1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing..."

What is the anger James is talking about? Slow to listen, quick to erupt on people. It's impatient, envious, arrogant, rude, controlling, irritable, resentful, contemptuous.

What's the solution?

Many people would say that the solution to anger is self-control. You just need to restrain your anger. You need to manage your anger. But James doesn't say that.

In light of all of this, he doesn't say stop being angry. He doesn't just control it or suppress it. James says, don't be angry, be humble. Don't be quick tempered. Be humble. Because the opposite of anger is not self-control. The opposite of the prideful anger James is talking about here is humility.

That's why James goes on to say...

James 1:21, "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

Receive with meekness. Be open, be receptive, be humble in regard to the word of God. Receive with humility, with the knowledge that God wants to teach us through His word. You can't learn anything when you've lost your temper. You can't hear. You can't receive. Which is why James says, be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to unrighteous anger.

But then He says, don't just hear the word, or receive the word...

PRACTICE THE WORD

James 1:22-25, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Matthew 7:24-27, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them..."

Jesus wants us to actually do something with what He teaches us!

Francis Chan has this great illustration: Often times what we do with Jesus teachings would be like me telling my daughter to go clean her room, and she comes back down an hour later. And I ask her, did you clean your room like I told you? And she says, "No, I didn't clean my room, but I heard what you said. You said, 'Go clean your room.' See, I'm really paying attention. I listened, I even memorized what you said and I can even say it in Greek! But no, I don't intend on doing what you said."

This is what we do with the teachings of Jesus. I didn't do anything with it, but I memorized what you said!

We could show up to church for our entire lifetime. We can binge all the sermons, all of the Christian content we want. We can complete all the bible reading plans, and attend all the bible studies, but it is not going to do a single thing in you, for you, or through you unless you put it into practice!

Matthew 7:26, "And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

We're all building something. We're all building on a foundation. And here in this house, in this church, we're not building on the whims of culture. We're not swayed by the fleeting and fickle opinions of men or the preferences of people. This church is being built upon the commands of Christ, the word of God, the way of Jesus.

One of the reasons many Christians are not changing is because we know what Jesus has commanded. We just don't want to do what He's said. We don't want to forgive. We don't want to sacrificially love our neighbors. We don't want to submit to Christ, we don't to practice spiritual disciplines, we don't want to press into community. We just want a customized Jesus that fits our desire and our will while we justify the very things Christ wants to chisel out of our lives.

Every single one of us in this room are compromising in both big and small ways every day. We make little compromises over time, little justifications over time that maybe isn't enslaving children, but maybe it's enslaving you.

Just like a fish is only free in water, we're only truly free to the degree that we refuse to compromise and we're living in alignment with his Word, doing what God made us to do, obeying Him in all things.

See there is such power in recognize that the more I obey Him, the more I become like Him. The more I become like Him, the freer I'll be.

PURE RELIGION

James 1:26-27, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Now, there are modern people who say the priority is the social issues. It's things like slavery, and taking care of the poor, the orphans, the widows, being a voice for the

voiceless, that's what really matters. But as far as you're concerned as an individual, you can live however you want. It doesn't really matter.

How you spend your money, how you deal with power and authority matters, but in the same breath, they'll say, *but you can do whatever you want to do sexually, it's your body. Personal holiness doesn't matter.* They'll say personal morality is an invented construct.

And on the other hand, there are those on the more traditional side who say, *no, the ONLY thing that matters is personal holiness. Personal morality is the priority. We don't even need to think about issues of compassion or justice in the world.*

You know what James says? It's both! The Pharisees were so concerned with personally holiness that they set up religious systems that exploited and oppressed people in the first century and Jesus constantly laid into them about it. At the same time, when Jesus would heal someone that was living in sin, he'd look at them and say, "go and sin no more." That's personal holiness.

James says that pure religion is both. It's addressing the issues like slavery, like foster care, supporting single mothers, walking with those who are struggling. It's compassion, and justice, and its keeping oneself unstained from the world. Some of us lean more toward compassion and justice, while others of us lean more toward personal holiness. Jesus taught both. And Jesus modeled both. And on the cross we see the perfect intersection of holiness and compassion. Of morality and justice.

3 Questions:

1. When do I find myself being quick-tempered, slow to listen, and quick to speak?
 - a. Watching the news? When running late? Stuck in traffic?
2. What is one area that God wants me to stop being a hearer only, and become a doer of the word? What change will I make today?
3. Between personal holiness and biblical justice, how might God want to grow me in both in this next season? Think in specific terms. How does God want to grow me to practice what James calls, "pure religion"?

