

James – Life After Faith
James 1:19-21
“Your Part of the Sermon”

1. THE KIND OF HEARING THE WORD DESERVES

- A. With a closed mouth
- B. With a calm mind

2. THE KIND OF HOLINESS THE WORD DEMANDS

- A. Who is responsible for this?
- B. What is removed by this?

3. THE KIND OF HEART THE WORD DELIVERS

- A. Where the word is sown
- B. Where the will is submitted

1. I read a story recently about a particular Sunday sermon that seemed to be running longer than usual. A little girl in the congregation grew impatient, and said to her mother, “Is it going into overtime?”

2. Her mother whispered back, “Yes, and if you don’t sit still, it’ll be sudden death!”

3. If you are faithful to church, in any given year, you will hear anywhere from 50 to 100 sermons. With that in mind, let me ask you, is your only role in all those sermons simply to sit still until the last “Amen” sounds, and you are free to go home?

4. Though you don’t preach the sermon, do you have a part in it? What is your responsibility whenever you hear the Word of God?

5. In James 1:18, Brother James told us that God by His grace, gave us new life through “the word of truth.”

6. In the next section of verses, the text before us now, James points us to the kind of response we should have to that “word of truth.”

7. At the close of verse 21, James encourages us to, “...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

8. Whether you are listening to a Sunday sermon, or reading your Bible in your private devotions, you play a part in how the Word of God will affect your life.

9. As Christians, we recognize the Bible to be more than just a book. It is the inspired Word of God.

10. Therefore, whenever it is read or preached, it deserves a special respect and regard. We must do our part to see that it accomplishes its purpose in our lives.

11. What is your part of the sermon? What are you to do when you hear the word of truth? Notice some things Brother James teaches us in this text. First of all, notice with me:

I. THE KIND OF HEARING THE WORD DESERVES

1. How many of you know that there is a difference in hearing and listening?
2. Wives, your husband may say, “I didn’t *hear* you,” however, it was not that the sound of your voice did not reach his ear canal. No, the problem is usually not with our ears, but our heads.
3. In verse 19, James reminds us that the Word of God deserves a special kind of hearing – one that involves listening.
4. James says, “*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*”
5. In this verse, James point us to the way in which we should listen to the Word of God. Notice a couple of things about the kind of hearing we should give to the Scriptures. First of all, we should listen:

A. With a closed mouth

1. The Jewish Rabbis used to say that “we have two ears and one tongue, and our tongue was put behind a wall of teeth to control it.”ⁱ
2. Surely the reason God gave us two ears and only one mouth was so that we would listen more than we would talk.
3. This is what James is getting at in verse 19, when he says, “...*let every man be slow to speak...*”
4. It is not that we are never to speak, but that are speech is to be slower than our hearing. We should listen first with a closed mouth.
5. There are some people who never listen to the Word of God because they are too busy talking themselves, either out loud, or in their own minds.
6. Listening to the Word of God requires a quiet focus on the things that God is saying through His Word.
7. An example of this is found in Nehemiah 8, where Ezra stood and read the Scriptures to the people gathered together in the street of Jerusalem.

8. Nehemiah 8:3 says, "...and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." We must listen with open ears and closed mouths.

9. Notice something further James gives us about the kind of hearing the Word deserves. We should listen not only with a closed mouth, but also:

B. With a calm mind

1. Look again at verse 19. James says, "*let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*" He goes on and adds in verse 20, "*For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*"

2. A.T. Robertson says that the picture painted in these verses is aimed at angry and argumentative speech against the Word of God.ⁱⁱ

3. Have you ever told someone what the Bible says only to have them get irritated with you? They say, "I know what the Bible says, but I don't really want to hear that right now."

4. That is the kind of agitated, argumentative spirit that James is confronting in this text.

5. There are some folks who will never give the right hearing to the Word of God simply because they don't like being told they are wrong.

6. Consequently, as James says in verse 20, the righteousness that God wants to produce in them will never come about because their angry spirit will prevent the seed from growing. Therefore, we must listen with a calm mind.

7. Former Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert once talked about all the people lined up daily outside of his office in Washington to complain about something. He said, "They call me the Speaker, but they really ought to call me the Listener."

8. Your first responsibility when it comes to the Word of God is to be "the Listener". James says, "*...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*"

9. That is how we are to hear the Word of God, with a closed mouth and a calm mind, listening to what God is trying to say.

10. Notice a second truth James gives us about our responsibility to the Word of God. He tells us not only *the kind of hearing the Word deserves*, but also secondly:

II. THE KIND OF HOLINESS THE WORD DEMANDS

1. As you move into verse 21, James informs you that your part of the sermon, your responsibility to the Word of God, not only involves how you listen, but also how you live.

2. James says in verse 21, *“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”*

3. Notice that command, *“...lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness...”* Why would James encourage us to deal with sin in our lives as a part of how we hear and receive the Word of God?

4. Well, just as you would not pour drinking water into a dirty garbage can, we should not, and cannot, receive the living water of the Word into a dirty life.

5. Truly receiving the Word of God demands a holiness of life. Notice a couple of things James teaches us about this holiness required by the Word. First of all, notice:

A. Who is responsible for this?

1. Again, James gives us a command to be carried out in verse 21. He says, *“...lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness...”*

2. In verse 18, we saw that the new birth and the work of regeneration was all of God’s doing. He took the initiative and responsibility in the work of redemption.

3. But who is responsible for this “laying apart” of sin that is commanded in verse 21? In answer to that question, note first of all that phrase, “lay apart”.

4. The phrase “lay apart” is translated from one word, and it literally means “to take something off”. It is used to describe someone removing a garment, or a snake shedding its skin.

5. With that being said, the word translated “lay apart” carries with it an “understood you”. In other words, the word indicates that this action is something we are to do ourselves.

6. It could literally be translated, “you having put away all filthiness.” In other words, there is a sense in which this holiness is our responsibility.

7. I read about a man who would always pray the same prayer in church. He would say, “O Lord...the cobwebs have come between us...Clear away the cobwebs...”

8. One day during his prayer, a brother called out, “O Lord God, kill the spider!”ⁱⁱⁱ

9. God gives us the power to be holy through His Holy Spirit. However, we must be willing to do away with the spiders of sin in our lives.

10. Notice something else about this holiness that James calls for. Notice not only who is responsible for this, but notice also:

B. What is removed by this?

1. Look again at verse 21. James urges us to take off, “...*all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness...*”

2. The language is a little obscure here, but notice that word “filthiness”. It is translated from a word that describes dirty, soiled garments.

3. It is interesting to note, however, that the word translated “filthiness” is from a compound of two Greek words that literally mean “ear wax”.

4. Think of that. James is talking about our hearing of the Word of God. The filthiness of sin can definitely clog up spiritual ears, and keep us from hearing what God says.

5. The phrase “superfluity of naughtiness” speaks of overflowing animosity and malice in our lives.

6. The idea is that when malice toward someone else is oozing out of our lives, we will be less likely to hear what God has to say to us.

7. In essence, James is saying that the sin in our lives must be removed in order for us to properly and peacefully hear the Word of God.

8. Many churches have started “casual” services in an effort to draw more people. Referring to dress and appearance, many churches are saying, “Come as you are.”

9. There is a sense in which James is saying to us, “Don’t come you as you are.” While what you wear is not all that important, how you live is.

10. James is telling us that before we hear and receive the Word of God - before you listen to a sermon - you should search your heart, and put away the sin that would hinder your hearing.

11. There is a holiness of life that is demanded by the Word of God. Your listening as well as your living matter in how you receive the Word of God.

12. Let's look at a third and final truth that James gives us with regard to your part of the sermon, and how you respond to the Word of truth.

13. Notice not only *the kind of hearing the Word deserves*, and *the kind of holiness the Word demands*, but notice also lastly:

III. THE KIND OF HEART THE WORD DELIVERS

1. I have chosen the wording of this last point, not just for the sake of alliteration, but because of what is clearly stated in verse 21.

2. The last phrase of the verse says, "*...receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*"

3. Now, remember, he opened verse 19 with the phrase, "*...my beloved brethren...*," indicating he was speaking to believers. So what does James mean when he says that the Word is able to "save your souls"?

4. Dr. Zodhiates, who went home to be with the Lord this past week, in his wonderful book on James, explains it this way. He says that this phrase, "save your souls" means "to keep safe, to keep alive."^{iv}

6. This is not the initial point of salvation - the moment we are converted - this is talking about the process of delivering our souls on a daily basis from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

7. The believer in Christ has been saved, and is being saved everyday. To achieve this daily process of salvation, we must have a certain kind of heart.

8. Notice what James teaches us about the kind of heart the Word delivers. First of all, it is a heart:

A. Where the word is sown

1. Look again at verse 21. James says, "*...receive with meekness the engrafted word...*" Notice the word "engrafted."

2. It is translated from a word that describes the implanting of a seed. In the case of the Word of God, it describes the way God plants His Word into our hearts.

3. James reminds us here that in order for the Word to have its saving effects upon our daily lives, the Spirit of God must communicate it beyond our ears, and plant it into the soil of our hearts.

4. This is a work of God. Only God can speak to our hearts! Only God can plant truth into our innermost being.

5. As I preach, I am scattering the precious seed of the Word of God. That seed is powerful, but it is only effective when the Spirit of God plants it into someone's heart.

6. James reminds us in this verse that it is possible to understand the Word with your head, but to fail to receive it with your heart.

7. Notice something further about the kind of heart that find deliverance through the Word. It is not only a heart where the Word is sown, but it is also a heart:

B. Where the will is submitted

1. The Holy Spirit is the one who implants the Word into our hearts, but we are responsible to see that we create a fertile soil in which that Word can take root.

2. That is why James says, "...receive with **meekness** the engrafted word..." Note that word "meekness."

3. Some translations render the word as "humbly" or "humbleness". The idea here is the opposite of the angry, argumentative spirit that James discussed in verse 19.

4. This type of heart comes to the Word of God with a submitted will, saying, "Whatever God says to me, I will receive and obey."

5. You see; God wants to implant His life-giving, soul-saving Word into your heart every time you hear it.

6. He wants to deliver your soul from the sinfulness and selfishness that will destroy it. That is His goal whenever you come under the sound of His Word.

7. However, you must be willing to submissively, and humbly receive God's Word in order for it to be effective in your life!

8. Imagine you visit your doctor tomorrow, and he tells you that you are very sick. He says there is a disease that is eating away at your body, and that unless you follow his orders, and take your prescribed medicines, you will surely die.

9. At that moment, you have the choice either to trust your doctor's knowledge and diagnosis, and receive with meekness the word he is giving to you, or to reject his diagnosis, and refuse to accept His instruction.

10. Whenever you hear the Word of God preached, the Great Physician speaks to you with life-giving instructions.

11. James says that we must be willing to submit our will to the surpassing knowledge of God, and receive with meekness His implanted Word.

1. In this text, you find that while you may never prepare and preach a sermon, but you will nonetheless have a part in every single sermon you hear.

2. When the Word of God is proclaimed to you, it is your part to listen closely, to see that you are living cleanly, and then to let Christ do His work through His Word in your life.

3. Through every sermon you ever hear, may your prayer be as young Samuel's, "*Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth* (1 Sam. 3:9)."

ⁱ Draper Jr., James T., James: Faith & Works in Balance, (Tyndale House, Wheaton, IL, 1981), p. 52

ⁱⁱ Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures in the New Testament – Vol. VI, (Broadman Press, Nashville, 1933), p. 21

ⁱⁱⁱ Zodhiates, Spiros, Faith, Love, Hope, (AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, 1985), p. 105

^{iv} Zodhiates, Spiros, p. 101