



Doing the Truth

James 1:19-27

Would you really want James to be *your* pastor?

James is an "in your face" pastor. He's talking to Christians who had to move from their homeland (Israel) because of persecution. Craig Blomberg, noted NT scholar, asserted that the letter of James is "probably the very first NT document and the first existing Christian writing of any kind of which we know" (Blomberg 2008, 35). We get a good picture of primitive Christianity when we read James and the picture is this: even though you are experiencing undeserved and inescapable suffering, you still have responsibilities! Grow up! When facing adverse circumstances, you must cling ever more tightly to the Faith, the "implanted word," the "law of liberty", the "royal law"—the Gospel! Do not seek refuge and relief in your suffering from the world. Do not accommodate the world! Instead, live out your faith commitment to God. Three distinct themes surface throughout the Letter of James: (1) Are you a hearer of the Word or a doer? (2) What is coming out of your mouth? (3) Will you help those who are helpless? Read the whole letter this week and note those questions.

How *receptive* are we to God's truth? (vv. 19-21)

To be sure, one who is quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger is one who is emotionally healthy in their relationships with others. At the same time, these words first deal with how I receptive I am to God's Word! When God's Word speaks to me in a way that challenges my assumptions, my wisdom, my experiences, my thinking: how do I respond? What's my reaction? Am I willing to believe God's Word only when it agrees with my way of thinking? Am I the kind of person who wants to worship a "Stepford God"? Pastor Soren Kierkegaard once said this about James 1:19-27,

To be alone with the Holy Scriptures! I dare not! When I turn up a passage in it, whatever comes to hand it catches me instantly, it questions me (indeed it is as if it were God Himself that questioned me), "Hast thou done what thou readest there?" And then, then . . . yes, then I am caught. So then it is action at once, or

instantly a humiliating admission. Oh, to be alone with the Holy Scriptures! And if thou art not, then thou art not reading the Holy Scriptures. God's Word, is an exceedingly dangerous book for me, and it is a domineering book. Give it a finger, and it takes the whole hand, give it the whole hand, and it takes the whole man, suddenly transforming perhaps my whole life on a huge scale.

Here's the issue: am I only willing to hear the truth when the truth is something I happen to like? Or agree with? Or am I willing to let this truth change me? How receptive am I to the Word of Truth?

How *responsive* are we with God's truth? (vv. 22-27)

Of course, it's one thing to hear truth and quite another to hear and do the truth! "No matter how important may be the mental assent to the Word, it has not been truly received until it is put into practice" (Moo 1985, 168). This "parable of the mirror" cleverly reminds us how silly it is to pay attention to the mirror without seeing *ourselves* in the mirror! Receiving the Word of God is not merely an intellectual feat; there's a moral decision that's involved. Will we put into play what God's Word is telling us? The Letter of James is not merely for the "twelve tribes" scattered; it's for the Christians who meet at Windsor Road!

James calls for three responses to God's Word: First, keep a tight reign on your tongue! Rather than complain, whine, or gripe about your undeserved suffering, James urges the fresh water of praise (3:9), humility (4:15), honesty (5:12), and prayer (5:13ff). "To bridle the tongue is to learn what is right, to say the right thing at the right time, and to say the right thing in the right way" (Scot McKnight).

Second, remember widows and orphans in their distress. In a patriarchal culture where property passed from male to male, widows and orphans were vulnerable. Christians were to remember such voiceless people. Speak for those who cannot speak for themselves!

Thirdly, keep yourself from the world's pollution. *World* in James does not refer to the physical planet, rather the spiritual environment. World in James refers to a system hell-bent on rebellion against the God of this universe. We live in this system but must not be of it. "James 4:1-6 tells us that friendship with the world is that war-mongering, division-creating anger at work that destroys the fabric of the messianic community" (Scot McKnight).

James insists that there is no greater freedom to be found than the freedom of submission to the "perfect law." I take this to mean the law of loving God and loving people. The Gospel is the good news of Jesus' love for His Father (first), and then the expression of such love by loving us, culminating at the Cross. Did you see the promise that comes with such love? It's a word which James heard from his brother, Jesus: "blessed." Do you want to be blessed?