

Faith Obeys

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[0:00] We're continuing in James. James is a brilliant book. Every time I read it, it breaks me. What I want you to do is in one minute, think about what we learned last week.

I told you there was one big thing that James talks about. Share it with your neighbor. If you weren't here last week, they'll teach you. If you're here with your wife and she wasn't here last week either, then turn around and try and find someone.

What is the big theme of James Go? Okay, if we swap papers, then we can mark each other's. James is the brother of Jesus and he writes a letter to his former church members who are scattered among the nations when they left Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen. And James exhorts them. This is the big theme. Don't be double-minded. Don't be one thing at church and another thing in the world. Don't be one thing on a Sunday and another thing during the week.

He says live a consistent Christian life. He says live the life of faith Sunday to Sunday. Don't be something different Monday through to Saturday.

[1:10] He tells them when trials come, trust God. Persevere in trials. Ask for wisdom. And perseverance will do its work. Ask God who gives wisdom without finding fault.

He promises that those who stand will receive the promised crown of life for all those that have loved God. He then in 12 to 18 goes on to tell them that you can't blame God for your bad decisions.

He says God never backs his people into a corner where sin is the only means of escape. Sinful decisions are made because of the evil desires that exist within us.

The reason we make bad choices is because of the badness, the evil cravings that exist on the inside. And he says desires lead to sin and sin leads to death.

And your alternative is to trust God who is good. Look at verse 17 of James 1. Every good and perfect gift is from above.

[2:22] Coming down from the father of the heavenly lights. He does not change like shifting sand. What a great verse. That instead of blaming God for our bad decisions, we trust God for his goodness.

He says God is not a whimsical provider. He's not neglectful or fickle. That he provides good things and he never changes. So he can always be trusted to provide good things.

Then verse 18 forms the bridge. This is the perfect example of God's goodness. Verse 18, he chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all creation.

This is James' thinking. If God is able to give us new birth through the word of God, if he's able to give us new life and adopted us into his family, then I think we could trust him for the day-to-day stuff.

That if he's able to regenerate us, adopt us, then I'm pretty sure we can trust him with tomorrow. And so we have great hope. And if he does not change, then his word does not change.

[3:42] He's not going to say something different tomorrow. What he says he means and what he means he says. And that's exactly what James is going to challenge us with this morning.

Let me give you the headline. Our attitude to the word of God reveals everything about our relationship with God. Your approach, your attitude to this book tells us everything, diagnoses everything about your relationship with God.

How you love this book is directly proportional to how you love God. Your devotion to this book mirrors your devotion to God. There's no quick, there's no sidetrack, there's no shortcut.

We know God more by reading his words. That's how he has principally revealed himself to us. Let me pray. Father God, take your word, plant it deep in us.

Father, do that. Give us such a love for this word that we might have a greater love for your son. Father, take your word and sear it on our hearts that we might love you more and live holy lives because of all that you tell us.

[5 : 01] We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Paul was saying that we spent a good amount of time as elders planning and strategizing and thinking about how we can move our church to greater strength, greater healthiness and making a greater impact in the world.

I spent a lot of time alone in my office, drawing diagrams, planning, plotting, strategizing. I mean, my whole office at the moment is just covered in whiteboards with scribbles all over it.

Looking for that silver bullet to bring strength and health and growth to our church. As members, trying to find that one thing that will change everything.

I've drawn endless diagrams. I've scoured the Bible read extensively, prayed continuously, and then repented of so much of my foolishness.

Because there are no magic bullets. There is no miracle medicine. God has clearly said that churches grow when the word of God does its work.

[6 : 18] God says churches grow when his people gather together to pray and seek the Lord, when they declare their absolute dependence on the God of the universe.

And God's church grows when God's people commit themselves to each other. That when word, prayer and fellowship come together in perfect congruence, then amazing things happen.

There is no shortcuts. There is no quick fix. And James is going to address that word ingredient in what we just read.

Because from the word flows everything else. As we love God's word, as we read God's word, as we learn about God from his word, we see the size of the God that we have.

And it is a joy to pray to him because he can be trusted. And when we read the Bible, we see the glory of church, how God is doing a new thing. God is putting his manifold wisdom on full display to the world in the church.

[7 : 24] We go, wow, I want to be part of that. When the word is doing its work, everything else flows from it. And there's unprecedented growth, unprecedented vitality and life when we read and obey and love this word.

Think back to this last week. What has been your relationship to your Bible? Has it been on the shelf gathering dust?

Has it been digging in and feasting heavily? Has it been keeping up a tokenistic daily devotion?

There's this great word. It's one of my favorite words. The word dilettante. Sounds like such a lovely word, like a gentle word.

It's a horrible thing to be called. To be a dilettante is to be a person who cultivates an area of interest, such as in the arts or, in our case, the Bible.

[8 : 35] To cultivate an area of interest, but without real commitment or a desire for knowledge. To just be playing.

To just be dipping one's toe in from time to time when it takes your fancy. We cannot be dilettantes dipping our toes into this word and expected to do its work in our lives and in our church.

James is so clear. That our attitude to God's word tells us everything about our attitude ultimately to God. God's word is to be the overarching foundational and absolute driving force in our lives, in our church, in our faith community.

This is the most powerful thing, force in all the universe. God created everything that we see and everything that we don't see through his words.

God created everything that we see and everything that we see and everything that we see and everything that we see. In our hands, we have the most powerful force in all the universe. And I wonder, do we treat it like that?

[9 : 48] If we would just be people who were not satisfied to live on simply bread. But we would live on every word ushered from the mouth of God.

James gives us three key principles and I pray that we would really take them on this week. Here's the first. Receive God's word humbly.

Receive God's word humbly. James is very clear in verse 19. There's that definition of a boring person, isn't there?

Someone who talks about themselves all the time when you really want to talk about yourself.

James says, how you listen reflects how you'll listen to God.

Everyone should be slow to speak and quick to listen. When you come to God's word, are you content to sit still and listen to his word?

[11 : 12] Not just rattling through that reading for the day, ticking the box and then getting on with all the other stuff that crowds into life. When we listen to God's word preached, is it just a casual listening for just slices of entertainment that will tickle your fancy for the rest of the day?

Or are we, no matter the ability of the preacher, we're saying, God, I want to squeeze every ounce out of this sermon that I possibly can. I want you to speak to me in a way that I cannot dismiss. Everyone should be quick to listen. That word quick is not just a going and not just a speed, but it's an earnestness and a readiness. It is a sitting on the edge of your seat saying, God, you promised that when your word is taught, your voice is heard.

And I want to hear your voice. Not just absorbing sermons, but grabbing them and gripping onto them and letting God's word change your life.

Notice what he says. Verse 21. And humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.

[12 : 26] So it's not just a readiness to listen, but it's an attitude of heart as we listen. Is there an arrogance or a humility?

Is there, I'm going to listen to this because I'm not sure this guy quite knows what he's doing, and the minute he says something wrong, I'm going to run up and tell him and correct it. Is it, oh, I've listened to you speak for half an hour, let me tell you all the things that I think.

Is there a humility in accepting the word planted in you? Do you come to God's word with defenses up? Do you come and go, actually, you can't teach me anything.

There is nothing that you can say, God, that will change the way I live. Will you humbly accept the word of God planted in you?

John Stott said, we must allow the word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency, and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior.

[13 : 26] When was the last time God's word changed you? Or have we become so comfortable and we just edit out the bits that are challenging?

God's word is to do his work in our lives. Everyone should be slow to get angry, quick to listen, slow to speak.

This word planted, he's not thinking, oh, it's spring and I should really go to home base and get some bedding plants. This word planted is built on the back of the entire Old Testament.

Listen to what it says in Jeremiah. The days are coming, declares the Lord. When I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah, it will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors 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.

This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time. I will put my law in their minds and write, literally plant it in their hearts.

[14 : 46] I will be their God and they will be my people as well. But God says after Jesus in the New Testament, the law is not just going to be an external thing that you can kind of pick up or put down, as was Israel's problem.

God says I'm going to write it on your hearts, I'm going to plant it in you. You are going to internalize it and absorb it. Do we allow this etching to take place?

Or do we respond with stonily blank hearts? Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you? Because our attitude to God's word tells us everything about our relationship with God. Humbly accepting it. Letting it do its work. Because it can save us. Receive God's word humbly, that's what he says first. Then he says remember God's word constantly.

You will find this hard to believe. But when I get out of bed in the morning, and I walk into the bathroom and I look at myself in the mirror, it is like gazing at prehistoric man.

[15 : 57] There is hair everywhere, dribble here, sleep all over my eyes, matted beard, I mean it's horrendous. And it's every day.

But thankfully the mirror is an incredible invention. Because it tells me what I look like. And enables me through hours of hair and makeup to look like this.

It shows us what we're like and it shows us what God is like. And then we look away and we go, well, that was fun, well it lasted. But it's not going to make any impact in my life.

Do we have a fleeting fascination with the things of God? No lasting fruit because it's not richly dwelling in our hearts.

If you go to Israel, all over the place you'll see Deuteronomy 6, 4. Return to Shema, the Lord. 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.

[17:02] These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. That word again. 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 door frames of your house and on your gates. Moses says, take this word and talk about it and remember it all the time.

When you lie down and when you get up and sit around the dinner table on your way to work, on your way home from work, internalize this word. Remember it always.

And it's not changed. Parents, teach your children about the Bible all the time. Make talking about Scripture an everyday reality in your homes.

Husbands and wives. Emmerdale is of no eternal significance. It really isn't. Discussing the plot line of who's doing what with who doesn't matter at all.

[18:08] But the book of Ephesians is for life and forever. So why not study that? You can spend your time sitting in a room, watching people sitting in a room as the latest reality TV floods our nation.

Or you can sit in a room and look into the eternal things of God that can do real work in our lives. Let this word dwell in our hearts richly.

Don't look into the mirror of it and walk away and get prosopagnosia where you can never understand what people look like. Where you can't differentiate faces.

James says, don't look at this word and then not be able to pick yourself out of an identity lineup. Because it makes no sense. I know what we all say.

I can't remember Scripture. I find Scripture memorization difficult. Well, that may be true. But I think it's nonsense.

[19:16] If I said, next week we're going to have a Scripture memorization contest, Carmen, for every Scripture verse you can quote verbatim, I'll give you 500 pounds. Jesus wept.

John 11, 35, 500 quid. Be joyful always. 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 16. 1 Thessalonians 5, 17. Pray continually.

1 Chronicles 1, 25. That is two grand. That is two grand in 14 words.

We would do it everything to remember these words. We would write it on the fridge. We would put it on the ceiling above our beds.

We would have biro all over our hands. We'd be listening to it on the bus. We'd even put it on the bathroom mirror, even though that might be difficult for some. And you know what?

[20:18] God says, this word is more precious than riches. This is not only the most powerful force in the universe, it is the most precious commodity in the universe.

So whether I give you 500 pounds or not, and I won't, still do it. Do it because when God's word is remembered and ruminated on and recited and discussed, it does its work.

Remember and act on God's word. Don't deceive yourselves. Do you see what it says? Don't deceive yourselves. But see what it says.

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, God's word brings freedom, and continues in it, not walking away, not forgetting what they've heard, but doing it, but doing it, they will be blessed in all they do.

Freedom and blessing comes from remembering God's word. Do everything that you can. Take notes, buy audio Bibles, get a good devotional guide.

[21:33] Talk about it all the time. The phrase look intently literally means a penetrating absorption. Absorb it.

Saturate yourself in it. God says this word of life, it is more fundamental than bread, it is more precious than gold, it is more tasty than honey.

And yet we have such a casualness to it that is revealing and rendering it unfruitful in our lives. Don't be a dilettante.

Our attitude to God's word tells us everything about our attitude to God. Lastly, obey God's word wholeheartedly.

Look at verse 22, it could be the entire theme of the whole book. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Just do it.

[22 : 32] If James was sponsored by Nike. Do what it says. If all our scripture reading, recitation, memorization, conversation, and investigation doesn't lead to wholehearted obedience, then we are deceived and our endeavors are worthless.

God is not going to test us on our Bible knowledge. He's not going to ask us if we can do the entire family tree of Abraham from Abraham down to Jesus.

He's not going to do it. He's going to test whether our attitude to God's word has made a real difference in our lives and whether we have been conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus in a response to his gospel.

All the Bible knowledge in the world can be utterly unprofitable if your searching of the scriptures doesn't enlarge your heart with a bigger vision of God and enlarge your heart for others and kindle your affections for the Lord Jesus.

God is not looking for knowledgeable theoreticians. He's looking for obedient protagonists. What does it look like?

[23 : 46] Well, verse 27. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this. To look after orphans and widows in their distress. Why widows and orphans?

Because they've got nothing to give. You're not doing for them so that they can give back in return. So shaped by the gospel that we'll do anything to make much of the Lord Jesus.

We'll care for those that have got no one else to care for. We'll enter into people's distress because we know what it is to have the Lord Jesus who entered into our distress and saved us from it.

Shaped by God's word to love others. When we see God's love for us in sending His Son to die on a cross, then we go, no one is unlovable.

If God can love me that much, then there's no one who is beyond the pale of love that God can generate in me. See, though, that it's not just social justice to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

[25 : 02] To live holy lives. To live lives that reflect and are conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. Dig into this word.

Love this word. Live this word. So Brunfield, it's the end of another sermon. We've got there. You didn't think we would, but we've got there.

The conclusion of another concentrated period where we have gathered around God's word and dug down together. The question is that James is asking, what do we do now?

What are we going to do on Monday morning as a result of what we've heard here? Are we going to respond like the man who looked at his face in the mirror and walked out of the bathroom and said, I've got no idea what I look like.

I couldn't even tell you where my ears are on my head. Or are we going to get up from here and put it into action to discuss it, to memorise, to meditate, to ruminate and to obey?

[26 : 19] Are we going to hear the challenge and obediently receive and remember God's word this week as we live it out? It is a virtual circle.

Read God's word, learn more about God, learn more about God, want to serve him more, want to serve him more, want to learn about him more. Learn about him more, want to serve him more, want to love him more.

They say that when you go running, if you go running long enough you start to really enjoy it. I've never got there. I've done like two weeks and then I go, I hate running. My sister runs marathons all the time.

She loves running. If she doesn't go running she gets more annoying than normal. Why not try it with God's word? If we really dig in we would get such an appetite that we'd just devour it.

It'd be like on a, we'd commit carbicide as we'd just eat the bread of life all the time. John Wesley wrote this and with this we'll finish. To candid and reasonable men I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart.

[27 : 29] I have thought I am a creature of a day passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God just hovering over the great gulf till a few moments hence I am no more seen.

I drop into an unchangeable eternity and therefore I want to know one thing the way to heaven how to land safe on that happy shore.

God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end he came from heaven he hath written it down in a book oh give me that book at any price give me the book of God I have it here is knowledge enough for me let me be homo unius libri a man of that one book here then I am far from the busy ways of men I sit down alone only God is here in his presence I open I read his book for this end to find the way to heaven.

this week I am going to send you a questionnaire it will be emailed out it will just ask you some very simple questions about what you have heard what you remember and what you are going to do about it it is anonymous no one is going to get a diploma but it will be really helpful and I hope really useful as we develop an attitude of receiving God's word humbly remembering God's word constantly and obeying God's word wholeheartedly let's pray together the psalmist writes I seek you with all my heart do not let me stray from your commands I have hidden your word in my heart that I may not sin against you praise be to you Lord teach me your decrees with my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways I delight in your decrees I will not neglect your word be good to your servant while I live that I may obey your word open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law Father God we don't want to be dilettantes Father God we want to be people like the psalmist in Psalm 119 so Lord would you open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your law and may we see your son with ever increasing clarity and may we love him with all that we are Father bless us and help us in Jesus name Amen Father G Father G O Father G Father G

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