

Where Listening And Doing Intersect

A sermon by Pr. David Johnson

A young farmer in North Dakota brought home a fancy barometer. In the days to follow, he watched it constantly. He hung it in a place of honor. But soon, after three days of predicted a "storm," while the sky was clear, he took it back and demanded his money back. On the way home, he and his wife were shocked to see evidence of a storm ten miles out. By the time they got home, they saw that their house had blown away. The furniture was in the trees, and the bathtub was some three blocks away in a pasture. Fortunately, the grandmother had believed the barometer. So when a dark cloud appeared on the horizon, she took the two small children and hid in the old, unused storm cellar. Her faith in the barometer kept them safe.

All too often, we approach the Word of God with the same skepticism as the farmer towards his barometer. We read portions and assess their productivity. But when we don't get the end result we want, we're tempted to scrap the whole thing. We listen to the voices of culture and decide that it "just doesn't work today." We listen to the whispers of the enemy who first asked, "Did God say?" and quickly answer, "I guess not." Our text for today from James 1, suggests a vastly different approach.

James 1:17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

James describes God in two ways – as both Good, and consistent. God is the source of all good (read perfect) things. In a world full of disappointments and deceptions, it is only our Father God who can be trusted to provide that which is good and perfect for His children. This same God who created the very universe that surrounds us (*calling it "very good"*), and provides the very brilliant lights of the heavens, also provides every good gift in life. And in those areas where the "good" is hard to find, we should stand on the certainty that He "causes all things to work together for good." (Rom. 8:28)

In addition to this, our perfect provider is also a God of consistency. He doesn't change or shift as even His creation will from time to time. The heavenly lights of sun, moon, and stars vary in effectiveness depending on the shifting of daily weather patterns and seasons. Our Father God is always at high noon, consistently poised to supply all that we need. (*see Mal 3:6; 1 John 1:5*)

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

God decided long ago, that His children would be "brought forth" (*produced; born-again*) by the transforming power of His Word. Oh, we deserve God's wrath and judgment, absolutely! But He has willed that we be "brought forth" (read birthed) by the miraculous power of

His Word. This is an Amazing Grace, indeed. And this is in sharp contrast to that which is "brought forth" or produced by our own lustful natures - *Death*.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

When we have been brought forth by God's Word, His desire is that we would be "firstfruits" among His creation. This isn't, or shouldn't be, a someday desire for God. We should stand as proof of His restorative power at the very moment of our transformation. At the moment our hearts are converted by the power of the Word, we are God's children, and therefore joint-heirs with all the saints in Christ. Our fruit may be small at that point, but it is none-the-less significant and refreshing.

James 1:19-20 {This} you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak {and} slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.



That's a meme Vicki shared recently on Facebook. And sadly, it's true. There is nothing that hinders the reception of a speaker's message quite like our flesh's ability to debate what's been said.

Human pride has a way of blocking our ability to humbly receive another person's views or instruction, especially if that message challenges one of our own closely held ideals. We begin formulating our responses even before the other has had the opportunity to finish their thought, or explain their observation. When the first sting of correction is felt, our flesh begins to rise up, our faces get flushed, our posture stiffens, and our voices turn edgy. Wrath arrives, and teachableness goes on vacation.

When this happens, the righteousness of God is blocked from the life of the recipient. As James writes, "*for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.*" The faucet of divine inspiration is closed off, when the ears and heart of the disciple are closed.

James 1:21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and {all} that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

As we listen to God's Word, we should also be aware of any filthiness (*moral dirt or defilement*) or wickedness (*depravity, naughtiness, malice, or malignity*) that might be lingering in our lives. The seed of God's Word can't grow, if the soil in which it was planted is rocky or full of weeds. Our loving heavenly Father, by His Spirit, implanted the Word in our hearts - and expects us to receive it, and not hinder its growth. We should receive God's Word with humility, allowing it to bear the wonderful fruit of salvation.

Now, it's at this point that we need a good reminder. This passage, as with all of James, is written from the

assumption that the reader is already a believer. James is not a book of evangelism, though it encourages each believer to live as one. You can't speak of fruit, unless the plant has already sprouted and grown to some degree. The unregenerate has neither the ability, nor the inclination, to "put aside" these things and humble themselves to God. Because of this, we see James press on with His divine instruction.

James 1:22-24 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for {once} he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

How often have you done it? You walk by the mirror in your bedroom (*or in the hallway*) for that last evaluation of your appearance - only to get down the hall and realize that you don't remember what you just looked like. That experience is exactly what this passage (*and others*) references as it relates to the Word of God.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

James says that a simple hearer is like that person who glances into the mirror and walks on without impact. There has been little to no change, because their appearance never really sunk in. The church is full of those who come, sometimes repeatedly, to the mirror of God's Word with a passing glance, with no lasting impact, for it never really penetrated their busy lives. I'm convinced that this is why God gives us spouses, and godly peers, to reflect to us what we are blind to see.

James 1:25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the {law} of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

You can't "Do" the Word, if you don't first "Study" (*look intently at*) the Word. You can't build the structure, if you don't read and understand the blue-prints. A committed believer must study the details of the Scriptures, see themselves, and revel in the amazing mercy of God in regeneration. They should walk away, acting on what they have just seen. Only then are they true Word-doers, disciples. And they will be blessed with freedom and liberty, both in this life and in the life to come. Not because of their accomplishments, but due to the transformation produced by God's Word in their lives.