

Mirror, Mirror James 1:22-25

In last week's message we considered how the new birth affects our talk and our walk. There should be a noticeable difference because of Christ. It begins with being a good listener. The next step is what we consider today, the need to act on what we hear. The easy part is in the listening, the hard part is in the doing. From that perspective, today's message in **James 1:22-25** will be particularly challenging because it's a call to practice what we hear. Once we hear it, we are left with a choice. Obey or don't obey. In **verse 22** I see two roads to consider.

I. TWO ROADS TO CONSIDER – v. 22

There has been and always will be only two roads, two paths to take. The first is the road of deception.

A. The Road Of Deception

“Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves.”

Deception is defined as the act of causing someone to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid. In the context of our verse, the deception is not from some other source or person, the deception comes from the person himself.

Over the past several years we have heard a lot about fake news and misinformation. Quite frankly it's been difficult to know really what is true and what is not. I have gotten to the point where I don't know what or who to believe because I feel like anything that is said serves only to deceive.

James says we deceive ourselves by thinking that being a good listener is all you need to do. Now don't get me wrong, when it comes to the Word, we need to be good listeners. In Scripture we are told to be quiet, to listen, to be still, to hear, to watch, to meditate and ponder on the Word of God.

As I have talked with folks who are still sheltering at home and don't have internet, they tell me who they are watching on TV to get fed from the Word. I'll tell them that person is a good substitute. Others

who have the internet are able to be a part of our 11:00 service on Facebook or may watch later in the week. We've had people outside our church join us online. Some are local to the Hartland area and others are listening from outside the state like Ohio and Florida. We hope more people come across our FB page or our website to hear the Word preached. So I'm grateful that people are joining us to hear the Word of God.

James isn't saying it's wrong to listen to the Word. As a matter of fact, we need to listen to the Word. **Psalm 119** is full of admonitions about the importance of the Word. But James is saying that we can deceive ourselves into thinking that all we need to do is hear it. We can listen to a great message, and I'm as guilty of this as the next person, be stirred in our gizzard, as my friend Uncle Johnnie used to say, get all full of goose bumps from what we hear without doing anything about it and James says that only serves to deceive us.

Just hearing a good sermon or participating in a good Bible study or reading a good non-fiction Christian book doesn't necessarily make us a good Christian or even help us grow in faith. We can nod our head, underline a verse in the Bible or some great thought in a book, but without doing anything that will affect our character to be more like Christ serves only to make us more knowledgeable.

Let me read something that Chuck Swindoll wrote that hits the mark pretty hard. It might even make you a bit uncomfortable. **“For many years in my life I was simply an ‘auditor,’ not an ‘actor’ – a ‘hearer,’ not a ‘doer’ of the Word. Though I take full responsibility for my former condition, it didn't help that I attended a church where the Bible was opened and dealt with like a textbook. I got so much information my ears could hardly stay together as my head swelled with all sorts of new truth that never made that all-important journey down to my heart and out into my hands. Sunday after Sunday the lectures from the pulpit would stack fact upon fact until I thought I knew it all.**

God had to get me out of that classroom Christianity to break the auditor mentality. And

that's just what He did. One man – a true mentor – was honest enough to look me in the eye and set me straight. 'Chuck, you know more truth than our whole group of Christians put together, but it sure doesn't show. That's called hypocrisy!' He got my attention.

If you have taken college courses, chances are someone was auditing the class. You sat there attentively listening to lectures, taking copious pages of notes, reading textbooks, preparing papers or short speeches, and cramming for exams because you were taking the course for credit. You invested financial resources and time outside the class as you studied. But not so the person auditing the class. He attended the class but never had to lift a pencil or take notes. He never had to read the textbook, write a paper, give a speech or take an exam. He didn't even have to pay for the course. All he had to do was show up and sit down.

Later on you find him talking with a friend who asked what he's been up to lately. He tells his friend that he's been taking a class on bio-mechanical engineering or something really impressive. All he's done is deceive himself and others into thinking something that isn't true. He heard the lectures but made no effort to put it into practice.

Is that the road we are on in this journey we call the Christian life? Do we think that hearing the Word of God preached every week, reading the Word of God every day, memorizing gobs of verses, filling out blanks in a Bible study notebook or reading every Christian book by our favorite author without doing anything about what we are reading or hearing will somehow translate into godly living? If so, we are deceiving ourselves. Now don't get me wrong, those things are essential and beneficial to spiritual growth, but hearing isn't enough. If that's the road we are on, it's the road of deception.

So James gives us another road to consider instead. It's the road of doing.

B. The Road Of Doing

“Do not merely listen to the Word, and so

deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

I don't think James could be any clearer or more direct. The command is really simple – do it.

What James says here is an imperative. It's a command. Its tense suggests do it right away and keep on doing it. The word “do” also implies that our effort isn't to be in some half-hearted manner where if it doesn't work out, we can stop, but rather give it our all, press forward or keep going.

Let me go back and finish Swindoll's letter, but let me warn you, it comes with a challenge to all of us. “As time passed, I began to see the Scriptures not as a textbook of information, arguments, and logical propositions to satisfy my intellectual curiosity but as the living Word of truth given by God to alter my attitudes and change my actions.

A lifetime of pastoral ministry has shown me that the church has too many 'auditors' of the Word. I see the old me in the faces of so many people in the pews. They have their notebooks packed full of notes, but they would be hard-pressed to show any significant changes they made based on those notes. I can no longer settle for that kind of Christianity. I want well-grounded faith, and I long for it to result in well-rounded living.”

Are we content to merely audit the Word or do we desire to act on what we hear? Are we just hearers or are we willing to get off the bench and be doers?

Back in the days when the Pistons won a couple of championships with Joe Dumars, Isaiah Thomas, John Sally, Dennis Rodman and Bill Lambier, the players sitting on the bench wore a rubber band on their wrist. If a player on the bench wasn't paying attention to the game, the player sitting next to him could snap the rubber band to get his head back in the game. They didn't want auditors on the bench content to watch the game from the sidelines, they needed players to be engaged as active participants even while sitting on the bench, ready to go in and fulfill their role for the team, to be doers.

As a benchwarmer, it's easy to get lost by watching the crowd and not pay attention. You can look

around at all the fans, think about where you're going after the game. Sure, you're on the team, you go through the warmups but if you're not engaged you have little to offer the team if you're called on.

I am genuinely encouraged when you walk out after a service and thank me for the message. It tells me you've been listening. That's great but my prayer is that it will make some difference in your life as you live out your faith by changing something about your character. On occasion one person will say to me "Good message, but you could have done better." It's meant in good fun and yes, I know I can do better. The question I want to ask myself is **what can I do better in my walk with Christ as a result of that message? How has it changed me? How am I more like Christ because of it? Am I doing the Word I just heard?** If I leave having only heard the Word without doing something with it then I have deceived myself.

This past week I spoke in chapel at David's school. I really enjoy going. I used the message I gave a couple weeks ago from our study on temptation. A few students stopped to thank me for speaking. Most were chatting with friends on the way to their next class. They were all very attentive, some even took notes. I think it's because they have to fill out a chapel journal for Bible class. But I don't want them to be just hearers of the Word, I want them to be doers of the Word. I hope that what I had to say made a difference, that they'll take to heart the challenge of temptation and choose to live for Christ by overcoming it.

When we listen to the Word of God, do what it says. In that way we demonstrate a genuine commitment to the Lord. Genuine faith always calls for sincere commitment and obedience.

John 14:15, 21

I John 5:2-3

It simply says that if we love the Lord we will do what He commands and doing His commands shows we love the Lord. **Matthew 7:24-27** says we are wise if we hear His Words and put them into practice and we are foolish if we don't.

Jesus told the story of a man who had two sons. It's found in **Matthew 21:28-31**. He asked one son to go out and do some work in the vineyard. 'Hey, the grape vines need pruning. I need you to go and take care of that today.' The son said 'no can do pops' or something like that. Maybe he was in the middle of something and couldn't get to it. Maybe he wasn't doing anything at all and simply didn't want to be bothered with it. Whatever it was, he told his Dad no. It says that later on he changed his mind and went out and did the work.

The father had another son and asked him to also go out and work in the vineyard. The son said 'sure thing Dad, I'll take care of it,' but then didn't go do the work he told his Dad he would. Maybe he was distracted by something else. We all do that from time to time. Someone asks us to do something and we say we will, only to get preoccupied doing something else and before we know it, we've forgotten all about it. This son got busy and forgot about the promise he made to his father. He heard, even agreed, but at the end of the day had failed to follow through and obey.

Jesus then asked his audience, of the two sons, which one did what the father asked. The answer is obvious. They both heard the message of the father. They both understood the message. There wasn't any misunderstanding. Each had a different initial response, but only one was a doer of the word.

There are only two roads to consider: the road of deception or the road of doing. **Which are you on?** Let me add that it's not like we can pick and choose which to do. I like this one, it looks easy or it looks easy today, but I'll forget about that one. I'm not sure I can do that or I'm not sure I want to do that. What we're really saying is that I won't do that.

I mentioned last week that we are studying *Impossible Commands* in our men's Bible study. Here are some of the commands we're told to obey, the ones we are to do, without hesitation, and without complaint.

Love God

Rejoice in the Lord (always)

Be perfect

Don't be afraid
 Love one another
 Give cheerfully
 Be completely humble
 Run away (I'm assuming it's run away from sin)

Here are several that aren't included in the book.
 Love your enemies
 Love your wife as Christ loved the church
 Do good to those who persecute you
 Forgive others
 They are all commands to do, not just nice commands to hear or suggestions to consider.

Are you a hearer or a doer?

Verse 22 gives us two roads to consider.

Verses 23-25 give us two results to consider.

II. TWO RESULTS TO CONSIDER – vs. 23-25

Depending on which road you take, there are outcomes that will result from your choice. The first one is in **verses 23-24** where we see his forgetfulness about the Word.

A. His Forgetfulness About the Word – vs. 23-24

Notice his irrationality.

1. His irrationality – v. 23a

“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says.”

Here is a person who listens to the Word of God. He hears the message, but he is an apathetic listener. Apathy is a lack of concern about they hear and translates into a lack of motivation to act as a result of what they hear. There is no response that moves them to action.

For those of you who have served in the military, it would be ridiculous to think that a superior officer having given you an order would accept your lack of motivation in doing what you were told to do. ‘I just don't feel like it today. How about you get someone else?’ That attitude won't fly. Hear and do

James says it seems irrational that someone who has heard the Word would not be motivated to obey it. He may be writing to these believers because he had

heard that some of them had given into this notion that just hearing the Word was good enough.

When God gave instructions to Moses to give to the Israelites, He didn't call them the 10 suggestions, He called them the 10 commandments because the expectation was for them to obey. So not only do we see his irrationality, we see his inattention.

2. His inattention – vs 23b-24

James uses a mirror to illustrate the message he wants to convey. In Biblical times a mirror wasn't made of glass with a reflective silver coating on the back that would cast an image of what was seen in the mirror. Their mirrors were made of highly polished brass or bronze. As you would expect, the image was dim, so the user would position the mirror to catch more light in order to provide a brighter reflection.

I'm going out on a limb here, but I'm guessing everyone of us looked in a mirror sometime this morning. It could have been while shaving or, yes, even brushing your teeth, combing your hair, putting on some makeup, tying and adjusting your tie. While driving your car today I'd bet my bottom dollar that you used your mirrors to back up or check a lane before passing a car. You may have even given one more glance in the mirror after you parked your car just before coming into church.

If we take a quick look at the **verse 23-24** we can get the impression that this person is just taking a glance as if passing by the mirror. But that's not the idea at all. The word **“look”** actually means taking a careful look at what you see in the mirror. You're actually spending some time going over what is reflected back at you. In the comparison, the person is taking a look at himself in the mirror and in this case the mirror he is looking into is the Word of God. The person who looks in the mirror and sees that his hair needs combing but walks away not doing anything about it is like the person who looks into the Word of God, sees something that needs to change to conform to the likeness of Christ and walks away having made no change. The tense suggests though that even though you look closely

at what is in the mirror, you are actually being careless about what you see.

So here is this person who comes along and looks into the mirror of God's Word. He even spends some time reading and reflecting on it in some careful study. He even contemplates what he should do with what he has heard and seen from God's Word. Yet he is described as someone who looks in a mirror, but after walking away from the mirror forgets what he has seen. He chooses to do nothing.

I can look in a mirror and see that I need to shave or that I have a big smudge on my cheek that I need to clean off but after turning away from the mirror, I forget all about the stubble or the dirt. That's the person who looks into God's Word but does nothing to change something he knows he should. He goes about his business and disregards what he has seen. The idea James conveys is chronic forgetfulness.

If I come into the sanctuary, sit down in my chair, open my Bible, hear the message, engage with the message, even sound off a few amens, but then walk out the door without changing my character in some way I am just like the person who looks in the mirror and doesn't change something needing to be changed about his physical appearance.

Our inattention to what we have heard, even though we have been given an accurate depiction of our character that needs some change through a careful and patient observation from the Word, only serves to deceive us if we forget what it revealed. Just as a mirror reflects our true nature, who we really are, so God's word does not hide anything about our spiritual need and the need for change in character. The sad truth of the matter, as James describes here, is that this person chooses not to change in any way.

The first result is his forgetfulness about the Word. The second result is his freedom through the Word.

B. His Freedom Through the Word – v. 25

We notice right away that there is a contrast between the person in **verses 23-24** and **verse 25**.

Verse 25 says he is careful about his attention to the

Word.

1. He is careful about his attention to the Word

“But the man who looks intently”

The word “**look**” in this verse literally means to stoop in order to have a good look. It's the same word used in **John 20:4-8** when Peter and John run to the tomb after they were told Jesus was gone. It says that John arrived first, and when he got there, it says he bent over and looked or stooped to get a good look. After Peter went in, he went in and what he saw made him believe in the resurrection.

Sometimes when I want a closer look at something on my face, I'll lean in closer to the mirror. **When you look into the mirror of God's Word, are you leaning in, stooping to get a better look? How intently are you looking?**

Chuck Swindoll says this person “**thinks deeply, obeys willingly, responding positively, abiding by its principles.**”

This person is the doer of the Word because God's Word demands action.

When we read history, it demands nothing of its reader, except that those who don't learn from it are doomed to repeat it.

Literature can be entertaining but has no expectations of its reader. Anything you may learn from a piece of fiction may be merely coincidental. You can even read a piece of non-fiction without having to do anything.

A do-it-yourself book can help you learn how to fix some plumbing or how to knit a scarf, but it doesn't demand that you do either.

You can read a cookbook but there is no command for you to cook or bake.

But the Bible demands action. It commands doing.

J. Vernon McGee says that “**The leatherbound Bible needs shoe leather to go with it.**”

If you are a swift hearer, you will be a swift doer. The man who looks intently is careful about his attention to the Word with an intention to do it.

Second, this man is continuous in his action through the Word.

2. He is continuous in his action through the Word

“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this.”

That word **“continue”** means to abide by or to live by. **Colossians 3:16** says that we are to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly. It is to be at home in us. So if we live in His Word after having taken a look at it, we will receive freedom.

Jesus explained it this in **John 8:31-32** **“To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching (the word hold refers to the continuous action of clinging to it every day), you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and truth will set you free.’”**

When we hold to the truth, that truth will set us free from sin because that truth reveals the salvation we need from sin that can only come through Christ. That truth will set us free from being a slave to sin, that we don't have to obey the old nature because we have been set free from it.

John Phillips writes **“James saw the law as perfect, something designed by a benevolent God to bring liberty.”**

The Pharisees took the 613 laws from the Old Testament and added thousands of additional laws that became too heavy a burden for people to follow. Jesus condemned them by saying they made Laws even they couldn't keep.

When we continuously obey God's Word there is freedom and peace.

In a sequel to the *Mutiny on the Bounty*, the authors tell the story of the settlement of a few mutineers, some native men and some women on Pitcairn Island. Due to a lack of law and no one to enforce it, the small settlement descended into utter chaos. Drunken brawls and immorality of all kinds were

rampant. Fearing for their lives, the women built a fort and barricaded themselves inside. Then someone found a copy of the Bible and they began to read it and live by it. After years of debauchery, they settled down to live new lives set free by ‘the perfect law of liberty.’ A new generation rose up living by the Word of God as their rule of life.

If our nation does not turn and begin to live by the perfect law of God that brings freedom, the bill that was passed this week in the House will be yet one more step toward utter chaos in our culture. The person who hears the Word and does it, is the person engaged in continuous action of obeying it and that person is blessed. The person who finds freedom through the Word is the person who is contented in his attitude about the Word. He is blessed. He is happy who lives in obedience to what he hears and then does.

3. He is contented in his attitude about the Word

“But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.”

There is a peace within the person who knows and then obeys what he hears. The person who takes the time to look at the mirror of God's Word and from the looking accurately evaluates his life based on what he sees and then acts accordingly to change, demonstrates that he has the right spiritual attitude, the desire to become more like Christ each day. He loves God's Word and is happy to obey it.

So are you a doer of the Word or just a hearer?