

We are going to be in the first chapter of the book of James this morning. James 1:19-27.

- It's actually really cool that we are in the book of James this morning
 - James holds a really unique place in the context of the New Testament, it's unique in its emphasis and in it's literary form
 - Like proverbs, James is wisdom literature. If you were to go through and read the whole book, you would undoubtedly see and feel the consistency of these two books in how they read
 - But as similar as it is to Proverbs, there is also a large and glaring difference
 - Proverbs was written for God's people before the events of Jesus, and James was written after
 - This is significant, because as we read our Bibles, at the center of all of our reading should be the gospel and Jesus
 - The OT points forward to Jesus and the NT point back to the cross
 - So what Proverbs does in pointing forward toward wisdom, the value of knowing and fearing God, the benefits of Godly wisdom, how to attain this wisdom;
 - James does in pointing back, and in speaking to churches to Christians, describing what it is like to have already received the wisdom of God in Jesus, and now to live out of this wisdom

I can almost guarantee that nearly if not everyone in this room has seen, binge watched, or been somehow intrigued by a cop show on tv. One of these police procedurals. Maybe you've read crime novels.

- Those are those tv shows like Law and Order, or CSI, NCIS, shows with version in like 19 different cities
 - All of these shows really have a basic premise, crime is committed and they take us on this journey of discovery as we learn the facts in a case and gather evidence, and by the end we get a more complete picture of some kind of heist or assault or crime or something
 - The cornerstone of these shows is the idea that evidence and fact craft the narrative
 - And the show follows the evidence scene by scene, and the picture of reality become clearer and clearer as the story drives on and the narrative is driven by the evidence that is left behind
- Throughout the book of James, his emphasis is on evidence, what is left behind
 - The question James asks with his whole letter: What kind of evidence does your life leave behind?
 - Evidence that you love Jesus, that you are seeking his glory and flourishing of his creatures?
 - Or evidence that you're aiming at something else, something less meaningful something worthless?
- The type of evidence that the author James is going to talk about in this text this morning, is a Christians relationship to God's word

Following Jesus means knowing and doing God's word

- James is going to show us that real Christ followers are men and women who love and cherish God's word
- We are going to see this in two points tonight
 - **1. Christians Receive the Word with Humility**
 - **2. Christians Do the Word with Consistency**
- The final part of chapter 1 will be James giving us three examples, three applications of what it will look like, for a Christian to receive and do God's word.
 - In other words, three pieces of evidence that you are a Christian

James 1:19-21

1. Christians Receive the Word with humility

- Right of the bat we see two things in this paragraph
 - An exhortation and warning about anger
 - Calling the anger of man filthy and wicked and unrighteous before God
 - And the second is an encouragement to receive, to listen to God's word with humility
 - Why the contrast between human anger, and how a person listens to God's word?
 - I think the contrast hinges on the idea of authority
- Almost always, anger is accompanied by an indignant and self-justified pride, whether internal or external
 - Unrighteous, human anger is always a matter of perception, someone or someones offend your perception of what should or should not be
 - You were offended, your sensibilities and judgements were offended by what someone else did or didn't do
 - Your kingdom was assaulted by a word or action, your rights and concerns were at risk, and what accompanies that anger is often the pride of knowing you are in the right and they are in the wrong
- This church that James is writing to is existing centuries before Christianity becomes normalized in the ancient world
 - Somewhere around a decade or two after Jesus, the gospel is exploding
 - People are coming to know Jesus, their lives are changing, their priorities are changing, their identities are changing
 - And the world around them was changing in response
 - You see, the world didn't like Christians
 - They didn't like a religion worshipping a dead guy they claimed was alive, they didn't like the challenge to their authority, the religious people didn't like what they saw as the abandonment of their tradition for this heretic Jesus

- From all sides these new Christians were being persecuted, arrested, beaten, abused, shops shut down, and even killed

- The world these Christians faced was harsh, brutal, and profoundly offensive

- James is writing to the Christians at the end of that persecution, but look what he says about it

James 1:2-3, 12

- In the face of such atrocities, anger and bitterness and resentment and rage would have been reasonable
 - I mean think about how we react to our children disobeying
 - Think about how we react to the ideology of a different political party
 - Think about how we react to someone cutting you off on reserve street bridge
- If there was justification for anger, it most assuredly is not for you and I in our 21st century pettiness, but in the systematic murder and abuse of the early church, or even in some roman guards taking the messiah jesus away on false charges, so you grab a sword and angrily swing it at those soldiers
 - And yet, Jesus said put away the sword, and James says put away anger, put away your witty quips and remarks, be slow to speak and slow to become angry, put away the pride that compels it, and instead approach the Word of God, and approach it with humility
- There is such a temptation to craft for ourselves what a right and wrong response is to the world around us
 - After all, we are the ones who experience it all
 - We are the ones who experience the pain and the suffering and the hard of life
 - So we act with righteous indignation at the world that has wronged us and those that have offended us

James 1:20-21

- Our often anger filled responses to the world around us are exactly the kind of evidence that James is saying shouldn't exist in a Christians life
 - On the other hand, what a christian should leave behind is a legacy of meek humility as we consider our circumstances not in light of what offends me, but in light of reality as shaped by God and the gospel of Jesus
- The thrust of this first part of our text is to remove our own experiences and feelings as an authority to evaluate a response to our circumstances, and instead look to God's word for wisdom and authority on how to interact and respond to our circumstances
 - Too often, as Jeremiah tells us, our hearts are deceitful, and self-centered, and if our sensibilities are our guides, they will lead us down a path of filthiness and rampant wickedness, not righteousness before God
- James exhorts Christians listen to and receive the word of God with humility and meek heart
 - Evidence of a life captured by the gospel of Jesus is one who receives the word of God with humility and meekness despite how counter that may be to the rebellion that wars within us

- God's word, the primary way God has communicated to humans, it isn't limited by the scope of human experience
 - It is the perfect and timeless word of God that reaches beyond the brokenness of our circumstances and into eternity
- So receive with humility the word that God has given to save your soul from the heartache of figuring it out on your own, and from the eternal consequences of never figuring it out
- For you and I what does this mean?
 - For you and I, that means reading it
 - Not letting it collect dust on your desk or bookshelf
 - Reading it, using it, weathering it, wrinkling the pages from reading and rereading, not wrinkling as it sits for six months in the backseat of your car as the sun blasts it through the windows
 - Read it. Listen to it.
 - Where it offends you, where it rubs you the wrong way, be humble to understand it
- But merely reading isn't all
 - After all, what is belief and faith without it shaping what you do
 - We call that hypocrisy, and we hate in 2020, millennials and gen-z ers really hate it

James 1:22-25

2. Christians Do the Word with Consistency

- Have you ever heard the story of Narcissus?
 - Ancient myth about a dood who couldn't get enough of himself
 - He's a young man, a really good looking young man, and he has all these men and women after him, after his love and affection, a real Chris Hemsworth looking dood
 - But Narcissus had never seen a reflection of himself, no mirror, no real clear image of himself
 - Until one day he's walking by a bank of a very still lake, and catches a glimpse of himself in the water, and he's just enamored by himself
 - He's looking upon his own face and he can't look away
 - Eventually he becomes so obsessed by his own image, he realizes that he will never be able to have the love of someone so beautiful
 - He is so overcome with grief that he dies on the bank of that lake
 - And as the greek myth goes, Narcissus is still admiring himself in the underworld, unable to take his eyes off his own reflection
 - This story is where we get the word Narcissism

- He was so obsessed with himself, that he couldn't look anywhere outside of himself for beauty or satisfaction or love or direction
 - He was so consumed by his own beauty that nothing else could compel him to look away from the reflection
- The simile here James uses is similar in principle
- A man looks into a mirror and sees only himself
 - But rather than being captivated by the beauty he sees, he looks, walks away, just forgets himself
 - Forgets what he looks like, totally uncompelled, no defining features, no identity, nothing memorable
 - Rather than seeing beauty in himself like Narcissus, this man sees Nothing worth remembering, nothing so important that he need remember it
 - What a ridiculous idea that we would forget what we ourselves look like...
 - That after intently, that's the word, after intently examining my bearded, balding, beautiful head in a mirror, that I would forget that beautiful bearded balding head
- How silly is it then, that we would claim conversion by the gospel of Jesus, study our bibles with intensity and vigor, and yet return the doldrums of life unmoved and unchanged by the word and the gospel
 - Again, how much do we hate hypocrites right?
 - Then why are we often so satisfied, or content to see one in the mirror?
- James makes the argument:
 - What do you see, when you look at this book?
 - A tome of ancient wisdom? A book of morals and ethics? A story of some old dead guys with some pithy things to teach us? A textbook to be studied and digested? A theology to be learned and internalized?
 - All of those things may be true about this...
 - But more than any of those oversimplifications, this is revelation, the communication of God to humanity, and in it is the glorious law of God made perfect and fulfilled by his Son Jesus! The gospel of Jesus that is able to save our souls!
 - Do you realize that God, the designer and creator of the universe, communicated to you, what is best for you?! What is good for you. What will give you happiness, and joy, and contentment?
 - God has given to you the word that you may believe and internalize it, yes and Amen!
 - But God has also given it to you that that belief and internalizing might shape what you do in this life, and you how you do in this life, that would bring glory to his name and joy to your soul!
- With humility a Christian receives the word of God, reads it, consumes it, thinks on it; and with consistency a Christian obeys the word, conforms to it, does it

- By God's glorious grace, he doesn't leave us hanging without help in what that looks like, he doesn't leave the doing of God's word an ambiguous uncertainty
- The last part of our text is what that doing actually looks like.
 - And James gives us three examples of application for receiving and doing God's word. He sums it up in three points of application.
 - And actually, if you were to go and read the rest of the letter of James, these three points of application, are a preview of what James is going to emphasize the rest of his letter

1. Watching our speech

James 1:26

- Speech and the tongue are themes throughout the whole Bible
 - There are dozens of commands and instructions from God on speaking in ways that honor him and love people
 - Speaking in ways that reflect the character and goodness of God

Psalm 34:13 "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit."

Ephesians 4:29 "29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

- Doing the word means watching how you speak
 - The tone you use with whom, the vocabulary and words you use also with the wisdom to know who it is your speaking to
- Later in this letter James talks about speech, the power of it to build up and tear down

James 3:5-6

- If you've experienced the harsh words of a friend or loved one, you have experienced that, that fire
 - And yet we are so foolish to not heed his word earlier in our text, and rather than slow to speak, we are quick with our words and often set fire to the relationships around us
- But it's not just the effect that our words have that matters here, It's not just that they can be received poorly, but the heart and intent of our speech

Luke 6:45 "45 The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Proverbs 15:28 "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."

- Jesus in Luke, and Solomon in Proverbs are both making the same assertion that our speech directly reflects the character and content of our heart
 - Both making the point that the evidence of our speech points to a deeper heart reality
- And if you think about it, our speaking, is a direct way that we reflect God as image bearers
 - This text makes clear the importance of God's word

- How God has spoken to his people, how God has communicated to his people
- One of the kindest most generous acts that God has ever done is speak to us, communicate to us, through this
- The primary way you and I communicate with each other is with our words
 - Yet another way to say that the externality of our speech points to something deeper
 - evidence of either a heart faithfully reflecting the character of God, or a heart dictated and moved by a prideful self-exaltation taking cues not from God's word as authority but from its deceitful self
- Your Speech matters
 - It's one of those truth we read, that we nod along to, of course we agree, it's all over the word
 - But today when I go watch football and am tracking my fantasy team, I will inevitably call some guy I don't know on some team an fool for not performing well enough for me
 - Leaving evidence behind, through my speech, of what I really value: in this case the pride of being right and knowing more about football and statistics than the people I play with
 - When you are harsh with your wife, when you speak to your kids in anger, when you mock a friend, with all of it you are leaving evidence behind that points to a reality inside of your soul

2. Loving the Weak

James 1:27a

- This is one of the wood sign verses
- One of the verses in the Bible that everyone agrees with, and not like we do with speech where we roll our eyes and say yes dad, but this is one of the ones we get passionate about
 - Loving the poor and needy, caring for widows and orphans, the most vulnerable and the most oppressed
 - This isn't just part of our Christian culture, this is part of the cultural ethos of our generation
 - When people that aren't Christians make allusions to the faith, it's always Jesus and how he cared for the poor, the weak and the oppressed
- I think there is a profound reason, that this resonates so deeply with people: because it's the gospel
 - Jesus, left the privilege of power and divine existence with God the father, and entered the oppressive experience of humanity, to live perfectly, only to die the death we deserved not the eternity he deserved
 - Then, offering it to the weakest, the vilest, the poor, Jesus offered to the oppressed a gospel that would change not their circumstances, but their eternity
 - We love these stories because built into us is the need for this story to be our reality!

- Time for some self-assessment, is this a normative part of your experience as a Christian?
 - Do you look behind you and see a trail of evidence of you sacrificing your time, giving your money, putting in effort to help your neighbor when they need it?
 - Have you invested in serving those in our community that have nothing to offer you?
- Doing the word means doing the second greatest commandment, another application of doing directly from the mouth of Jesus

Matthew 22:36-40 “36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Luke 4:18 ““The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

- Practically, this makes sense
 - Those with the least, those with the most need, in most broken of circumstances can see so much more clearly their need for saving than those that have everything
 - How many of us were saved by God when we were at our most broken and our weakest?
 - I think one of the areas of doing that we struggle with as the 21st century church is our evangelism
 - I think that struggle is directly tied to our interactions, or rather lack of interactions with the weak, broken, and oppressed in our city and our communities
 - Those with the most need and most hurt and most pain, have the most to gain by hearing and believing the gospel of Jesus
 - But we are too often too busy in our affluent circles of wealth and privilege to notice much less love these people
 - While this application of doing, of love and mercy and care may be the most palatable of these three, and the most culturally celebrated, it could very well be the one we struggle to find evidence of the most
 - I say all of this from a place of conviction, I am one of the worst offenders
 - But nonetheless it remains true that pure religion, pure application of love towards others in need, reflects so clearly the love Jesus had for us as Christians
 - Unlovable creatures with little or nothing to offer the God of glory, yet he would choose to adopt and love us and so we should choose to adopt and love those with nothing to offer us

3. Not Conforming to Culture

James 1:27

- Of the three, this one hits a little awkward doesn't it
 - I do speak from the overly sensitive sensibilities of a millennial, but I could feel a reaction inside my own heart when I read this for the first time
 - As if I needed to make an excuse for James and what he is saying here
 - What a foolish reaction!
 - We opened up by encouraging each other to receive with humility the word of God, not make excuses for it
- To understand this well, we need to remember who these people are: they are persecuted Christians
 - How tempting would it be, at the prospect of imprisonment, violence, the loss of your business or job, at the prospect of murder, how tempting would it be to put on a facade of "not Christian"
 - To avoid the hurt, the pain, the suffering, the persecution, how easy would it be to avoid conversations about religion and faith at you kids little league games or in conversations at work because of some fear that people would see or treat you differently

Romans 12:2 "2 Do not be conformed to this world,^[c] but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 8:29 "29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."

- Being a Christian means being conformed to the image of Jesus, not the image of your peers, celebrities or influencers
 - Unstained means unaffected, unstained means unphased or free from
 - Consider again the context of the people he's writing to? What is he urging them to be unstained by?
 - Their circumstances, their persecution, the easy answers to their difficult situations, the excuses that free one up to not do the word
 - James urge with the word unstained just means apply *God's* truth to your life
 - God's truth shapes me, not my truth, not my identity groups, not my cultural truth, not what's easiest right now, the truth of God in his word shapes me
 - His unchanging, perfect and beautiful word
 - The word you receive with meekness and have seen as perfect and beautiful

- These three characteristics are the pieces of evidence that the CSI's, the detectives, and the lawyers uncover that should all build the narrative of a life lived to glory of God

James 1:22, 26

- It can be easy to call yourself a Christian
 - Honestly in this country for the last two and a half centuries it's been advantageous to call yourself a Christian
 - If you grew up in the context of church, private school, Christian friends like I did, it's very easy to assume the mantle and label of Christian
 - This text makes clear that Christians are distinct, not just in what they claim or call themselves, but in how they live, Christians live differently
 - To love Jesus, to truly love Jesus and cherish the gospel mean living a pattern of life that doesn't look like the rest of the world, that reflects the character of God in your speech and how you treat others, that reflects a care for the words and revelation of God in the Bible
- I want to leave you, with what James is leaving in the tone of this text: a warning
 - Do not think you are something that you are not, because the only person you are fooling is yourself
 - If there isn't a pattern of following Jesus in your life, if all that marks you as a Christian is the ritual of Christian practice and not a changed life, I implore you to examine your life
 - Do you see evidence of someone that loves Jesus above all?
 - Do you see evidence of someone that humbly trust God's word above his own feelings
 - Do you see evidence of someone that does what scripture commands you to do
- Let me be clear, we'll never arrive at being perfect, we won't
 - I'm not after, James isn't after a life without mistakes, he's after a trajectory
 - Growth in Christ is just that, growth
 - But it should be seen, there will be fruit, there will be evidence of a life changed by God's glory
- If you don't see it, if you don't see any evidence, any fruit, any change, then return to the cross of Christ!
 - Because only there will any of us find that which can save our souls and change our eternity