

A Bible Test

(James 1:19-27)

11/18/15; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Atlantic hurricanes usually make landfall in the southeastern portion of the United States.

Though the remnants of storms may eventually make it north into New England, most of the damages done in the south.

That was not the case with a hurricane in 1938 that made landfall in Long Island, NY.

This hurricane, which is often called the Long Island Express or the Great New England Hurricane, was also poorly forecast as well.

Obviously in the 1930s, they were without the incredible weather forecasting equipment that we have today.

However, meteorologists in that era still did an incredible job to predict coming storms and save lives.

Unfortunately, very few weathermen were able to forecast the coming destruction of that 1938 hurricane.

The wind speeds of the hurricane were close to 120 MPH when it blew ashore at Bellport, NY on September 21, 1938.

The storm killed 682 people and damaged or destroyed over 57,000 homes.

The immense damage and loss of life was blamed on the fact that the storm was traveling faster than anyone expected.

Most had expected the storm to slow down and weaken as it moved over the cooler waters of the northern Atlantic...

However, the storm actually was speeding up the coast and bringing strong winds with it.

One story that came out of the the hurricane was of an amateur meteorologist who lived on Long Island..

Knowing that a fall storm was headed their way, he drove into New York a few days before the storm and purchased a barometer.

Barometers measure atmospheric pressure, and he was excited to see how the pressure changed with an approaching storm...

When he arrived back home and removed the barometer from the box on the morning that the hurricane hit, the needle never moved from its lowest reading..

Since the storm wasn't supposed to be that bad, he began to shake the barometer and hit it to see if it would move..

But the needle never budged from its lowest possible point, which read "Tornadoes and Hurricanes."

Thinking that it was broken, he drove back into the city that morning to return the barometer for one that worked.

When he headed back home, he encountered hurricane force winds that eventually destroyed his home.

Turns out, the barometer was reading correctly that morning...

It wasn't broken at all; it was accurately warning of the intense storm that was approaching...

The man simply couldn't believe that it was accurate; so he assumed it was broken.

We have the same tendencies in us as well...

If we hear or see something that doesn't set well with us, we simply ignore it, assume it can't be true, or even worse, we attack it.

Say for instance, someone comes to you and kindly tells you that they have seen a tendency in you that you lose your patience too easily...

Even though this may be a dear friend who is simply trying to help, many people would either ignore the warning, assume that it can't be possibly be true about them or even attack the messenger..

Such is the tendency of our fallen nature as people..

Sometimes, the truth just doesn't set well with us..

Sometimes, the truth is too much to bear..

Sometimes, the truth is the last thing that we want to hear...

But let me remind you, the truth is what saved you.

At one point in time, you heard the truth about your sin...

You heard the truth about how your sin separated you from a Holy and sinless God.

And you heard the truth of how Jesus died in your place taking on the punishment of your sin..

And you heard the truth of how repentance and faith in Jesus Christ would save you from the consequences of sin..

And it was that truth that caused you to repent and believe the gospel..

As believers, we love the truth.

It is truth that set us free from sin and its consequences..

Now, we come to James 1:19-27 tonight and we face another one of James' test of genuine faith....

In the opening 12 verses of James, we looked at the test of trials...

And we saw that a person's endurance in trials reveals the genuineness of their faith...

People with true faith sees trials as a joy and know that the testing of their faith is a blessing from the Lord...

Folks with counterfeit faith see no benefit in trials and use them as excuses to give up..

Then last week, we faced another test of real faith...

And that is the test of how we view temptation...

A person with real faith sees himself or herself as the source of temptation...

And sees God's goodness as a barrier to giving into temptation..

While those who don't possess a saving faith see God as the source of their temptation and give in to the lusts of their flesh..

The test in James 1:19-27 is a third test, and it is a test of how do we view the truth of God's Word...

We are going to divide this test of faith into 3 sections...

In verses 19-21, we are going to see....

I. True Faith Has the Right Reception of God's Word (19-21)

In verses 22-25, we are going to see that...

II. True Faith Has the Right Reaction to God's Word (22-25)

And then finally, we are going to see that..

III. True Faith has the Right Demonstration of Obedience to God's Word (26-27)

Now, let's begin in verse 19 and start this 3rd test of true faith in the book of James...

I. True Faith Has the Right Reception of God's Word (19-21)

Let's begin this by just reading James 1:19-21...

19 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. 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.

Now, the question with James and the mistake that many people make with this passage is that they see it as unconnected from the previous verses..

Though you are free to see it that way if you like, I see a clear connection between these verses and the rest of chapter 1...

If you look back in verse 18 from last week, we talked about how God's goodness to us should keep us from falling into sin...

And verse 18 was a reminder to all believers that God is not only good to us in a general sense of providing food, clothing, shelter, etc...

God is especially good to believers because He has saved them...

Verse 18 literally says that we should resist temptation because God caused us to be born again..

And how did he do that?

Verse 18 says that he did it through the word of truth..

Now, that could mean a number of things...

You may have been saved by hearing the word of God preached...

You may have been saved by someone sharing the truth of God's Word with you..

You may have been saved by simply picking up a Bible and reading it yourself...

The point is that the word of truth, which is the Word of God, has played a part in your new birth as a believer.

Now, it is with that truth in mind of verse 18 that we move to verse 19...

And I would remind you that the splits in your Bible, whether that is a paragraph or a chapter are all the work of man..

God simply inspired James to write down his Word as the Spirit delivered.

We aren't to think that James took a break after verse 18...

And then started writing again in verse 19 because we see a split here...

James just wrote as God breathed out his word and as James was carried along by the Spirit....

Verse 19 came right after verse 18 and I would suggest to you that they are connected..

James is telling that us that we were saved by the word, and then he begins verse 19 in this way....

Remember this brothers....

And how do we know the verses that follow are connected?

Well, look at verse 21...

We see that James talks about the word there as well...

“Receive the word implanted” and that is the glue that holds this section together....

James is simply reminding believers...

The word of truth saved you, but the word didn't leave you after salvation...

It was implanted in you if you are truly saved...

And you need to rely on it still, even after salvation...

The Bible is not just useful to us in the sense of salvation...

It is also useful to us as we continue to grow in our walk with God...

Think of it like this..

Consider a ticket to a football game...

The ticket is not just useful for getting you in the door, but often times, you can turn over that ticket and find a layout of the stadium...

And it will help you find your seat...

You just don't take that ticket stub and toss it in the trash...

It has other valuable information on it as well..

The same is true of God's Word...

It has saved you but it is also a roadmap of how to live after salvation...

And true believers will have a right reception even after salvation..

And James begins this section with instructions on how to receive God's Word...

In verse 19, you see 3 simple instructions on the right reception of God's Word..

First, you need to be quick to hear God's Word..

That would include reading the Bible for yourself and receiving the truth of the verses contained in it..

It would include placing a priority on being available to hear God's Word taught and preached...

Since the word has saved you, don't become someone who then tunes it out or find excuses not to hear God's Word...

Rather, make your available to hear God's Word...

Second, be slow to speak..

Some think that this is instruction to be cautious about teaching God's Word...

James is going to talk about the stricter judgment that comes to teachers of God's Word, but I think is simply a reminder to control our verbal response to the truth of God's Word..

The truth of God's Word can often make people feel like the have to say something about it....

And this is in a negative sense of where someone wants to argue or contend with God about the truth of His word....

It is like the kid who sees the "Do Not Touch" sign who then wants to touch it even more....

Often times, we need to think more about what we see in God's Word before we speak more about it....

And that leads to the third instruction of verse 19, where James warns about being quick to anger over God's Word...

We certainly see this today in our world where the truth of God's word is being openly rejected...

The Bible says that Jesus is the only way.

How does the world react?

It shakes an angry fist and says there are plenty of ways to be saved...

The Bible says that homosexuality is a sin.

How does the world react?

It shakes an angry fist at God's Word and say that they will do what they want to do...

The Bible says that there is a place called hell.

How does the world react?

It covers its ears, shakes at ugly fist, and says that the God that they don't believe in would never send someone to hell...

But this same kind of anger can also be a temptation for believers who are in sin...

The Bible says that you can't marry an unbeliever if you are a Christian, and that makes the anger rise in some believers...

The Bible says that you must pray for your enemies, and some Christians angrily refuse to do so...

James is reminding us all that we must constantly be hearing God's Word, but we also must constantly be resisting the desire to speak against or to get angry at the truth we hear in it.

But he just doesn't say "do this" and don't do this, he gives the key to being able to do this in verse 21..

The key is to fight against your old nature...

You see that in verse 21...

"Put aside the filthiness and the wickedness that still contaminates your old way of life..."

And then here is the key to having a right reception of God's Word...

Receive the word with "humility."

So much good fruit is produced in the life of a believer who is humble...

And humility is the key to not arguing with God's Word and getting angry at God's Word...

In one sense, who are you to contend with what God has revealed in His Word?

And those who possess a genuine faith will be full of humility when it comes to receiving God's Word in their life...

That is why a true humility is a great sign of being truly saved.

Now, there is lot of false humility out there, and people pose as humble all the time...

But genuine believers who have saving faith are always humble because they understand that they deserve nothing...

And they are simply grateful that God would save them at all...

There's the first part of James' test of true faith...

How do you receive God's Word?

But there is more to the test and that is found in verses 22-25....

Just receiving the word rightly is not enough...

The reception of the word is important but also is the reaction to the word as well...

II. True Faith Has the Right Reaction to God's Word (22-25)

Let's read verses 22-25...

22 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 [x]natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, [y]he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 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 [z]an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in [aa]what he does.

While I was in seminary, we had chapel on Tuesday and Thursday mornings....

It was an incredible opportunity to be “preached to” while in seminary...

One message late in my seminary journey was given by a man named Art Azurdia...

He is a pastor at a church in Portland Oregon, and he preached a passage out of Revelation 3...

And it was an incredible sermon.

So, I went up to him afterward just to thank him and tell him I had really enjoyed listening to him...

He said this, "The word doesn't exist for our enjoyment only; it exists to move us to action as well."

"What are you planning to do about what you just heard?"

I was caught off guard, and I gave the only thing I could think of...

"Let me think about that."

And though it created an awkward situation, I will never forget his point...

"Receiving the word rightly is good but we must also act on what we received."

That is James' point in this second section of this passage...

You need a right reception of God's Word, but you need a right re"action" as well to God's Word...

It need to move your feet and change the way you live...

To drive his point home, James uses the simple analogy of a mirror...

In James' day, mirrors were not made of glass but of highly polished metals...

And people in the first century would polish up bronze or silver or gold...

In hopes of getting it so relative that they could see their image in it...

Can you imagine a world without mirrors?

Can you imagine if you were never able to see your own face?

Anyway, James simply offers an illustration that everyone can understand...

It is not enough to look in the mirror, you need to react to watch you see there...

For instance, can you imagine a woman who pulls out her compact....

Opens up and looks in it and finds a huge stain of lipstick on her teeth...

Then closes her mirror, puts it back in her pocket-book and then comes into church with that stain still there?

No. The point of the mirror is to reveal things that need attention in our appearance...

Then we are to correct those imperfections and move on...

That is the function of the word of God in the life of someone who claims to be saved...

The word not only saves us, it will also reveal other areas of our lives that need attention as well...

And someone who is truly saved and has a genuine faith, hears the word and then takes what he hears and applies it in areas of his life that need attention.

Only a fool would look in mirror, see an obvious problem, and then decide to do nothing about it...

James says in verse 22 that they delude themselves...

The word delude was used in mathematics of someone who miscalculated a problem...

Folks who only receive the word and never act on what they hear are deluded, and they have miscalculated the genuine of their faith...

And let me tell you, it is bad to get $2 + 2$ wrong, but it is much worse to get your salvation wrong...

Yet, that is James' point here...

Don't just stop at the right reception of the word, follow up with the right reaction to it as well...

Verse 25 is great instruction on how to properly react to the word in your life...

Whether the word comes through daily Bible reading or Sunday School teaching or preaching...

The right reaction is this, according to verse 25...

Look "intently" at the law..

The law is simply a reference to God's word, which is perfect and sets us free...

Intently means that we receive the word and not just glance at what we see...

But we put ourselves under the microscope of God's Word...

One great quality of a doctor is personal attention...

I never want to feel like I am just another patient on the list...

I want the undivided attention of the doctor when he examines me...

Yet, how often do we give just a glance at God's word as we move on the next thing on our list...

Receiving God's Word is a blessing in our lives, yet as a pastor I see all kinds of reactions from people who are there to receive God's Word...

Closed eyes, folks glancing at phones, people joking with their neighbor...

But I never take that as a personal insult; it is simply an insult to God's Word...

James is saying that a right reaction to God's Word involves the look of intent where you carefully examine what you are hearing...

But secondly, not only are we supposed to look intently, we are to abide by what we hear...

Simply put, we obey what we hear..

We do it.

And then what is the promise of verse 25 to someone who receives the Word and then acts upon the Word?

He will be blessed in what he does....

There is one final section of third test of real faith...

How do receive the word?

How do you react to the word?

How do you follow through with obedience to the word?

We have looked at the reception and the reaction to the word, now let look a the demonstration of obedience to the word.

III. True Faith has the Right Demonstration of Obedience to God's Word (26-27)

Let's read verses 26-27..

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

This is simply where true faith shows itself...

True faith always generates good works...

Works don't save a person, but works shows that someone is saved.

And in these verses, James simply follows his pattern of showing true faith versus false faith...

He has done this in each of the sections that we have looked at...

In verses 19-21...

Someone who doesn't possess saving faith angrily receives God's Word...

Someone who possesses true faith humbly receives God's Word...

Then in verses 22-25, someone who doesn't possess saving faith looks at God's Word and only hears, ...

While the one with saving faith looks at God's Word and does...

Now in this final section, James compares true and false faith once again...

In verse 26, we see a person who claims to have faith...

James uses the word "religious" to describe them, which simply means that on the outside, this person looks saved...

In our day, that would mean someone who goes to church, who has a good reputation, etc..

James is simply saying that a person who does not have saving faith may look the part on the outside, but his actions say otherwise...

In this case, his speech shows that he isn't truly saved...

James says that he can't bridle his tongue...

He has no control over what he says...

Filthy speech, slander of others, gossip, lies are all products of an unbridled tongue...

James goes on to say that a person like that has a worthless religion..

In other words, a person who does all the outward activities of true faith, but shows by his internal actions that he isn't saved....

He might as well stop doing all the outward actions...

In other words, why come to church and act like a believer if your actions the rest of the time show that you are an unbeliever...

Worthless simply means that there is no point in what that person does...

And then James contrasts that unsaving faith with true faith in verse 27....

Real faith does this...

And James simply gives some examples of the works of those who have a true faith...

The first example is to visit orphans and widows in their time of need...

We all understand what that means...

These are folks who are without the people who should be closet to them on earth..

The widow is without a spouse, and the orphan is with our parents...

These are needy people...

And then James gives another example, and that is to keep yourself unstained by the world...

In other words, those with true faith live holy lives and resist sin...

Now, people have often said are these the only two works that someone with a true faith does?

No, not at all...

The Scriptures are full of other examples of the fruit of true faith.

James has just simply offered two examples for his readers.

But let me say this...

What are the two greatest commands?

Love God and Love others...

Jesus said that all the commands could be summed up in those two commands...

Guess what you see here in verse 27?

A command to love others by visiting the orphan and the widow...

And a command to love God by pursuing holiness in your life..

And God through James is reminding us all that true faith will show up in how we love God and how we love others...

While those who don't possess a true faith will look the part but will never have the evidence of fruit to back up their claim..

Conclusion

That is really the 3rd test of true faith in James...

How do you receive, react, and respond to the word of God?

Does it cause your anger to increase or your humility to increase?

Do you hear it more or do it more?

Do your actions match the word of God and the faith you claim or do your actions contradict the word of God and the faith you claim?

It is amazing that we live in a day where attitudes about the Word of God are constantly changing.

I expect that from the world, but unfortunately attitudes toward the word of God are also changing in the church..

Last year, a pastor of a large church said that fellowship with other believers was more important than reading the Bible.

Now, I believe that fellowship is very important to Christians and we should make every effort to do that...

But it is not more important than the Word of God in the life of a Christian...

You need both, but for a pastor to say that only reveals his attitude toward the Word of God.

Which, in light of James 1:19-27, is sad.

The Word of God should hold a place of importance in the life of every believer and certainly every pastor...

I pray that God's Word holds a place of priority in your life...

I pray that God's Word full you with humility and not anger...

I pray that you not only hear God's Word but you also do it.

And as your pastor, I tell you that noting is a substitute for reading the Scriptures and obeying what you read.

That is what people of real faith do.

Let us pray.