

Sunday Morning Message

February 4, 2024

Real Religion

Text – James 1:16 - 27

Congregational Reading – James 1:16 - 27

Introduction

Today, we are going to see what James has to say about the role that the Bible plays in helping us to put our faith to work; or as the old timers would say, to put our faith into shoe leather. The overall theme of this Letter is the practical application of faith – putting our faith to work. The Bible – the Word of God – contains the instruction manual that tells us how we are supposed to behave in this world, and it also supplies the spiritual nourishment and strength that we will need to be spiritually healthy.

This passage and the message for today will show us how to build our faith through what we receive from the Bible. The level of our faith – our growth in faith - will be in direct proportion to the time that spend in the Bible:

"(17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

In the first part of James 1, the subject is temptation and how we can have victory over temptation. Verse 16 will transition us into the next section.

"Do not err, my beloved brethren." (James 1:16)

This verse ties in perfectly with the passage before it which deals with temptations, but it also provides a perfect bridge into this new discussion regarding the role of the Bible in our Christian walk.

I. **Receive the Word of God (vs. 17 – 21)**

"... receive with meekness the engrafted word," (v. 21)

A. **The Bible is a Gift from God (v. 17)**

"(17) Every good gift (δόσις – dosis) and every perfect gift (δώρημα – dōrēma) is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17)

Wiersbe said: “Everything good in this world comes from God. If it did not come from God, it is not good. If it comes from God, it must be good, even if we do not see the goodness in it immediately.”¹

It is said by some that this verse may have come from an early Christian hymn.²

It is interesting that the Greek contains two different words for gift (*δόσις* – *dosis*, and *δώρημα* – *dōrēma*). According to McArthur: The “two different Gr. words for “gift” emphasize the perfection and inclusiveness of God’s graciousness. The first denotes the act of giving, and the second is the object given. Everything related to divine giving is adequate, complete, and beneficial.”³

Gifts can be special because of what is given, and because of who gave it. It can also be special just because it was given.

Illustrate – Every once in a while, my wife and I will receive little cards or notes from our grandchildren, It may be just a homemade piece of paper with kid’s handwriting on it; worthless to most, but very valuable to us.

Cometh down – (*καταβαῖνον* from *καταβαίνω* – *katabainō* – Present Active Participle) – the gifts keep coming down. Our God is a good God and the idea here is that He continuously showers us with gifts.

We need to remember and learn to fully appreciate the many gifts that God gives us. Wiersbe points out that David forgot about and neglected the many gifts of God when he took Bathsheba:

If King David had remembered the goodness of the Lord, he would not have taken Bathsheba and committed those terrible sins. At least this is what Nathan the prophet told the king. “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, ‘I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things’ ” (2 Sam. 12:7–8). Note the repetition of the word *give*

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 343–344.

² Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: King James Version*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 1875.

³ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1927.

in this brief statement. God had been good to David, yet David forgot God's goodness and took the bait.⁴

Notice in v. 17 that God is also the *Father of Lights* –

"(5) This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5)

God has perfect vision and clarity. He sees everything, and He doesn't even need to turn on the flashlight app on his iPhone.

Notice also - *with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*. Because God is transcendent and dwells outside of eternity, He does not need to change. He knows the beginning and the end. The principles contained in this Book are eternal principles. We do not need periodic updates or revisions.

According to v. 17, we also learn that God is immutable; He does not change.

"(8) Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8)

Because God is God, He knows exactly what good gifts we need, and He keeps on giving them to us. The specific gift that God refers to here is the Bible.

B. This Gift Has Saved Us (v. 18 & 21)

"(18) Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ... (21c) which is able to save your souls." (James 1:18, 21c)

Salvation can only come through the Word of God illuminated by the Spirit of God. That is what Jesus meant when He said that a person must be born of the "water and the Spirit" when He was speaking with Nicodemus in John 3. I believe the water there is a reference to the Word of God.

"(23) Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter 1:23)

C. This Gift Will Save Us (vs. 19 – 21)

"(19) Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (20) For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. (21)

⁴ Wiersbe, 344.

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." (James 1:19-21)

1. We need to listen to what it says (vs. 19 – 20)
2. We need to continuously apply it to our lives (v. 21)

The Bible not only will save our souls from eternal damnation, but it will also save our lives from ruinous mistakes and preserve our effectiveness in our representation of the Lord.

Filthiness has to do with moral defilement.

Superfluity if naughtiness – literally means abundance of wickedness, or evil – a desire to injure or break laws.

McGee states: I believe the Word of God is the greatest preventative against the sins of the flesh. The old Scottish preacher said, "Sin will keep you from the Bible, or the Bible will keep you from sin." He was certainly accurate in that. James is speaking to those who have been saved. You have received the implanted ("engrafted") Word—it has been planted in your hearts. The Word has already brought salvation to you, but you have a life to live as a Christian. Salvation is in three tenses: I have been saved (penalty of sin); I am being saved (power of sin); I shall be saved (presence of sin). James is speaking here of salvation in the present tense.⁵

II. React to the Word of God (vs. 22 – 25)

"22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:22-25)

We cannot just keep receiving the Word of God without also reacting to it. The Word of God will change who we are and what we do. James illustrates this point with the illustration of a person who looks into a mirror. Women especially like to spend time in

⁵ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, electronic ed., vol. 5 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 639.

front of a mirror applying makeup. The mirror reveals things that need to be fixed. We check our hair, we examine our teeth, we look for things that need to be improved upon. The Bible is like that mirror, only it looks deeply into our souls and spots flaws in our lives and in our behavior that need to be yielded to the will of God. The Bible sees what we cannot see ourselves.

"(12) For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

According to the passage in Hebrews, the Bible not only sees imperfections on the surface of our lives, but it is also like an X-Ray machine in that it reveals our thoughts and intents, or motives.

III. Religious Activities Influenced by the Word of God (vs. 26 – 27)

This is where our religion becomes shoe leather.

"26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27)

In these last two verses, James explains that pure religion is not about ceremonies and rituals, which is what most people associate with it. To the Old Testament Jew, religious activity meant that he participated in the sacrificial system, giving his offerings for sin. He also observed the Sabbaths and attended the services at the synagogue. He would also observe all the yearly traditions, such as the Passover, the Feasts of Trumpets, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Day of Atonement, etc.

For the New Testament Christian, religious activity would mean being baptized and uniting in membership with a local church. It would include going to church regularly and giving tithes and offerings. It may even involve serving within the church as an usher or teacher or in some other way. These are all good things, but James states that God is just as concerned about how our religion affects our everyday lives. If you go to church every

week and still live Monday through Saturday like a lost person then, according to James, you are not religious at all, according to what James said here.

A. True religion will Influence your Words. (v. 26 – see also chapter three)

“...and bridleth not his tongue.”

Notice that James says that supposed religion that does not include a controlled tongue is useless – it’s vain, or empty, or good for nothing.

B. True Religion will Impact the People of the World. (v. 27a)

James also specifically talks about how to treat the poor people from within the congregation in chapter two.

“...To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,”

Illustrate - I have been very blessed here in the last couple of days to hear that many from within this congregation are going to visit Billy Jones in the hospital. It has been a tremendous encouragement to his mom Carol and his sister Desiree. Yesterday, as I was leaving the ICU, Issan was coming in; and then when I was pulling out of the parking lot, Bob was pulling in. And others have been by - Sarah Camillo and James Giroud.

Also, when I went to see Linda Dempsey at her new assisted living place in Hammonton on Friday, Alisemary and Darla were there, along with Alisemary’s little grandson. Bob has been by there to see Linda as well. Cindy and Camille went by there yesterday and not only saw Linda, but also spent some time with Linda’s daughter Nicky.

God says that this is true religion. Not how many verses you memorize and recite in front of the congregation. It is what we call applied theology or practical theology. It is the kind of theology that impacts the people around you and makes a difference.

C. True Religion will also Insulate you from the Problems of the World (v. 27b)

“and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

Separation from the world is still in the Bible, even though it is not a very popular doctrine within Christianity today. God wants us to be more in tune with what He is doing in and through us than with what is going on in this world.

"1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not

conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)
"17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you," (2 Corinthians 6:17)

Conclusion

These are all illustrations or examples of how the Bible will change your life and influence real religious activity in your life.

True religion – real faith – will dramatically impact the way we live every day. Christianity is not something we observe on Sunday; it is who we are every day of our lives. The Bible is a huge factor in our Christian experience.

It was the Bible that revealed to us our sin and need for a Saviour.

It was the Bible that showed us who the Saviour is.

It was the Bible that showed us how to receive the gift of eternal life that the Saviour offers to us.

It is the Bible that will show us what to do and how to live after we are saved.

Questions – How important is the Bible to you? How much time do you spend reading and studying the Word of God? You cannot be successful in the Christian life without receiving healthy doses of Scripture on a regular basis.

*"(8) This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for **then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.**" (Joshua 1:8)*

*"1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and **whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.** 4 The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish." (Psalm 1:1-6)*

We need to spend time daily in this Book.