

OKOTOKS EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

HEARING, DOING, STANDING FIRM
NOVEMBER 12-18, 2017



SERMON NOTES

Hearing, Doing, Standing Firm
Matthew 7:24-29

What do I need to do with what I have heard today?

MAIN POINT

Genuine faith demonstrates itself through hearing and doing God's Word.

THINKING THINGS THROUGH

Connect the sermon to the study.

1. Why does the saying, "Actions speak louder than words," resonate with people?

2. Why do people look for consistency between a person's speech and actions?

Leader: The Epistle of James is a practical letter. A primary emphasis in this letter is the daily expression of one's faith in action. Evidently, James was dealing with some people who tried to separate being a Christian from demonstrating one's faith in everyday life. In James 1:22-27, James warned his readers against assuming their faith is secure if they are not putting God's Word into practice. James stressed the vital connection between hearing the Word of God and living it.

DIGGING DEEPER

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> [HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:22-25.](#)

3. James wrote that we deceive ourselves if we limit our faith to hearing the Word and not putting it into action. Why do we often hear and not do when it comes to Scripture? What does this say about our faith (vv. 23-24)?

4. When do you find it the hardest to put into action what you know God's Word says? Does this show up in one area of your life more than another? Explain your response.

Leader: James was concerned that believers persevere in living out God's Word. James maintained that just listening to God's Word was insufficient. When one hears the Word and does not act on the admonitions contained in it, that person really is engaging in self-deception. Simply listening to the message is not enough. For James, genuine religion and daily life could not be separated. He had little patience with those who claimed to be pious or religious but gave no evidence of inward change by their daily conduct.

5. Make a list of the differences between the people described in verses 23-25. How can we be sure that we are the right kind of hearer? What do we risk happening when we are hearers only?

Leader: James compared the person who listens without taking action with a man looking at his own face in a mirror but neglecting to do the needed grooming the mirror reveals. In contrast to the person content to be a hearer of God's Word without acting on it, James presented a doer who acts (v. 25). This person looks intently into the truth of the gospel and lives according to the freedom and hope it brings.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:26-27.

6. Why do you think James singled out caring for orphans and widows as an example of faith in action? What do you imagine their plight was in James's day? What is it like today?

7. In verse 27, James included two things that describe genuine religion. Why did he pick those two things? How are each connected to a relationship with Jesus?

Leader: True religion expresses itself in loving service and in holy living. Put another way, true religion includes both social ethics and personal ethics. Orphans and widows were some of the most helpless and vulnerable members of society, and by taking care of them, the church put God's Word into practice. Both aspects of religion brought together in this verse indicate that we are to be in the world rendering service to others, yet we are not to succumb to the evil of the world. Jesus perfectly modeled this balance for us during His time on earth. Jesus also went so far as to secure our adoption by God in the ultimate example of sacrificial, loving service.

8. What truths of Scripture are we putting into action when we meet the needs of others? Read Matthew 25:35-40 for Jesus' teaching on this matter.

Leader: James reminded us how God's righteousness is formed in us so that God's love reaches through us to others. God's shaping tool is His Word. Reading it and studying it are not enough. We must obey it through the power He supplies. Then God's righteousness begins to be evident.

DOING LIFE TOGETHER

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

9. Why is meeting the physical needs of the hurting and helpless so important for the Christ follower? Why is this often difficult?

10. What would change in your life if you took seriously James's admonition to care for the less fortunate?

11. How might we as brothers and sisters in Christ help each other avoid being "hearers only"?

12. What step can you take this week to make your faith in Christ and the power of the gospel more evident to others?

PRAYER

Close your group gathering in a time of prayer. Take time to hear prayer requests, specifically those related to today's topic and convictions group members are feeling as a result of the Scripture. Then close in prayer, asking God to open your eyes to the opportunities around you to put your faith into action.

MEMORIZE

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." —James 1:22

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PASSAGE

JAMES 1:22-27

1:22. James's command is literally to "keep on becoming doers of God's Word." He insisted on an obedience which lasts. This does not minimize the importance of hearing God's Word. It does emphasize strongly the need for acting. Too often Christians view a sermon as an interesting moral or theological lecture. We need to do something other than sitting and listening.

Jesus pronounced a blessing only on those "who hear the word of God and obey it" (Luke 11:28). The command to listen to God's Word describes someone who attends a lecture. The hearer could nod agreeably to the message but do nothing as a result. God wants a listener to become a disciple, an obedient follower of Jesus. One who hears the message without doing anything is

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self-deceived. Such a listener has made a false estimate of the situation. Jesus warned against this error (Matt. 7:21-27).

1:23-25. James presented a negative and a positive illustration of a response to God's message. Via a vivid picture of listless listening, verses 23-24 compare those who only hear God's Word to people who gaze into a mirror and dash away with little memory of what they saw. Mirrors in New Testament times were made of polished metal. People used them to wash their faces, shave their beards, apply cosmetics, and comb their hair. Then they quickly left, giving little thought to the image they had seen. People can repeat this experience in the spiritual realm. We give a quick glance into God's Word, find a morsel of truth, and jump into another task without remembering or applying what we read.

Verse 25 uses the mirror metaphor with four verbs to picture the response of obedient listeners to God's message. First, obedient people look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom. This describes someone who gazes at God's message with a desire to learn. The same verb—translated as bent over—pictures the apostle John staring into Jesus' empty tomb (John 20:5). John's look led to an obedient faith (John 20:8).

Second, obedient people continued to do what God said. They put God's Word into practice and follow through with commitment. Third, obedient listeners do not forget what they hear. Spiritual amnesia never conquers their minds. Fourth, obedient listeners do what God's message instructs them to do. Good listening, endurance, clear memory, and obedience characterize committed Christians. They are eager to receive and obey what God tells them to do.

God's Word is the perfect law that gives freedom. Obedience to Jesus' commands in Scripture brings freedom from sin and death. Whenever we submit to God's message, this law of liberty produces a disposition to obey God's will joyfully. We have freedom because we truly want to serve God. Jesus promised this freedom in John 8:31-32.

Obedient people are promised a blessing. We do not need to wait for a future blessing. We already have the blessing in our grasp. Doing what God requires brings a blessing with it. Psalm 1:1-3 summarizes the blessings of obedience. Those who meditate on the Law of the Lord will be "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

1:26. This verse describes a person who considered himself to be religious but did not listen well to God's Word. The person focused on the externals of religious action such as public prayer, fasting, giving, and worship attendance. James did not belittle this action, but he added that inner control of the tongue must accompany outward performance.

Keep a tight rein on his tongue sometimes described the bridle used with a horse. The tongue is compared to an unmanageable horse which needed bit and bridle to tame its excesses. Controlling the tongue is so important that James devoted most of chapter 3 to its use.

James leveled two accusations at the person who practiced outward religion without inner control. First, he deceives himself. This repeats the idea of verse 22 in different words. What a pity to find after a lifetime of pseudo-religion that you have only been practicing self-deception!

Second, his religion is worthless. Peter used the same word—translated as *empty*—to describe useless pagan practices his readers had followed before they became Christians (1 Pet. 1:18). Religious practices without inner control have no more saving power than paganism.

1:27. Two evidences demonstrate pure religion: deeds of compassion and inner purity. This does not reduce Christianity to mere benevolence. True religion has more features than James has mentioned. The emphasis here is that for God to accept our worship it must be accompanied by loving ministry and a holy life. Both Christians and non-Christians could see and understand this

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type of evidence.

To look after orphans and widows demanded demonstrations of concern and active involvement. The psalmist pictured God as a defender of orphans and widows (Ps. 68:5). Christ used the word for look after in Matthew 25:43 to describe the ministry of caring for those in prison. Obeying this appeal calls for more than an occasional visit. It demands genuine compassion and true engagement.

(Not) polluted demands a freedom from contamination by the world. Peter used this word to refer to Christ as "without . . . defect" (1 Pet. 1:19). Christians are to model their purity after that of Jesus. We must follow God's instructions devotedly if we want to produce a lifestyle honoring to God. Obeying God's Word demands control of the tongue, a compassion for others, and a separated life. These are the identifying marks of pure and faultless religion.