

More than Listening | James 1:19-27

Grace Anglican Network | Sunday 26 April 2020 | Ven. David Bassett, Senior Minister

Are you ready for our second instalment from James? Are you ready, not just to hear, but to be transformed? Are you willing to be transformed by God's word? Are you humble enough to accept that you, like me, still need to be challenged, changed and improved?

I am sure you can all think of someone you know who seems to spend an inordinate amount of time in front of a mirror - getting their hair just right, making sure their make-up is perfect, checking that there aren't any blemishes. It's a common enough scenario, especially when you seem to be late for an event! (no one in particular in mind here!) But can you also imagine someone spending that same amount of time in front of a mirror and at the end coming out with what appears no change – hair all a mess, still some left-over food on the side of their mouth, looking dishevelled and unkept?

James' message to us today in chapter 1 verses 19 to 27 is simple but deeply, deeply profound. He says, God's word is the mirror we hold up to ourselves to see what we are really like so that we can fix ourselves up – or to use the phrase I remember mum saying before we were going out as a family – “David, go and tidy yourself up”.

Now, remember James is writing to already believers. Those who have come to know Jesus, those who have put their faith in Jesus, those who have been forgiven and made new through Jesus' death and resurrection. Those who have faith. To the brothers and sisters in Jesus.

So, it's not like getting ready for a job interview where you want to look your best and where first impressions are so important. It's not about being good enough to be loved by God.

The bible is clear in that God loves and accepts us as sinners and redeems us in Jesus and makes us holy as he is holy. What James wants us to know, to do... is the ongoing process of sanctification, living out our faith, the ongoing process of growing in faith, in becoming more and more like Jesus. This is a life-long process until that great day when we are made perfect and complete – that day when we meet God face to face, that day we are waiting for when Jesus returns. So, as we await that day – here is James' advice. You see it there in verse 21.

Welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

What is your attitude when you open your bibles? What is your mindset when you are reading the bible? Do you come to it with meekness? An attitude that says – God you know better than me. That meekness that says, I need to learn from you. That humility that says, not my way, but your ways O Lord.

I know it is all too easy to forget this. All too easy to allow my own intellect, my own understanding of the world, my thoughts on what I think the bible should be saying, or my expectations to dictate what I think this part of the bible is saying. Yes, we come with our minds alert, but we come as a student, as a disciple, not as the expert. James says – welcome with meekness. Is that a blemish that's reflected in the mirror for you?

Do you hear, then, how James is referring to the bible? Its astounding. He refers to the implanted word. I'd love to have more time to explore this with you – but for now briefly, what is the implanted word? In Hebrews chapter 4 we are told that the word of God is living and active. Here it is implanted. John tells us the word became flesh and dwelt among us – the person of Jesus. Jesus tells us that he will send his

Spirit to who will bring to bear within us the word of God. God's word, God's words to us, are to indwell us, become part of us, they do a work from the inside out as it were.

As such, you can't approach the bible and just skim across the words, or think of them as nice or just see our bible reading time as a task to get through. The words need to be implanted, we need to think deeply upon the words, to meditate, to allow them to sink in so that they can be the transforming work. Not be something that goes in one ear and out the other. God's word comes to us in the bible but is made alive to us by the Spirit of God. Peter the Apostle said to Jesus in John 6 – "where else could we go? You have the words of eternal life". James wants us who know these life-giving words, to also be transformed by these life-giving words. Do you approach the bible with the attitude – these words are bringing me life? These words are the nourishment I need for life – they are the superfoods of spiritual life. How's your spiritual diet going?

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All we need for salvation and to remain in Christ is found here in the bible. It is such a wonderful gift from God. We have a God who speaks, who has revealed himself, who has come to us in a way that we can respond to him. So James says don't just hear these words and brush them off. He says in verse 22 that that is to deceive ourselves. He says, put the words into action. Be doers. And then gives us the powerful metaphor of looking into the mirror and then forgetting what I saw. Like if I was to look in the mirror this morning after I finished shaving and see that there is still a stack of shaving cream on my face and then as soon as I turn away from the mirror forget what I saw and turn up here looking the fool.

The bible is the mirror for my soul. And I need to look carefully, and I need to take seriously what I see. And then to respond appropriately. Listen to how James puts it. Verses 25. *But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.* Here is the offering of grace. The means of blessing. To be informed and transformed by God's word, to be strengthened to persevere in faith and holiness, to be guided in how we act. And so, to have confidence that I am pleasing God and I am being blessed by God.

I'm sure, you like me, long to know and please God. You long to be all that Jesus calls us to be in response to him giving us his all. James says we get there by allowing the word of God to be implanted deeply within us and to do its transforming work. This is a work of God's Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 8:1 warns us *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.* In the same vain James wants to make sure we have heard him right. It's not about becoming ritualistic. Reading the bible to find a list of dos and don'ts, or about having head knowledge. It is about heart knowledge. And heart knowledge is expressed in action. It is in expressing love and mercy. It is reflecting the same love that God has, the love that he has extended to us in Jesus.

I just love James' down to earth, authentic practicality. 'Watch what you say'. 'Don't be quick to speak or sprout your own thoughts but be quick to listen' – especially to God's word and spirit. 'Watch your anger' – that's where he started this section in verse 19. And he ends here in verse 27 with a call to do – put love into action especially towards the most vulnerable.

So, friends, here is the mirror being held up to us. Asking us to think about our attitude to God's word. Our attitude to the bible. Come and look just a bit closer with me. Come on lean in. Are you spending good time reading the bible? Are you doing this in a way that gives you time to go slow, to pause, to reflect, to ponder? Are you doing this on your own and with others? Are you engaging with it – asking

yourself – what is God showing me? How does this help me to love God more? How does this help me to love my neighbour more? Are you allowing the bible to shape and mould you? Are you a different person to who you were a year ago? 5 years ago? 20 years ago? Can you see a greater godliness?

Our faith comes to us at great cost to God – who gave his all that we might have life. The call is for us as we receive it to be authentic, transformed people, true disciples of Jesus. My prayer is that you will grow in your love of God's word and that God's word will continue to work in you that which is pleasing to him.

Give the bible good time this week. Look closely into the mirror of your soul. And know the wonderful grace and transforming power of the resurrected Jesus. May God's word live in us and bear much fruit for his glory. Amen.