

## Characteristics of Faith

James 1:19-27

As I prepared this week's message, I was reminded of a show I watched as a young lad. The show was called "Mr. Ed" you know the one. "A horse is a horse, of course, of course, and no one can talk to a horse, of course." That is, of course, unless the horse is the famous Mister Ed."

It ran from 1961-1966 and featured of course the talking Mr. Ed. Did you ever wonder how they got the horse to talk? It was peanut butter. It got the horse's lips to move, and Actor Allen Lane provided the voice for Mr. Ed.

A horse is a big powerful animal, but we control this animal with a small item called a bridle...or in the case of Mr. Ed, peanut butter.

Today we will look at James 3<sup>rd</sup> test of our faith: Response to the Word as we look at James 1:19-27. We will find three elements of the test in these verses. The first is:

### I. Proper Receptivity v. 19-21

## A. Things we should be v. 19-20

James 1:19-20, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

Be quick to listen...Barb asks me if I have lost my hearing when I don't respond to her. This is a great indicator that listening isn't the absence of words. It is active and takes attention to listen. You might even say it takes energy to listen.

Proverbs 17:28, "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues."

So, guys, there is an advantage to staying silent, but the key for us is to not be fools. We need to put in the energy to listen.

Next, James says be slow to speak. We all know someone that when they speak everyone listens. It's that person who is always quiet, but when they speak it is filled with truth and wisdom.

The type of person James is encouraging us to be is one who speaks truth, one who edifies others and honors the Lord when we speak.

James then adds the encouragement to be slow to anger. Notice it doesn't say never be angry, it says be slow to anger. He further defines this anger by saying that human anger does not produce righteousness.

There is an anger that does produce righteousness and that can be defined as holy indignation. God is angry at sin; He is angry with injustice and His anger isn't poured out upon the very first act of sin or injustice. He is patient in His anger.

This is how we are to approach anger. Anger does not strike out in an uncontrolled fit of rage. Anger is not rage. Godly anger doesn't lose control.

On the other hand, human anger lashes out, it loses control, it seeks to harm where God's anger seeks restitution and reconciliation.

#### B. Things we should get rid of v. 21a

James 1:21, "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent"

James here shows us that the condition for receiving the Word is putting aside all filthiness and the remaining wickedness we struggle with.

Filthiness is a barrier for us from clearly hearing the Word. To remove wickedness, we need to confess our sins, repent which means to change direction in our lives and to eliminate that sinful behavior.

When I was a teenager we lived on a hobby farm, my dad's hobby, my chores. I had the delight of cleaning out the cow pens. For you non farmers that means I scooped out the poop.

Needless to say, one can get pretty dirty or shall we say, filthy, doing that type of work. Now, it wouldn't make much sense to do that work and then simply go into the house, go to my room and simply jump on my bed to rest the day away.

No, I needed to clean up first or every part of my life would have been, well, soiled shall we say.

Sin makes us filthy. We need to get cleaned up or we soil all areas of our life.

#### C. Things we should incorporate in our lives: The Word v. 21b

James 1:21b, “and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

The humility James describes here is one that means meekness or gentleness. It doesn't reflect arrogance at all.

Jesus says in:

John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

We need to know Jesus' commands in order to keep them. We need to know His Word.

Paul reveals how valuable Scripture is for us when he writes to Timothy in:

2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

If you take anything away from today's message it is what Paul wrote here.

## II. Personal Responsiveness v. 22-25

### A. We deceive ourselves if we are hearers only v. 22

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

Why would someone only listen to the word and not do it? Why? In this text being a doer means that we “continue to strive to be a doer.” This means its work. To often Christians get satisfied, they have Jesus and the promise of eternity and that's enough for them. Are you satisfied?

If we are to demonstrate our gratitude to Jesus for all He did for us, do you think being satisfied does that?

Obedience to the Word is the most basic spiritual requirement. It isn't about a feeling; it's about being obedient children before the Father.

So, when you read your Bible, and you are challenged or even convicted about what it is saying will you be obedient to it?

When you hear a devotional thought on Scripture on the Word or the Pulse, will you obey it?

When you come to church and hear a great, biblical, theological message.... Mike must be preaching...will you obey it? Will you?

Next James gives us an illustration:

B. The Example of a man looking into a mirror v. 23-25

James 1:23-25, “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

It is these verses why we are using mirrors to symbolize our series in James. Now, mirrors didn't use glass until the fourteenth century. In the first century mirrors were highly polished metals and to see yourself clearly you would have to move the mirror around until you got a clear vision, you had to work at it.

To see your image, you had to “look intently.” So, if you worked that hard to see yourself if you found something out of place wouldn't you adjust it?

Psalm 19:7-9, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. 8 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. 9 The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.”

The law of the Lord can only refresh your soul when you apply it. It can only make you wise if you apply it. It can only give joy if you apply it.

Joshua 1:8, “Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Did you notice that? “Be careful to do everything written in it.” DO IT! That's the key, DO IT.

Remember, this is a test that James has given to test our faith. Our motives are revealed in our response to God's Word. If we read it and do nothing that

reveals that our faith is useless. If we change, if we are obedient to the Word, our faith is of great value.

How does this work? When we look into the Word we will see two things. First, we see our sin. Second, we see Jesus' sinlessness. That difference should motivate us to make a change.

So, basically, we are looking at the man in the mirror and asking him to change his ways.

### III. Prompt Resignation v. 26-27

#### A. The necessity of controlling the tongue v. 26

James 1:26, "Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."

James uses the word rein here; you might know it better by the word bridle. A bridle is small and is used to control a horse. A horse is big and powerful but is controlled by a little bridle. Our tongues need to have a bridle controlling it!

Jesus talks about the tongue in Matthew.

Matthew 12:34, "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

Matthew 12:37, "For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

What comes out of our mouths reflects what is in our hearts. If you want good things coming out of your mouth you need to fill your heart with good things. Where do you think the good things come from? Yes, The Word of God.

#### B. Pure religion before God v. 27

James 1:27, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

James uses the word "pure" here which has the meaning of "cleanliness." And the word "faultless" translated by some as "undefiled" as the word has the meaning of freedom from contamination.

So, what is this pure and faultless religion? Those who look after orphans exhibit pure religion. Orphans

were one of the most vulnerable peoples in Jesus' time and in many ways are the most vulnerable in our age as well.

Those who act as foster parents live this value out. Those who adopt live this value out. The Gibbs lived out this value when they adopted Bahati.

Widows are another vulnerable people group. I was touched this past week as Ann Anderson was making arrangements before her and Paul left for the winter to make sure Andy had a ride to church and Bible study. This is living out this value.

James' words "to look after" has the concept of helping in any way possible. This application isn't just limited to orphans and widows. It should be applied to anyone in need.

James then adds at the end that we should have a continued effort or ongoing effort to remain from being stained by the world. How are you actively working to remain unstained by the world?

Doesn't this go back to how we correct ourselves as we look into God's word? This is the test James has brought before us.

1 John 2:15-17, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever."

There it is, will you do the will of God? To pass James' test you must go to your Bible, see what flaws you have and change. That's it! Are you willing to change your ways when you become aware that they don't reflect the character of Jesus.