

Natalie W. Bell
August 29, 2021

Just Do It
James 1: 17-27 and Mark 7:1-8, 14-23

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.^[f] ¹⁸ In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Hearing and Doing the Word

¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved:^[g] let everyone be **quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger**; ²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted **word** that has the power to save your souls.

²² But be **doers** of the word, and not merely **hearers** who **deceive** themselves.

²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves^[h] in a **mirror**; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. 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.

If any **think** they are religious, and do not **bridle their tongues** but deceive their hearts, their religion is **worthless**. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for **orphans and widows** in their distress, and to keep oneself **unstained** by the world.

In Deuteronomy 6, in the Old Testament, there is a passage called the Shema, where Moses tells the people **to listen to God, and love God** with whole heart, soul, and strength—it's the basis of the Great Commandment—to love God, and our neighbor as ourselves.

The Shema is one of the most important prayers for Jews.

It's called the **Shema**, because it starts with that Hebrew word, shema, which means Hear.

But it doesn't just mean 'hear', it also means 'obey'.

Hear AND obey.

Listen AND **do** what I say.

Here's the scripture in Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴**Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.**^[a] ⁵*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

We don't have a word like shema in English.

But this Hebrew term means **BOTH hear and obey**.

I think of the Shema when I hear the words from James—
*be **doers** of the word, and not merely hearers.*

James says if we just hear only,
we are like people who **look in a mirror**,
walk away, and forget what they saw!

In other words, those who hear only are like people
who just quickly glanced in the mirror....

We can't just glance at God's word for a moment, or even just a Sunday.
We are asked to **listen and obey!**

Isn't this what we often admire in our role models and heroes?
The **integrity** to not just **know**—or even just **say** what's right--
but to **DO it?**

We want people who walk the walk, right?

This is what both **James and Jesus in the Gospel of Mark** reading
are talking about today.

They are talking about not just **hearing** God's word,
And not just **saying** we love God,
but actually **DOING it**.

It's interesting that in Mark's Gospel we do see people
striving to do God's word, the Pharisees.

The Pharisees get a very **bad rap** today—
they were men of God, who tried to follow God's law.

This is why they are accusing Jesus' disciples—
because the disciples are not washing their hands before eating,
which was an important Jewish custom and law.

But Jesus says you've **got this all wrong**.
 It's not what goes into the body that matters, like unclean hands.
 That doesn't cause defilement, or make us unclean.
 It's what comes out of the **heart** that matters.

Note that Jesus does **not** say that washing hands is ridiculous or unnecessary.
 He says that the men pointing this out
 are **talking** about following God,
 but their **hearts** are not really in it.

*Jesus says to them,
 "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you **hypocrites**, ...
 'This people honors me with their **lips**,
 but their **hearts** are far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
 teaching human precepts as doctrines.'
⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to **human** tradition."*

Jesus can always **see right through to the human heart**.
 And Jesus points out their **hypocrisy**.
 You **say** you honor God.
 But your **hearts** say otherwise.
Jesus cares about our hearts.

You know, one of the main **critiques** of Christians today is **hypocrisy**.
 We **say** we believe in God, but we don't **act** like it.
 We say we believe in love, but we don't **actually love** our neighbors.
 We **talk** a good talk, but we don't **walk** the walk.
 And truth be told, sometimes **we ARE hypocrites**, for we are all fallen people.

James points out the 'walk the walk' hypocrisy too.
 The difference between just **hearing** the Word of God, and **doing** it.

And James gives us a way to get beyond this:
 He says, *let everyone be **quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger**;
 be **doers** of the word, and not merely **hearers** who deceive themselves.*

All of us can be here in church and **hear** what God wants of us.
The question is—can we leave here and **DO it?**

Can we **CONNECT it to our everyday lives?**
Especially when it means making a **change?**

When was the last time **you made a change** after hearing from God?
Putting **what we know to work** often requires change.

But James says **here's a way to walk the walk.**
Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.

When was the last time you were **quick to LISTEN?**
Real, **active listening** means we take it all in—
without spending all our time coming up with our own response,
or a 'fix' for what they're saying.

Real listening means **holding your tongue.**
Being **slow to speak.**
That's **challenging**—it's not the way most of us are wired.
But James says this is **the way to walk the walk.**

In other word, we need to **connect some dots---**
between HEARING.....BELIEVING.....& OBEYING.

If we **hear** that God is good, and we **tell** others God is good, that's great.
But do we also **ACT OUT God's goodness?**
What happens when we hear that God wants us to welcome the poor,
the immigrant, the outsider, the sick?
Do we hear that and then—**DO it?**

If we **hear** that God wants us to **give,**
and we **put** something in the offering, that's great.
But what happens when we hear that God wants us to give generously,
proportionately, sacrificially, not just something small?
Do we hear, believe, and then **give accordingly?**

This is what **Jesus and James** are talking about.
A **CONNECTION** between God's Word, and our hearts and lives.

Hypocrisy is a **DISCONNECT**—between *values and behavior*.
It comes out **two different** ways.

One is the way of the **Pharisees** and us—
when we **say** we'll do something,
we may even go through the **motions** in our behavior,
but we don't actually **believe** in what we are doing.
Our HEART is not in it.

The other temptation is what **James** describes—
we **hear** God's call, but we don't actually **do** it.

These two temptations are **EQUALLY dangerous** sins.

What God wants from us is a **CONNECTION**—
between **our head, heart, words, and actions**.

How does that **challenge** you?
Where do you struggle to do this—because **we all struggle with it, right?**

It's so easy to **say something and fail to follow up**, isn't it?
Sins of **omission** are so common.
We miss opportunities to live what we believe
We fail to stand up and do what's right.

It's also so easy to just go through the **motions** of faith,
and **not have it** in our hearts.
So that when tough times come, and temptations hit, we **fail**.

So, what can we do?
How about being **quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger?**
How about trying to **hear**, and then **do** what God wants?
And avoid the **trap of hypocrisy?**

To do this----We need the **help of Jesus**.
We need the **Holy Spirit** to empower us.
We Jesus to help us **be the people we SAY we are**,
and follow the God we say we follow.

And we can look to role models around us,
 And those who have gone before us,
 But most of all we **look to Jesus**—his life, and ministry.

And we do this, **NOT just on Sundays.**
 We do this **every day!**

On Sundays, we are **refreshed, renewed and reminded**
 of God's love and direction for our lives,
 so that we can **go out and DO** the work of Jesus.

Jesus tells us what to do—
share the Good News.
love God, and our neighbors as ourselves.
 make more **disciples.**

The question is: how are we doing this?
 Where are we **living out** our faith?

You know, the book of **James** has received a bad rap over the years,
 for being too legalistic.
 Martin Luther hated it.

But this little book has some great **practical advice** for Christian life.
 It's about walking the walk.

So, in the words of **James**,
 where can we **be quick to listen,**
slow to speak, and slow to anger?

Can you think of a time—where you can do that **this week?**
 It's not easy, but we believe that God can help us do it!
 And the reward is amazing!

I think of some difficult situations,
 and difficult people,
 and how **listening more, and speaking less, was transformative.**

It's amazing how differently people can act---when they are truly heard.
 When someone takes the time to really listen to their concerns.
 Listening is not valued in our culture—but it's part of our Christian calling.

And being ***slow to speak***.
 Talk about being countercultural!

And yet—we have the ***ability to slow down and hold our tongue***.
James says: If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless
 Wow.

Being Slow to anger—is also very countercultural, and very important.

All of this brings us to ***DOING God's word***.
 James has real, concrete ways we can do that.
He says: Religion that is pure ... is this:
to care for orphans and widows in their distress,
and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Why orphans and widows?

Well, they were the ***most vulnerable*** people in their society—
 they had nothing, no social standing, they were nobody.
 James is saying what Jesus says in Matthew 25—
 that we are to live our faith, by caring ***for the least of these***.
 By ***loving our neighbors***---ALL of our neighbors, especially the vulnerable.

So how will we ***walk the walk of faith?***

I want you to take your ***bulletin and a pencil*** from the pew,
 And take a moment right now, to jot down just a word or two--
 About a person or situation where you can
 say and do what God wants—this week.

And then I want you to take a moment,
 To just silently ***pray for God's courage and strength***,
 to do what needs to be done.

After this sermon, we'll be singing a hymn that is very simple, but profound.

*Lord I want to be a Christian **in my heart**, in my heart,
Lord I want to be a Christian in my heart.*

That's our **GOAL**—to BE a Christian—in our hearts.

Friends, hear the **Good News of the Gospel** today,
Let's not **just hear** God's Word—when we leave here, let's **do it**.
And all God's people say together, Amen.