## **Living The Word**

James 1:19-27

Series: The Book of James Pastor Jarrett Stephens

**Illus. Bellaire Card** – I have this note card in my office and have kept it through the years. I must have been 10 or 11 years old when I wrote this down. I thought of it this week, when I was preparing and writing this message.

I remember when I first heard it preached as a boy, it just marked me and has stayed with me all these years. I kept it on my desk throughout junior high and high school. It is written on a giving envelope! Remember those? They would be in the pew racks. I remember my home preacher making this statement and for some reason it stuck out to me...thought it was so good.

I wrote it down...and maybe I wrote it down all those years ago just so I could share it with you today as an introduction to this message. Here is the statement, It's in the form of a question:

## If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Now, that's a good question. That's something to think about. If you were arrested and were charged with being a Christian:

- If they were to look at your daily schedule, would there be evidence that God is a priority in your life?
- If they were to interview your friends, co-workers, employer, your family members would their eye-witness testimony help build the case that you are a believer or take away from it?
- If they were to look at your bank account? Could it be determined that the Kingdom of God is of any value to you?
- If they were to put you under surveillance and observe you when you thought no one was watching...
- If they were to wiretap your phone and listen to your conversations or subpoena your phone and read your texts, gain access to your social media accounts...

If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? EVIDENCE is what I'm looking for...NOT what you SAY, but what you DO.

And THIS is exactly what James is after in this letter he is writing to his congregation – many of which have been forced from their homes and are now dispersed and living scattered out all over the Holy Land and known Roman world.

They receive this letter from their pastor, and he is encouraging them to stay faithful...to keep living out their faith. We mentioned in our introductory message that James is a "show me what you believe" kind of guy.

He is pushing his congregation to accept what the Lord is doing in their life because God is building their faith and after their spiritual maturity. And what we have said thus far is, that spiritual maturity can be measured by:

- Enduring trial joyfully (v. 2-12)
- Defeating temptation consistently (v. 13-18)

And today, we'll see it in (v. 19-27) by whether or not we are obeying God's Word diligently.

I'm calling the message today: Living the Word

The Bible...God's word is the theme of this series of verses here. You are going to see the "word" mentioned in (v. 21, 22, 23, 25) and as we begin reading, I want to start in (v. 18) where we see it mentioned there as well.

James 1:18-27 – "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.  $^{19}$  Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;  $^{20}$  for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore

put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. <sup>26</sup> If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's

religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

The only way there will ever be enough evidence to convict you of being a Christian, is if you listen to God's Word (so that you know what it says) and then live the word of God out in your daily life.

As James writes here, we can't me hearers only, but DOERS of the word. We are to obey the word of God diligently – this is a mark of...another way to measure spiritual growth.

Now, as we get going, there are two truths James shares about the Word of God that we need to know and understand.

First: The Word Saves

This is James 1:18 – "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

We are "brought forth by..." James is using language and terminology describing a pregnancy. We are "brought forth"...we are born again...we are delivered into this world spiritually by "the word of truth". We hear the word, respond by faith to the word and are saved – we are brought forth by the word.

And those that had been born again...those that had been saved...they became what James refers to here as "firstfruits" because they were the first to be hear the message, respond to the message and begin following Jesus. Other would come after them, but they were the first followers of Christ, hence the term "firstfruits".

Here's what's important though – ALL of them were saved the exact same way. They were brought forth by the word of truth. It's the word – the gospel that God uses to save us!

This is why when you come to Champion Forest, we put a premium on preaching and teaching the word of God. Salvation takes place...it can begin to be activated if you will WHEN the Word is spoken and responded to by faith.

Paul put it like this in Rom. 10:17 – "So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ."

Earlier in that same chapter of Romans, listen to his argument for why preaching and sharing the good news with others is so important – he knows salvation doesn't occur without the word.

Rom. 10:13-15 – "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

People are only brought forth (born again) by the word of truth IF they hear the word of truth. This is why it's our responsibility to get the word to them (i.e. via missions and evangelism).

The Word Saves. Secondly though: The Word Sanctifies

The word "sanctify" means to "set apart". Once we are delivered forth by the word of truth...once we are saved...we are then "set apart" and made to look more like Jesus by the exact same word that saved us.

James 1:19-21 – "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

Let me give you a little salvation lesson here. I actually did this, this week for a group of high school seniors I am discipling. It's always one of the first lessons I teach those that I'm walking with so that they understand what the Lord has done in their life.

**illus. Whiteboard** – (justification, glorification, sanctification)

Now, notice here...the same word of truth (the gospel) that saved you, is the same word that will continue to save you!

Again, the word sanctify means to "set apart"...to make holy. And we are made holy by not simply knowing God's Word but more than that living God's Word.

# John 17:17 – "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."

So, I want you to check this out...I want you to consider the importance of the Word of God in your life. It's what saves you and it's what grows you...it's what sanctifies you.

Because of this, there are three what I would call "actions" we as believers have to take as it relates to the Word of God.

#### Action #1: **Receive the Word**

This has everything to do with the posture of our heart.

We are either going to humble ourselves and receive God's Word into our lives OR we can be prideful, arrogant and reject God's Word for our life.

Jesus likened our heart to soil and the word of God to seed that falls on the soil. Do you remember this illustration he gave? It's pretty powerful!

Matt. 13:3-9 – "And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup> Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, <sup>6</sup> but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away.

<sup>7</sup> Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup> He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus in one of the only times we are given in scripture where he actually explains the parable to his disciples.

Matt. 13:18-23 - "Hear then the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup> When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.

<sup>20</sup> As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup> yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while,

and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. <sup>22</sup> As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. <sup>23</sup> As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed

bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." So, the only way that our heart will receive the word of God is the only way that soil will receive seed – it has to be soft, fertile soil...a word for this would be humble.

This is what James is getting at in: James 1:19-21 – "Know this my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

A soft, receptive heart begins by having a quiet, humble spirit before the Lord. It's humble people that are, "quick to hear and slow to speak."

You've heard the old adage: God gave you two ears and one mouth so that you could listen twice as much as you talk. We're going to be dealing with our tongue and how we communicate in a few weeks. We're told here in (v. 26) here if we don't bridle our tongue, we're deceiving ourselves and our religion is worthless – this is what James chapter three is all about!

What does it mean though to be quick to hear? Let's talk listening skills as it relates to the Word of God. Receiving the Word of God into our lives involves hearing and really listening to the Word of God.

- We can't listen to the Word of God if we are never slowing down long enough to spend time with him in his Word!
- We can't listen to him if the cell phone is always near and the notifications are always going off!
- We can't listen to him if we are so busy running from one place to the next never allowing the noise of the world to cease!
- We can't listen...our hearts won't be receptive if we're always the one talking in our prayer time, and we never pause to take in what God may be trying to say to us by his Word and through his Spirit.

When we receive the word humbly into our lives it involves being slow to speak and quick to hear what God would have to say to us. A humble and receptive heart will also be a heart that doesn't hold a grudge – this is what this anger is about in (v. 20).

See, anger in and of itself is not a sin. Paul tells us in (Eph. 4:26) that we can be angry, we're just not to sin in our anger. We see glimpses in scripture of a righteous anger that Jesus models.

James isn't speaking about that kind of anger...he's speaking about a seething anger that comes from sandwiched right here in the middle of a context speaking of the "word of truth" – what's this about?

Well, we talked in the message last week about the sin nature in us...that flesh that has distorted desires or sometimes tries to meet godly desires in an ungodly way – that sin nature/flesh HATES truth...it's repulsed by it!

**Illus. Mushrooms -** You know what I'm talking about when I say the word repulsed? I have the pallet of a 12-year-old...drives my sweet Debbie crazy! Give me chicken nuggets, mac and cheese and coke zero and I'm good. I do NOT venture out when it comes to food choices.

Like, I've never eaten Mayonnaise. It repulses me. I've never eaten guacamole. Can't do it...something about a creamy green. Now, I can tear up salsa and love catsup, but can't eat tomatoes. I've never eaten a mushroom – the thought it right now is making me sick...it's a part of the fungi family – why would you eat it? These things...just thinking about them repulses me...gives me a gag reflex.

Well, listen to this: our sin nature is so deeply flawed...our flesh is so sick that it is repulsed at anything related to the Word of God.

So, watch this...when God's Word teaches something that we don't like or line up with in our flesh, we can get angry about it! When God speaks through his Word, and it cuts because that's what God's word does!

Remember the writer of Hebrews? **Heb. 4:12 – "For the word of God is living** and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

When you come to church or you are sitting in a Bible Study or maybe you are just in your time with the Lord – sometimes his word is like a scalpel and it can cut and hurt. God is using his Word by his Spirit to operate on you without anesthesia...and it's NOT always pleasant!

If we're not careful we can get offended by what God says...and if we don't deal with it honestly and with humility, what happens is we can start getting angry with God!

I've seen this through the years! God uses his word to address something that is off in your life...something is going on and God uses his word to send a warning and rather than receiving it with gratitude and repenting, you reject it and get mad!

- Might be a relationship you're in and God uses his word to in 2 Cor. 6:14 where it's commanded to not be "unequally yoked" or Heb. 13:4 where it states the marriage bed should be undefiled – and the reality is you are missionary dating, thinking that you are going to win that person to Jesus or you're sleeping with someone you're not

married to...you hear God's Word – will you humbly receive it and listen to what it says or get mad that God calls you out for disobedience and sin?

- Might be he exposes something dark in your life. You've been lying about something at work or at home. Or maybe you're cutting corners of some kind and you read in God's Word or hear a preacher talk about the importance of confession and repentance. You know you need to confess to your spouse or to your employer your lie or your deception, but rather than coming clean what happens? You get mad at God for bringing it up...for the conviction you are feeling so you try to deaden it or make it go away instead of dealing with it and letting God bring healing.
- Some of you could be angry at God right now because he allowed a certain trial in your life...and deep down there is bitterness and resentment toward God. You're angry with him. Mad at him. Or mad at him because of the consequences of a choice you freely made!

## Prov. 19:3 – "When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord."

What James here says is that anger will not produce the righteousness of God. God has saved you, and he wants to sanctify you...and he is using his word to do it!

The question is, "Will you receive it humbly or in your pride reject God's word and his voice in your life?"

What we are seeing is if we really want to get out of the word of God everything God desires for us, we have to be slow to speak and quick to hear, slow to anger (open to whatever it is God would have to say to us, AND James says we have to (v. 21) "put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness" that is in our lives.

It's interesting that in this section on hearing and doing the word of God, James uses this word "filthiness" which was a medical term in the time of the Bible that described ear wax!

Sin is like ear wax that prevents us from hearing the voice of God. Don't think that you can live however you want to live Monday through Saturday (let moral filth and rampant wickedness in) and expect to hear God's voice clearly on Sunday...not happening!

In fact, it could be that some of you come each week, and you leave thinking, "Well, I guess God didn't speak to me today."

When the truth his, his Word was preached, he was speaking by his Spirit, but you couldn't hear it because of filth in your life that is effectively preventing you from hearing God.

This is why it's so dangerous to coddle sin...to make small compromises...to let impurity creep its way into your life – it deafens us to the voice of God!

Some of us would do well right now to ask God to take a q-tip to our soul – and let's confess our sins before him so that we can hear him clearly and distinctly. This is why confession of sin and repentance is so very important.

God's Word saves us. God's Word sanctifies us. Therefore, three actions. Action #1 – Receive the Word – and that word receive there (v. 21) means we are "to welcome" it into our lives…to embrace with eagerness!

We are to treat the Word of God like it's a dear friend or a beloved family member that we haven't seen in years that knocks on our front door. We would open that door, see that person, bring them in and welcome them into our home – that's the idea here when James says, "receive with meekness the implanted word".

Listen, in the New Covenant (Jer. 31, Ez. 36) – God has planted his word in our hearts....and when we receive it into our lives it brings and gives joy and peace and life. This is why we don't just receive the word, but we are to:

#### Action #2 – **Reflect on the Word**

James 1:22-25 – "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.<sup>23</sup> For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

I love the imagery here. James like any good preacher gives an illustration. And he says, "don't be like a man who goes to the mirror and then just forgets what he sees...that's someone who hears the word, but doesn't do the word.

Instead, James here calls for reflection...that phrase "look intently" in (v. 23) – it's this idea of examining carefully. It's stooping over.

**Illus. Lanier Library** – original fragment of dead sea scroll – took a friend by there and we were looking at it. We were both stooping over and looking at it a magnifying glass. Looking intently.

The parallel is easy to understand. James, says don't look intently and then forget...look intently, then DO! You'll be blessed in your doing.

I'm calling on us today along with Pastor James to "look so intently" at the Word that we can't forget it! I'm calling us to absorb the Word...saturate ourselves in it...memorize it!

Remember the goal James says that God has for us? Perfection...completion...conformity to Christ - i.e. spiritual maturity!

Spiritual maturity will NOT take place apart from knowing God's word – and knowing it comes from reflecting on it. Getting it into your life. This takes time…it takes work!

It doesn't happen by osmosis! You can't put your Bible under your pillow and wake up in the morning knowing more of God's word.

Instead, we have to get in God's Word for ourselves. Get a reading plan. Have community. This is why Life Groups are important. These are all tools that help us reflect and remember the word of God.

I can tell you this on a personal level, nothing has been more helpful in my sanctification than the Word of God and meditating on its truth.

**Illus. Dallas/West Palm Beach** (Gal. 6:7-9 & 1 John 2:15-17) – discipleship group memorizing Romans 8:1 – Next Step books have one verse each session to memorize.

God's Word saves. God's Word sanctifies. Therefore:

Action #1 – Receive the Word

Action #2 – Reflect on the Word

Action #3 – **Respond to the Word** 

Be a doer of the word! This is the entire thrust of this passage. Don't just say you believe...live like it! LIVE THE WORD!

Respond to what you are reading in a proactive way! If there is a command, obey it! If there is a promise, claim it! If there is a sin, avoid it! If there is an example to follow, then follow it. If there is a lesson to learn, then take it in.

James 1:22 – "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

**Illus. Coach Prime -** Look, Coach Prime at Colorado has been talking a big game...for months! Well, yesterday, he walked it!

If you are going to talk the talk, you have to walk the walk! James calls for action. At the end of the day, it's not HOW much you know the Word, it's how much you LIVE the Word.

Obedience is the litmus test for true belief in Jesus. We'll spend an entire message on this in a couple of weeks.

Rick Warren was once asked what the best translation of the Bible there was. Listen to how he answered: "My answer: When you translate it into your life. That's what Bible study is all about. If you're not translating God's Word into your life, you're not studying the Bible the way God intended. God gave us the Bible to transform us, not simply inform us. It should give us a bigger heart, not a bigger head. In the Book of James, we're told, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." In other words, God wants our beliefs turned into behavior."

God wants us to respond to the Word by obeying it and doing what it says...notice what the last part of (v. 25) promises – "he will be blessed in his doing.

You want a blessed life? Receive, reflect and respond to the Word that saves you and sanctifies you. Do this...and if you are ever arrested for being a Christian, there will be more than enough evidence to convict you.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.