

Why Jackson's Man in the Mirror never could make a "CHANGE!"

James 1.19-27 | Mirrors Part 2 | April 10, 2016

Missions Night Tomorrow Night

The greatest album of all time was released in 1987. The album was called "bad" and it was by a guy named Michael Jackson. Yes, thriller sold twice as many copies as any other any album in history. But Bad ranks #10 all time in sales and was just a better all around album. From that album came 5 consecutive #1 billboard songs. "I just can't stop loving you," "bad" "the way you make me feel" "dirty Diana" and "The Man in the Mirror." I don't know if you need to know how big a fan I was of Jackson's music & mad dance skills. But there may or may not have been a solo....at my wedding.

That last one, man in the mirror, was the song many people considered Jackson's greatest contribution to culture. And the reason was because that song was a call to change the world by changing yourself.. Remember the lyrics?

"I'm starting with the man in the mirror. I'm asking him to change his ways. No message could have been any clearer. If you want to make the world a better place take a look at yourself and make a change."

Then like a preacher he gets into it at the end of the song and starts saying "you've got to move...SHOME ON!" You gotta do something. The song was passionate and called people to change the world by changing themselves. That's inspiring!

But it was flawed. The flaw was that it didn't give any power to change. It called for change without talking about the power for lasting change. And so people got excited for a while, but eventually even Jackson himself didn't experience lasting change for the better in his own well documented life.

But he was on point about change. All change begins by looking in the mirror and seeing the real you. Then doing something about it. And that's what James is going to talk to us today about. How to experience real, lasting change in the gospel.

We are continuing our series through James we are calling "Mirrors." And Today is the title track. You want to change your life? You want to become the person God is calling you to be? James is going to show you where the power for real lasting change comes from. And he's going to tell you to

look in the mirror. And then he's gonna say "SHOME ON!"
And I'm going to try really hard not to leg kick.

2 parts to sermon.

1. Walk through the passage and show you what James is saying.

2. Show you how spiritual change works.

[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. [21] Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James finished verse 18 from last week talking about how the word of God has brought new life to us. And in verse 21 he's talking about receiving the word of God that is able to save your souls. But it seems like verses 19 & 20 are on a different subject.

I think I mentioned this last week that at first glance James seems like the most ADD of all new testament writers. Bible...anger...bible...SQUIRREL! No there actually is a really important connection.

James is saying don't be an angry person, be a listener. It's kind of a new thought for me but James is contrasting two things I don't normally put at odds. anger And listening.

That's because underneath anger is pride. Pride that I'm right and whatever is contradicting me...is wrong. And so when my pride is challenged I am quick to speak against whatever that is.

In contrast the listener isn't quick to anger, he or she is quick to *hear*. To listen. Slow to talk. And then here's how James connects that to his whole thought about God's word.

"Therefore..." you put away something and receive something.

The put away literally means take off. Like taking off a piece of clothing. You set it aside. And he says that thing to put away is moral filthiness and wickedness. He's referring to that anger & pride (and probably expanding beyond that anger to all sin), and showing you the connection.

See you cannot receive or put on the word until you've put off the pride. He's saying one of the reasons the Word of God is not changing you is that you have an angry and proud spirit.

That's why he's saying you have to receive this word with meekness. With humility. And its almost like his litmus test for whether or not you will be able to receive God's word is how you interact with other people. Are you quick to listen to others? Or as soon as they start talking are you actually working on what you are going to say in response?

Because if you won't even listen to other people you won't listen to God.

And you'll never be able to get anything out of God's word if your pride keeps you from really hearing it.

The way many Christians show this pride is that we try and get around any interpretation of God's word that challenges us to change the way we live right now. So you read Luke 12:33 "sell your possessions and give to the poor" and we are like...how can I interpret that in a way that I can agree with it...but it doesn't change my life any.

See our pride makes us quick to speak back to God's word instead of receiving it and doing it....why? because we don't want to change. And you will never get anything out of the bible until you own your pride, set it down, and open your heart and mind to receive God's word as it is.

[22] But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

James says you can't stop at hearing. In fact, if you think you put down your pride and you hear the word...but that is as far as it goes...you never really heard it. You just pay it lip service. And you aren't deceiving God. You may act all holy around people in your community group, you can dominate sword drills. – Anybody? Growing up in a southern Baptist church we were rewarded for memorizing bible verses and we would get pop quiz sword drills. Cause bible is a sword. And the one who could recite the most on command won. I

dominated. Cause I'm a Shelton. And Sheltons win. Winning sword drills did not make me a Christian. It reinforced my pride though.

You can listen to K-love, only read Karen Kinsbury novels, and slap a whole school of Jesus fish on your car, but if your life steps are still dictated by YOU, your pride and your agenda, and not God's word, you are deceiving yourself.

I think a very real danger many bible belt Christians face is self-deception. Here is what I mean:

James has a burden that the people in these churches (professing Christians) are deceived about whether or not they have genuine faith. This is why he gets here really quickly. There are men and women in the church who think they're pleasing to God. They think they're in right standing with God, but they're not. They think they're right with God because they apparently are hearers of the Word.

By definition, these professing Christians are blind to their self-deception. They are unaware that they are building their life on sand. They are convinced they're building their life on the rock, and they continue to chug along, falsely believing they're building their life on the rock. This is why James goes here, because James understands that what he said in verse 21... Meekly receiving the Word of Truth

means more than just hearing it and nodding to it. It means to embrace it and to actually, in faith, act upon it.¹

My grandfather had a saying he passed to my dad that seems to fit perfectly today. It usually came out when I tried to talk up my baseball skills but it applies here and to every area of life. Sometimes grandfathers just have a way of saying things. He said:
Don't talk the talk unless you can walk the walk.

That's a big emphasis for James. You gotta walk the walk.

Don't just hear the word, DO IT. Don't just talk like you are a Christian, walk like it!

Why is that such a big deal:

[23] 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. [24] For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

His analogy is simply this: What is the purpose of a mirror? First you say "OHHH That's what I look like" Sometimes that's followed by...OUCH. And then what do you do? You act. You make a CHANGE! The mirror shows you your flaws

¹ The burden of James thought is owed to Beau Hughes at the Village Church from his sermon on this same passage titled hearer / doer.

that you can't see, then and then you fix them. James is saying to hear the word and not obey it is like looking in the mirror, seeing a deli mustard smeared all over your right cheek, going away and forgetting about it. Doing nothing about it. And you are like...nobody does that. James says...exactly. Yet, that is what the person who hears the bible and doesn't act on it is like. What James is saying is you must have never really looked at yourself in the mirror to begin with.

And I think more than that, James is revealing something so true about the human heart. What James is getting at is that there is something in our heart that doesn't want to see who we really are. We want to give God a casual glance but we really don't want to see who we really are. Because the truth is we aren't as put together as we think we are. Our system of morality where we decide what is right and wrong isn't as consistent as we hope to believe. That's why Jackson's song is so powerful. Because everybody can relate to wanting to see the man in the mirror "change his ways."

I was on an airplane Sunday night and this nice guy from a hindu background and I are talking. I'm sharing the gospel with him and he's like yeah man I know all this. I believe it. I was like...WAIT what? You said you aren't a Christian. And he says he learned the bible and he really does believe Jesus got out of the grave and is the son of God. But he doesn't want to be stuck doing what the bible says. And I told him Jesus doesn't give you that option. You can't hear it, say you believe it, then not live by it. You are deceiving yourself.

Jesus is all or nothing. You've created your own religion. How confident are you as the head of this new religion?

[25] 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.

One phrase you need to see there:

“Law of liberty”: James is labeling the Old Testament law with New Testament words. Which is cool. See what he's saying is the OT *law* used to be something that condemned us. But Jesus *liberated* us from that condemnation by paying the penalty that we owed for breaking it. That's one of the ways he fulfilled the law. Now, with a full and free heart we can be a doer.

Remember, James is a book about progress. So he says look into the *law* from this side of the cross. And you will find more gladness in Christ and freedom to live as God calls you to live. He's taken away your punishment for breaking the law and left you free to pursue God's design for your life without fear of condemnation. And it is in your living, in your doing, that you will be blessed. That's where the blessing of God is. It's not in what you know, but what you do with what you know.

Then he finishes this chapter with some very practical words about doing versus hearing.

[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

James is so frustrating because he is so absolute and specific. By the end of this series you are going to think of James like a physical therapist. You will hate him while you are with him, and then be so grateful you had him in your life afterwards. Sorry Caleb!

You can't "interpret" away what he says. He gives three tests to help you see whether or not your religion is REAL or whether you are deceiving yourself. We better listen.

1. **What are you saying?** This one seems odd to me. The bridle was the instrument along with the bit by which the rider controlled his horse. This is twice in this short section he's talked about how our words reveal our heart. Jesus says in Luke 6 that it is out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. That's why it is so important to James. If you are a regular liar, if you are prone to gossip, if you are prone to slander, if you are prone to vulgar joking, prone to sarcasm...he's not telling you to stop. He's saying you may want to know that your heart is producing that. Your heart is likely not at peace with Christ but is insecure and hurting and your words reflect that.

[27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction...

2. **Who are you helping?** What a statement in verse 27. Pure religion undefiled...is helping orphans & widows. widows and orphans represented the most vulnerable and helpless in society, for the often had no legal way to provide for themselves. Look, Christianity is not *only* defined by helping the helpless, but a Christianity that does not help the helpless is not Christianity. One test of pure religion, therefore, is the degree to which we extend aid to the “helpless” in our world-whether they be widows and orphans, immigrants trying to adjust to a new life, impoverished third-world dwellers, the handicapped, or the homeless.

Why of all the things he could say, is this pure and undefiled religion? Because it is the purest picture of what Jesus did for us! See the gospel message says that we were the widow and orphan. Orphans need to be cared for. A 3 month old orphan left on its own will die. It can't feed or protect itself. And when you start to have compassion for that orphan you start to feel the heart of God. Because that's how God felt about you. We were helpless. This world is confusing, messy, and our own hearts are incredibly fickle and if we are honest we know we are deep down confused frightened orphans. And God rescued us. Not because we deserved it...we are orphans. Orphans don't earn love. They just receive it. So James is saying when you look after widows and orphans, that's pure religion because that's self-less love. And that is the gospel.

Though you didn't do anything to deserve it, the father in heaven set his love on you and brought you home. And now you have security and provision in Christ. So now go give the same thing to the orphan God gave to you.

, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

3. **How are you living?**

James isn't talking about living a perfect life. But he is reminding Christians that they have a hope far better than anything this world can offer. But even though we are new people with a better hope, we still get pulled back into some of those old things that aren't near as good as Jesus but still entice us. And when we give into them, they leave a mark. And if we look at our lives and all we see are the markings of the world and not the life marked by following Jesus, we are deceiving ourselves and we need to check our hearts. You ask: what do the markings of Jesus look like? Galatians 5.22 – Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control. Is that you? Or are you Opportunistic, anxious, angry, harsh, and selfish? Sounds like the fruit of the rotten spirit.

So I told you this is a book about progress. And God is calling you to progress in your faith. To move closer to him. Spiritual Growth is never idle. To be idle is to be moving away from God. James is calling you to move towards him. That's part 2 of the message today. **How spiritual change works:**

1. Put down your pride.

You need to learn to see the pride in your own heart if you are really going to be someone who grows in the word of God. Because your pride is always going to challenge God for who has authority over how you live. In Jonathan Edward's "Thoughts of Revival" he concluded that it was pride that strangled revival. He gave his readers 3 things to check themselves for pride:

1. **A proud heart is sure of every point of its belief.** It cannot tell the difference between a major and a minor point. The mark of a proud heart is that its argumentative. Is that you? Do you have trouble letting things go? I notice this in myself a lot. If I'm in a conversation I need to make sure the other person understands 100% of why I'm right.
2. **A proud heart enjoys confronting or avoids confronting but it never confronts with tears.** That is, a proud heart doesn't love the other person, it only loves itself. And so you either enjoy beating the other person to exalt yourself, or you try to avoid the other person to preserve yourself. The humble heart doesn't run from conflict but mourns that it must take place. Because the humble person loves the other person more than himself/herself.
3. **You're always griping about how your life is going.** A humble hearts recognizes that you don't always know what's best. A humble heart submits his or her suffering to the care of God and suffers without a great deal of griping.

You will have to surrender that heart of pride and it will be hard because pride is so deceitful. It convinces you that you are awesome which is what makes you unaware that you have the flaw of pride. So seek to put aside pride! Here's how you can do that:

2. Get to know the Bible

A real goal of mine today is to convince you that you need to allow the word of God to be implanted into your heart and mind. James is saying instead of being the proud self made man or woman, *hear* the word of God. Listen to it, get to know it. God promises he will implant it on your heart but that only starts to yield fruit as you soak in it.

That word picture James gives us where he says the Bible is like a mirror. That's our whole word picture for the series. **James doesn't simply say to look in the mirror and then go off and obey. He says to take the mirror with you.**²

Never stop looking in the mirror! That's the point! The word doesn't conjure up in you the will power to do it, no you have to be looking into the perfect law at all times. How can you always take it with you? I don't just mean keep an app on your phone where you can pull it up. I mean store it

² The "take the mirror with you" thought comes from Tim Keller's sermon "Growth through hearing" part 2 on James 1.19-27. An excellent sermon on anger and the word of God.

into your mind and heart. Meditate on it, memorize it, feast on it.

- How did Stephen face his execution with patience and love? He looked up and saw God. He took the mirror with him
- Jesus says not to have anxiety about anything but consider. Look at the birds. God takes care of them, he will take care of you. In anxiety battles, Take the mirror with you.
- Deuteronomy says you want to know how to raise your kids? Put the word on your Doorposts, put it on your forehead, put it everywhere. And when you lie down and when you get up...Deuteronomy 6.6-8. "And these words I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
- We are to look to Jesus Christ and what God has done for us. How can we look at that and think that He will forget us?
- If you are willing to do that, you will be blessed because it is the perfect law who brings freedom
 - You don't obey by will power, you obey by taking the mirror with you and looking.

That's today's big main point.

Take the word of God with you

It is not easy. You need people around you to continually tell you to keep looking. Because you often don't want to look. And you need a friend to tell you to stop trying to do it on your own and look. But what freedom and rest comes from this!

I told you we'd have homework each week. Last week it was about trials. This week it is about getting to know the word of God. If you are here for 8 weeks you are going to have 8 achievable homework assignments. And many of you can't DO what God's word says because you don't know what it says. And the only time you hear what it says is when you come in hear on Sundays. I appreciate you taking my word for it but I also want God's word to be implanted on your heart. So this weeks homework:

Homework: Read the Book of James

Short. 5 chapters. Literally could do it in 20 minutes. Or you can go one chapter a day the next 5 days and still take the weekend off. Not a big exercise. But read it! And if you get done and think what's next? We've got links on mercycharlotte.com to help you develop a plan to read the other books of the bible.

3. Do what it says

Ok, remember Michael Jackson's song "Man in the mirror?" I love it because it is a call to action. James' words here are

a call to action. James is calling you out and saying you think you are a Christian but you aren't obedient to God's words? You are deceived and you are not a Christian. So it's real simple...obey God's words. Now remember, James is about progress. So where are you going to start? James gives you 3 places: What you Say, Who you help, how you live. Pick one of those and start to let the gospel go to work on how you handle them. All three of those are about lowering your view of yourself, exalting your view of God, and acting on your faith.

- How can your words be life giving instead of life taking? That's what the words of the gospel are. They give life to everyone. How can your words be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit to do the same?
- How can your life be sacrificed for others? Serving orphans and widows is exhausting and time consuming. We desire to be a church that stays in the community for the long haul. But the reason most organizations will doubt us to begin with is because they've seen too many churches say they will serve the community but then come once then leave until same time next year. We are a church that stays with the orphan and widow. And that is gonna take sacrifice. No way around it. We've partnered up with a couple of organizations through Serve Charlotte to care for the orphans in Charlotte. Website.
- How can your life be marked by obedience to God's word instead of a desire to satisfy yourself? Will you

trust his will? Even if it means ending a relationship that you know isn't good for you? If it means admitting your secret sin that you know is destroying you? If it means pacing yourself so you aren't losing self control along with the other co-workers on Friday night? Giving up your own time to serve your spouse and kids? Even when it means you won't get to do what you want to do?

Can you change? Absolutely. Will you though? Well there is great hope for you in the gospel. Will you put down your pride? Will you gaze into the mirror of God's word. Accept what it says about you and accept the hope it offers you? Will you act?

I want to change the world. I do. That begins right here though. May we be a church changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's Pray.

Closing into Communion