

Jas09 – Don't Just Hear James 1:22-25

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Open your Bibles. Turn them to James chapter 1. Title of the message this morning, “Don't Just Hear.” Verses 22 all the way to 25.

If you look down at your Bible and you're using the ESV or a literal translation, you're going to see that the text starts with “But.” Not even the correct etiquette “However,” just “But.” It's a contrast word. It's a word that begins a new thought, with a contrast. So we could say “However” but the Bible says “But.” Last message James said be quick to hear. This message he says *But* do not be just a hearer. Let's read James 1:22.

James 1:22 (ESV)

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

Last message – be quick to hear. This message – beware of being a hearer only.

Last message we said “Be quick to hear” applied to both how we respond to the Word of God and how we respond to other people. These verses are very focused on the Word of God whether we are hearers only or doers. And the warning from James today is beware of deceiving yourself. James 1:22 says if you are a *hearer only* of the Word of God there's a chance you are deceiving yourself. So, strap in and prepare to be challenged by the Word of God.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father allow your Word to speak. Word of God speak. Pour down like rain, be what you are. The living, active, powerful, dividing, discerning Word, Logos. God in expression. Be that, Lord. Speak to our hearts today. Reveal to us the specifics of where you would apply this Word to our lives. We pray you would apply it, we pray it would change us and we pray it would be supernatural, in Jesus' name, amen.*

It's so easy to deceive ourselves and honestly, at times we do it on purpose. When it comes to hearing the Word of God, it's easy for us to feel like we've accomplished something just by listening. If we come in here – or other places – where genuine worship is occurring and the Word of God is really being taught, it's pretty easy to leave feeling good about just being here listening to worship and hearing the Word of God. However, if we continue being hearers only and feeling good about ourselves because we are hearers, we can very easily become self deceived.

James 1:22 (ESV)

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

In New Testament times, philosophy (especially Greek philosophy) was big. And there were lecture halls built for people to come and hear the philosophers and thinkers expound on their “thinking.” The most famous of these lecture halls in the Bible was the Areopagus in Athens where Paul found himself giving an incredible sermon in Acts 17. The philosophers of Athens had brought Paul to speak at this great lecture hall because as Acts 17 says:

Acts 17:21

21 . . . all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

These “thinkers” of the day would love to gather to hear the other thinkers think out loud. They would hear interesting and entertaining thought and have lively discussion about them and then go away and do absolutely nothing with the information. Their goal was simply to come and listen and socially interact with the other “hearers” and then go on living without any regard to what they’d heard. The word James uses for “hearers only” in James 1:22 is most likely a comparison to these “hearers” of his day, those who felt good about themselves because they listened to the matters of “higher learning.” Their intellect was stimulated and they enjoyed interacting and discussing what they heard.

But here is the critical truth and the critical danger. For the most part these hearers were not disciples . . . neither of the one who was teaching or of the one who was being taught about (such as some famous philosopher.) Most of the people were merely there enjoying the social aspect of gathering at the lecture hall and discussing weightier matters with the friends they had made there.

Do we have the courage to admit that this picture of the lecture halls of philosophy could sometimes describe how we approach coming to church? And the final deception is when we begin to convince ourselves that the hearing alone is good enough for us. The more we convince ourselves that hearing alone is enough, the easier it is to convince ourselves that we don’t have to actually do anything.

Here’s the problem. Jesus was never about hearing only.

John 8:31–32 (NCV)

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “If you continue to obey my teaching, you are truly my followers.

32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Jesus, talking to those who believed in him, said *if you want to know the truth and if you want the truth to set you free... continue to obey my teaching, to truly be my disciples.* There are many who wonder why their “believing in Jesus has not yet set them free from the bondage of their sin. And yes it is true that faith alone saves you, by God’s grace alone through your faith alone. But Jesus says here in John 8:31 something else is required for you to truly be set free.

In the NLT it’s *if you remain faithful to my teachings*

In the AMP Bible it’s *If you hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them .*

..

THEN you will KNOW the truth and the truth will set you free.

This should be a great fear of every committed Bible teacher and I promise you it is a great fear of *this* Bible teacher. For a preacher to produce “hearers only” of God’s Word must be a great offense to God. Paul makes it clear in Romans 2:

Romans 2:13 (NLT)

13 For merely listening to the law doesn’t make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight.

Our self deception comes when we get to place where we think that our hearing is actually doing. Consider the “arm chair” quarterback. He jumps up and down in his recliner getting all excited about the decisions the quarterback is making on the field, but the truth is his recliner antics are all the doing are all the armchair quarterback will ever be part of. And if we set that recliner on the sidelines of an NFL game and we launched that guy into the actual quarterback position it would be a very, very ugly site.

It’s the same way with arm chair preachers. I thank God very often that it’s been a long time since we’ve had someone here telling people every week what mistake I made and how I should have done this or that. Those people specialize in listening closely but their only goal is to spew out their opinion about whatever is being said (and it’s almost always negative opinion.) And the truth is, very seldom, if ever, do those arm chair critics actually apply the life-changing Word of God to their own lives.

Okay, so we looked at a couple of my illustrations of what this hearer only in verse 22 looks like. Now let’s look at how the Holy Spirit describes this person.

James 1:23-24 (ESV)

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.*

The “hearer only” is also an “immediate forgetter.” It’s like the person who looks intently in the mirror but goes away and immediately forgets what they look like. We look in a mirror to see what we look like. This isn’t like the self love where we admire ourselves in every mirror we pass, that’s another problem all together.

Here, the idea is conveyed so you can remember it. It’s like looking closely into a mirror and realizing we have a little booger hanging down, but instead of doing something about it, we just walk away and act like we don’t have a booger hanging there – not good.

What’s worse, it seems like James might be implying an “intentional forgetting” here. Meaning we intentionally set our mind on something else in order to forget what we saw in the mirror.

“No, I’m not going to think about that booger hanging there. I’m just gonna think about something else so I don’t have to address that thing.”

We can get really good at this, can’t we? In fact, some of us are masters at this and we’ve learned how to use technology and addiction to help us “intentionally forget.” We can easily forget (at least for the moment) by turning on the TV or the computer or opening an app on our smart phone and many of us use more “thought-numbing” tools to intentionally forget... addictions – porn – anger – money – recreation. It’s really easy to become an expert at “intentionally forgetting” what God has spoken to us loud and clear.

So, do we have a pretty good picture of the problem? Have we illustrated it enough? And so the question has to be, then what? If I am prone to doing the exact same thing (and I am) how can I change it? Well, as always the answer is in the next verse.

James 1:25 (ESV)

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.*

This word for “look into” here in verse 25 is different than the word for “look into” in the previous two verses when talking about the man who looks into the mirror and forgets. This “look into” means “to stoop to look.” It means to stop what you’re doing and stoop down to examine closely the details of a thing.

It’s like me looking for bugs with my grandkids in the backyard. When we find one I have to make a concerted attempt to get down on my knees and put my face close to the

ground in order to examine the grand detail of the incredible bug my grandkids have found. That is this word “look into.”

NLT says – look carefully

NIV says – look intently

NCV – says carefully study

This is a determined examination in order to absorb the details of God’s Word.

And then James says we are to “*look intently*” into “*the perfect law, the law of liberty.*” Now all commentators agree James is continuing his thought of verses 22 and 23 where he says be *doers of the word* and not just *hearers of the word*. This perfect law, the law of liberty (or freedom) is the fulfilled law in Jesus Christ which we most often call the Word of God. God’s perfect law (his Word) is the law that sets you free.

NLT says - *the perfect law that sets you free*

NCV says - *God’s perfect law that makes people free*

Here’s the hard truth. *Our freedom is Jesus Christ is directly tied to our obedience to his Word.* People who reject God’s Word in order to live for themselves and “be free” are always the people in the worst bondage. The truth is, in Christ, our freedom from guilt, fear, lust, anger, addiction, etc... is found only in obedience to God’s life changing Word, and not just hearing the Word but *doing*. Your freedom from bondage to sin will come from continually choosing the joy of willing obedience to Jesus Christ and his Word.

Man, study Romans chapter 6. Dig into it until it transforms the way you think about the (so-called) freedom of serving sin versus the true freedom of serving God. Let’s just look at the end of Romans chapter 6.

Romans 6:20–23 (NLT)

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right.

21 And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom.

22 But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is God’s perfect law that makes people truly free.

So let me ask you an incredibly important question. Why can two people attend the same church for the same time, both be in the same genuine worship, both hear the same proclamation of God's Word and one person have their life radically change by the power of God and one person not? It's because of how each one responds to the Word.

God's Word will transform all who truly receive it. But it does not *automatically* transform all who *only hear it*. What determines the difference is what we *DO* with God's Word. Are we a *hearer only* or a *doer*?

In the Gospels Jesus tells the parable of the sower and the seed.

The sower sowed seed on four soils. Some fell on the hard road. Some fell on the rocky ground. Some fell among the thorns. Some fell on good and fertile soil. When the disciples asked Jesus what the parable meant he said the seed was the Word of God. The four soil types were the condition of people's hearts and only in the heart represented by the good soil did the seed produce any fruit.

The three soils where the Word never took root, they are the *hearers only*. The good and fertile soil that produced a great crop. That is the *doer* of God's Word.

Here's the good news. In verse 25 we are told clearly how to make our hearts ready for the Word of God so that it can produce radical fruit. Again, back in James:

James 1:25 (ESV)

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.

We have already dealt with number one. Number one is the one who looks into God's Word. It is to look intently, carefully, studying in order to absorb it.

Alistair Begg, who helped inspire me on this message, says "Don't wait for God's Word to jump out at you, you must jump in."

#1) We've got to look intently into God's Word.

#2) (verse 25 says) is the one who perseveres in God's Word. It's not *just* looking intently, but habitually. Habitually. Regularly. Continually. We must develop a lifestyle of looking intently into God's Word and persevere in it.

So, #1) Looking intently into God's Word

#2) Looking habitually into God's Word

#3) (verse 25 says) This person is a *doer* of God's Word. Not just intently and habitually, but obediently. . . . ***being no hearer who forgets - but a doer who acts***

The final step that brings radical change into our lives is actually, regularly obeying God's Word. The true power of God is "triggered" by our actual obedience to God's Word. As soon as we begin to obey the Holy Spirit becomes our power to obey.

As we read in Romans 2:22, the power we receive from walking in obedience to God is what breaks the bondage of sin in our lives. And the end of James 1:25 says ***this is the person who will be blessed in his doing.***

So, how do I become a doer of the Word and not a hearer only, thereby deceiving myself?

- #1) Look intently into God's Word
- #2) Look habitually into God's Word
- #3) Be a doer of God's Word.

And I can honestly tell you, we have become so focused on this exact process around here in the past four or five years, I guarantee you if you want to learn how to do this there are great people here who will teach you.

We use:

- 1) The daily discipleship journal to look intently into God's Word.
- 2) Discipleship groups to habitually focus on God's Word
- 3) Accountability partners to help you become a doer of God's Word.

Here's the process we teach you to regularly:

Meditate on God's Word
Apply God's Word
Respond to God's Word

We want so badly for you to be transformed by the power of Jesus Christ in you. If you ask us (at the connection center) we will help you.

If you look on our website (under "About Us") you'll see this:

Our Purpose for Existing as a Body of Believers

- 1. To glorify God and worship Him in every area of our lives.**
- 2. To help one another become fully devoted, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.**

We want to help one another become doers of the Word and not hearers only. We want the Word of God to make a true change in your life. Because as R. Kent Hughes says: ***The solemn truth is, unless the Word has made a change in our lives, it has not really entered our lives.***

Let's pray. *Lord your Word is living and active and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword. We can't get away from it unless we just close our heart off to you. And God right now we refuse to do that. Instead we open our heart to you Lord. We say we don't want to be a hearer only. We don't want to be self-deceived. We want to know that you're changing us, transforming us. We want to meet you at that level, we want to know you at that level, and we want to walk with you at that level. We want to experience your hand upon us. Your power in our lives. We want the bondage broken. We want to be transformed because you live with complete freedom in our lives. We want to be the real deal. We want to know you. Help us Lord. Fill us with your Holy Spirit. Draw us to yourself. Lord we come to you now, believing and receiving, And we pray that you would come into our lives with power. With power to transform, Lord. And transform us Lord, so radically, that it shows, that the people around us know.*

If that's your prayer today, just agree with it, "Yeah, that's me. What am I doing? I want to know you. You gave your all for me. You gave me life when I was dead. Please forgive me of my sin. Please come into my life and make me a new creation. It is in Jesus' name I pray, amen.