

Beyond Listening: The Call to Obedient Action

Sunday, January 25, 2026 | Ben Boyd

Summary:

This message confronts us with a challenging truth from James 1:22-25: it's not enough to simply hear God's word—we must become doers of it. The teaching draws us into the uncomfortable reality that we can be captivated by biblical truth without being changed by it. Like looking in a mirror and immediately forgetting what we've seen, we often experience conviction during worship or study, only to walk away unchanged. The message uses powerful examples from Scripture—King Herod who listened to John the Baptist gladly yet beheaded him, Pontius Pilate who was fascinated by Jesus yet condemned Him—to illustrate how listening without obedience is spiritually futile. The core challenge connects directly to our prayer lives: many of us avoid being alone with God because we fear what He might reveal in that mirror. But here's the liberating paradox of faith—true freedom comes through obedience to what James calls 'the perfect law,' which is ultimately Jesus Christ Himself, now written on our hearts and minds. When we root ourselves in God's Word, receiving it humbly, focusing on it, remembering it, hiding it in our hearts, and dwelling on it, transformation happens naturally. We're called beyond selective obedience and comfortable listening to a life where surrender leads to action, where hearing God's voice compels us to move, and where our Made to Pray journey becomes more than knowledge—it becomes the very rhythm of our changed lives.

Points:

- Christians are made right with God not by obeying the law, but our freedom in Jesus leads us to respond with careful obedience
- Listening to God's Word without obeying is like looking in a mirror and immediately forgetting what you look like
- Many believers are captivated by biblical truth but remain unchanged by it
- A major hurdle in developing a prayer life is fear of being alone with God and what He might reveal in the mirror of His Word
- The "perfect law that sets you free" referenced in James is Jesus Christ, whose law is now written on our hearts and minds
- We are no longer under the law as a means of acceptance with God, but under the law as a means of living for God

- Obedient people experience true freedom, while disobedient people think they are free but remain in bondage
- God's patience should not be mistaken for approval of disobedience
- Obedience comes not from mustering willpower but from surrendering to Christ, receiving His Word humbly, and allowing it to work in and through us
- Repentance is a privilege, not something to be ashamed of

Scripture References:

1. James 1:22-25 - Main text about being doers of the word, not hearers only
2. James 1:5 - "If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God"
3. James 1:19-20 - Quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger
4. Mark 6:19-20 - King Herod listening to John the Baptist
5. Hebrews 10:14-18 - The new covenant and laws written on hearts
6. Jeremiah 31:31-34 - Prophecy of the new covenant (alluded to via Hebrews)
7. Luke 6:46-49 - Building house on rock vs. sand foundation
8. Psalm 1 - Tree planted by streams of water (referenced)
9. Matthew 5:27-28 - Looking at a woman lustfully = adultery (alluded to)
10. Matthew 5:21-22 - Anger against brother = murder (alluded to)
11. Matthew 22:37-39 (also Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27) - Greatest commandments: love God and neighbor
12. Romans 10:9 - Confess with mouth, believe in heart for salvation

Questions to ask from this message:

How does the distinction between being 'captivated by truth' versus 'changed by truth' challenge your current approach to hearing sermons and reading Scripture?

In what ways might fear of being alone with God prevent you from developing a deeper prayer life, and what specific truths about God's character could help overcome that fear?

James compares neglecting to act on God's word to forgetting what you look like in a mirror—what are some practical 'spinach in your teeth' moments where you've known God was showing you something but walked away unchanged?

How does understanding that obedience follows surrender rather than earning acceptance change your motivation for following God's commands?

Pastor Ben mentions that 'disobedient people think they are free, but they are in bondage'—can you identify areas in your life where perceived freedom might actually be bondage?

What is the difference between listening to God's word for knowledge versus listening for transformation, and which one characterizes your typical Bible study?

How do the examples of King Herod and Pontius Pilate as 'great listeners' who remained unchanged serve as warnings for modern Christians who consume lots of religious content?

Pastor Ben describes God's correction as a father coaching a child through necessary changes—how does this image contrast with how you typically view conviction or discipline from God?

If the 'perfect law of freedom' is Jesus written on our hearts and minds, how should that internal law differ from external religious rule-keeping?

Reflecting on the Made to Pray series and this message about doing versus just listening, what is one specific action you need to take this week to move from passive hearing to active obedience?