



The Book of James 1:19-25, 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. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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. 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. (ESV) May Lord add His blessing to the Reading and the Hearing of His Word Today, in Jesus Name, Amen...

Many of us are not aware of just how impactful what we look at has upon our minds, our thoughts and actions, and even our spirit man. What we focus on matters. What we meditate on matters. What we allow to influence us matters.

And my question for all of us tonight is simply this... what are you looking at? Notice the Words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:3-6, “³For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” (NKJV)

Even by the very teachings of the Apostle Paul, what we focus on matters all the more when it comes to spiritual warfare and dealing with strongholds, vain arguments, high things that exalt themselves, and even our thoughts (what we focus on) has to be governed, captive, and submissive to Christ; and, may I add, not subject to our emotional whims. So tonight I want to give you 3 specific points of things not to look at...

1. Faith encourages us to look up but Regret causes us to look back!

- a. Genesis 19:23-26, “²³The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. ²⁴Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. ²⁵And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” (ESV)

- b. Church family, if we are not careful, what we are looking back at will preserve us in a state that will keep us from making it to our destination.
- c. Like Lot's Wife, she was so bound up in the regret of what she was leaving that she couldn't help but regret leaving Sodom even though what she was living in regret over was actually under the judgment of God. She allowed the nostalgia of what was prohibit her from embracing what could be.
- d. And there are so many of us that allow the regrets of yesterday, the pain of yesterday, the hurts of yesterday, the loss of yesterday, the junk of yesterday, the broken relationships of yesterday to preserve us in a state that has kept us from making it to the destination set before us.
- e. And if we are not careful, what we are looking at will not just prohibit us from our destination; what we are looking at will destroy us. Don't make the mistake of Lot's wife! Don't allow regret to preserve you in a state where you are constantly looking back in regret and not looking forward in hope!
- f. Point #2...

2. Faith urges us to look up but Fear spurs us to look around!

a. The Gospel of Saint Matthew 14:26-33, “²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear. ²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” ²⁸ And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind,^{lel} he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (ESV)

a. Church, if we are not careful, what we are looking around at will cause us to lose focus on what has enabled us to do the impossible.

b. Peter, while looking at Christ, was walking on water but when Peter looked at the impact of the storm, he almost drowns.

c. Fear may spur us to look around but what we fail to remember is that we were already doing the impossible by walking on the water!

- d. Likened unto Lot's wife, what she looked at petrified her into a state of regret but Peter looking around in fear almost caused him to lose his life. Notice that in both instances, what they were looking at had the capacity to destroy them.
- e. I want to remind us all of the Words of Paul found in Philippians 3:13-16, ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained." (ESV)
- f. We need to see the value of looking unto Jesus and doing the impossible! We need to see the value of pressing onward to the prize of the high calling of God that is in Christ Jesus! WHAT we look at matters just as much as WHO we look at!
- g. Point #3

3. Faith reassures us to look upward but Worry spurs us to look Inward!

- a. 1 Kings 19:1-8, “Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ² Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³ Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. ⁴ But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” ⁵ And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” ⁶ And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. ⁷ And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” ⁸ And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.” (ESV)

- b. Church, if we are not careful, what we are looking inward at will cause us to lose sight of what God has already done!
- c. Elijah made the mistake of allowing his current circumstances to erode the faith that He had used to call down fire upon Mt. Carmel. He allowed his current season to overshadow the victories of his past seasons. And how often are we guilty of doing just that? We allow our current dilemma to overshadow our past triumphs
- d. Elijah, being trapped by his temporary emotions began to look inside himself and beg God to kill him. The same man that called down fire and birthed revival in the nation is now begging for death and God's answer to this request was food and a nap.
- e. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is rest. Slow down. Take a break. Take time off. Shut down for a minute and just breath. And notice that after Elijah had a snack a nap, well a few of them actually, he arose and went forty days and nights. Supernatural sustainment by simply taking a nap. Sometimes the most spiritually nourishing thing that we can do is rest; and it's even biblical. It's called a sabbath.
- f. Church don't allow worry to drive you to a place of emotional and mental anguish where we are always looking inward at our emotional state and not looking upward in Faith!

g. Who we look to is just as important as where we look too! Let's us refocus on Jesus and lose focus on the whirlwind that so many of us are facing right now!

h. And lastly, Point #4..

4. Faith inspires us to look upward because that's what Jesus did!

a. John 17:1-5, "When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." (ESV)

b. Jesus looking towards heaven and saying not my will but your will be done; and as in the story of the Messiah, sometimes the will of God is painful but just because it's painful doesn't mean it's not perfect

- c. If we are aware that what we are looking at is bigger than us, it will cause us to lose focus on ourselves and realize that the big picture is more important; but God thought enough of us to include in the puzzle and your piece of the puzzle matters.
- d. So I close with this question: what are you looking at?
- i. Are you looking at the life that God pulled you out of?
 - ii. Or are you looking at the current storm you are in?
 - iii. Or perhaps the anxiety of your future?
 - iv. Are you looking towards heaven saying, “I choose to look to you.” May we all tonight stop looking inward, stop looking around and stop looking back but choose, this day, to look up!