

TBC – 6/8/03 p.m.

HEARING GOD'S WORD, DOING GOD'S WILL

James 1:22

Intro: It is a well-known fact that Martin Luther did not believe that the epistle of James should be in the canon of Scripture. Or, to state that another way, he did not believe that the epistle of James was a part of the Word of God. He called it “an epistle of straw.” Luther’s objection to this epistle is found especially in the latter part of chapter 2 where in verse 14 he raised a question if a person can be saved by faith if he does not also do works. In verse 20 he declared that faith without works is dead, that is faith alone does not save. Then after speaking of Abraham he said in verse 24 he said that Abraham was justified by works, and not by faith alone. And then he went on to teach the same thing about Rahab.

The point that James was making was that if a person claimed to know the Lord, i.e., to have faith, but did not demonstrate in his life that he belonged to the Lord by the way he lived, his faith was not true faith. Basically this is what the Lord taught in the parable of the sower. We had it also in Colossians 1. If a person really knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his, or her, Savior, not only is his life going to be changed, but he is going to persevere in that change. And, we know from the teaching of the NT generally that the changes become more pronounced as a true Christian grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

The big issue in Luther’s day was not prophecy, but justification. He and all of the Reformers were opposing the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation by works, and it would seem that Luther could not put any other interpretation upon what James wrote than that he was also teaching salvation by works. Hence his rejection of that epistle.

There are undoubtedly many today who would agree with Luther. What they are actually saying is that a person can be saved without a change being made in his life. Now we all know that no Christian is perfect, even the most mature. And we are not going to be perfect until we are with the Lord. But there has to be a change. Before we are saved, we are lost; afterwards we are found. Before we are saved we are blind, spiritually blind; afterwards we see. Before we are saved we are dead, dead in our sins; after we are saved we have life, eternal life, divine life. Before we are saved, we are in darkness; afterwards we are in the light. Paul declared this in 2 Cor. 5:17. The only way we can tell that a person has been

saved is by the changes that take place in his life – changes in the way he lives, changes in the way he talks, changes in the people he enjoys being with, changes in his attitude toward God and toward Jesus Christ, and toward the Word of God. He will undergo a change toward himself, no longer inclined to be independent and self-confident, but humble and inclined to believe that he needs to trust in the Lord. He will sense his need to pray and to be prayed for.

Now these changes do not all take place to the same degree in all who profess faith in Christ, but these are the kind of changes that we all need to look for in ourselves, and in others. Abraham and Hagar showed by their behavior that they were really trusting the Lord. They were not saved by what they did, but what they did indicated that they were saved. Some have expressed it this way: We are justified before God by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; we show before men (who can't read our hearts like God can) that we are justified before God but the works we do, by the way we live.

Our text tonight expresses the same truth with respect to our lives as the people of God.

Those of us who are saved know, or we should know, that the Word of God was instrumental in our salvation. I would go so far as to say that no one is ever saved but what the Word of God is involved in some way. But look what James wrote in verse 18 of chapter 1. (Read and explain.)

The Apostle Peter said the same thing. (Read 1 Pet. 1:18-25.) We are redeemed by the blood of Christ, i.e., by His sacrificial and substitutionary death on the Cross, but it is by the Word of God that that message has been brought to us. It may be a verse that we memorized as a child. It might be some verse that we read in Scripture ourselves. It may be a verse that someone else gave us in personal conversation. It may be a verse we were especially influenced by in hearing a sermon. It could be a verse that someone mentioned in a letter that they wrote to us. But somehow, and in some way, the Word of God is always used in our salvation. And that is one big reason why it is important for us to use the word when we are talking or writing to someone about salvation.

After we are saved, we continue to need the Word of God *daily* for our growth in the Lord. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:2-3 and 1 Pet. 3:18. And this brings me, brings us, to James' words in James 1:22.

I have tried to describe the content of this verse by my title for tonight: "Hearing God's Word, Doing God's Will."

We need to notice first:

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD OF GOD (as I have already indicated) IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

James was talking about hearing the Word, and doing, or obeying, the Word. As we move in our country farther and farther away from God, the Word of God becomes less and less important. You go into many homes today and you would look in vain for a Bible. Talk to many people about the Bible, and they won't know what you are talking about. I saw a sign that I believe it was a young lady who was carrying, and she said, "Atheism has always been the American way of life." You would never have seen a sign like that when I was a boy. Our country has never been a truly Christian country, but there was a day when teachers did not hesitate to talk about God, or the Bible. But apart from divine intervention those days may be gone forever.

But a true Christian knows that he needs the Bible, and is convicted in his heart if he neglects it. I know that people can carry a Bible to church, then take it back home, put it somewhere, but never think about it until they get ready to go to church the next Sunday. But I am not talking about mere church-goers; When I say that some people really feel the need for the Bible, I am talking about people who are really saved. As Dr. John has told us in SS that there never has been a book like the Bible, and there never will be. This is the book that every child of God will find his heart drawn to. If you can leave your Bible along all week long, you had better examine yourself to make sure that you really know the Lord. The Bible is *the* Book for every true Christian. I feel sure that with most of you, except perhaps for mothers with small children, you aren't up very long before you have the Bible open before you, and you are reading the Word for instruction, for comfort, for strength, possibly for cleansing, and for any other blessing the Lord may see fit to give you on any day.

Now what is our first need concerning the Word of God? It is to hear the Word. The Bible frequently says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." We need to hear what God has said in His Word, and we need to hear it over and over again. We need to ask God to give us ears to hear His Word. So let us think for a few minutes about hearing God's Word.

II. HEARING GOD'S WORD.

What are some of the ways we hear the Word of God?

Well, we hear the Word when we read it. I don't know how you read your Bible, but I go into my study *and read it aloud*. Lucille usually reads her Bible at our dining table, and I know that she reads aloud because I have come upstairs and have heard her reading aloud.

Now sometimes we can't read aloud because we have to do our reading with others present in the room (like with a roommate in college). But whether we read aloud, or silently, we are hearing the Word. And we all need to be doing this every day, and as often during the day as we can. We need to read like the Bible was not only written *for* us, but *to* us. If you have made this a priority in your day, then you need to start right away. This is the foundation for every day.

But there are other ways in which we hear the Word. We are doing one of those way right now, listening to the Word as it is read publicly, or taught, or preached. Reading good Christian books is another way. I am reading several books right now. One of them is a book by Jerry Bridges. You can't read any book by Jerry but what he will have you listening to the Word. People will write to you by e-mail or what we now call "snail mail," and mention some Scripture that has been a blessing to them, or they may just put a Scripture reference with their signature at the end of the letter. This gives you another opportunity to "hear" the Word. It always helps our hearing if we can see at the same time.

But now our text indicates a danger that we need to avoid with all of our strength. You say, "What is that?" It is the tendency which we all have of reading, and then forgetting, and turning to our day's activities as though we don't have to think about the Word any more. James was not rebuking the believers to whom he was writing for not hearing the Word; but he was concerned that that might be all that they were doing with respect to the Word. It is wonderful if you are reading the Bible every day. I know that some of you have your own schedule which you follow. And that is great! But one part of good reading is memorization. And another part is meditation. These will help us in the next step that James was talking about. In fact, they are a part of it. You all know what it is, and so let's go to it. I almost said, "Let's go for it!" And this is where we are all weak. I am talking about:

III. DOING GOD'S WILL.

I am afraid that often when we talk about doing God's will, we are thinking about some major decision we need to make, or are about to make – like what we are going to do out of the many things in our lives which are calling for attention. As we get into our later school years, we think about what we are going to be doing as our life work, or where we are going to go to school, or who we are going to marry, or where we are going to live, or many other things that you could mention. And these are all very important matters where we need the Lord's guidance. But when you read your Bible you find the writers of Scripture focusing attention on the kind of people we are, what we need to do and what we need to be if we are to be pleasing to the Lord. The instructions of Scripture penetrate into every area of our lives. James and Paul and Peter and John all deal with even the smallest details of our lives. Where do we find the will of God? It is not if the fleece is dry or wet. It is not if the day is sunny or rainy. The will of God is laid out on page after page in our Bibles.

James called the Bible “a glass,” a looking glass, a mirror. And just as we look into a mirror to see if our face is clean, or if we need to comb our hair, we look into the mirror to see how we measure up with the Word of God. And just as we often look into a mirror, and then proceed to forget what we have seen, that is often the way our Bible reading comes to an end.

When I look into a mirror, I am not looking to see Lucille. So when I read my Bible, I should not be reading for Lucille. I believe James' illustration here is an excellent one. When I look into a mirror, I see me (as shocking as it sometimes is, especially the first thing in the morning. My Bible is a mirror of another kind. I need to read my Bible to see if I can see myself. If I can't, then I need to spend some time on that verse, or that part of the chapter, until I begin to see myself there. The improvement usually takes more time than it takes to wash my face with soap and water, but that is where I need to begin. And that is what I need to be doing every day. When I submit to the will of God day by day in the practical exhortation of the Word, then when the major decisions need to be made, I am at least more prepared to make them in line with God's will. But if I am just reading, and not applying, and not doing what the Lord tells me to do through His Word, then I am going to have a tougher time when the major decisions come along. The more personal I make my reading, the more profitable it is going to be for me.

Now if I am hearing, but not doing, what will the result be? Here James spoke of:

IV. “DECEIVING YOUR OWN SELVES.”

We all hate to be deceived. I think that is one thing that makes a major purchase of anything such a chore, whether buying a car, or a home, or anything else. I would had to be an immigration officer at one of the borders of our country because you would have to approach people with the idea that they are trying to deceive you about something. I just couldn't be happy with a job like that.

But do you know where our greatest danger is regarding being deceived? Let me give you another of our memory verses in *Bible Verses Everyone Should Know*. It is the second verse in Assignment 4: Jer. 17:9:

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:
who can know it?

The Lord told this to Jeremiah. But whose heart was he talking about? The Lord was talking about Jeremiah's heart. He was talking about my heart. He was talking about your heart. But who is most likely to be deceived by my heart? You? No. *I am! I am the greatest danger to myself.*

Paul wrote in Gal. 6:3,

If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he
deceiveth himself.

I doubt very much if there has ever been a person who has ever lived whose pride has not brought on self-deception. But the point in our text for tonight is that if I hear the Word, but fail to do the Word, I am deceiving myself as to the benefit that I should be getting out of the Word. I am also deceiving myself as to how much my Bible reading is pleasing to God. Hearing the Word, and then doing the Word, or doing God's will as it applies to my life, is the only way to be blessed in what I am hearing and the only way to make progress in my relationship with the Lord and with His people.

The verse that answers God question in Jer. 17:9, “Who can know it?” is found in verse 10:

I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man
according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.
For “I try the reins,” the NASB has, “I test the mind.” The Lord is the

only One Who can make us see our needs, and Who can enable us to make the changes in our Bible “hearing” so that we are really doing His will as the fruit of our time in the Word.

Concl: The Lord can lead us to see that something is wrong, and His Word shows us how to make things right. But the first thing that we need to understand is that we can’t make the changes that we need to make in our own strength. But by the power of God, and by His grace, our reading of the Word can take on new meaning and result in new blessing when we become just as concerned about doing the Word as we are about hearing it. “Faithful is he that calleth you, Who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).