

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
 5/25/2019

To Jesus Christ, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification, be glory forever Amen.

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from James, chapter 1, starting at verse 21:

James 1:21-27 [EHV] ²¹ So after getting rid of all moral filthiness and overflowing wickedness, receive with humility the word planted in you. It is able to save your souls. ²² Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves. ²³ In fact, if anyone hears the word and does not do what it says, he is like a man who carefully looks at his own natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ Indeed, he carefully looks at himself; then, he goes away and immediately forgets what he looked like. ²⁵ But the one who looks carefully into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues to do so—since he does not hear and forget but actually does what it says—that person will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone considers himself to be religious but deceives his own heart because he does not bridle his tongue, this person’s religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled in the sight of God the Father is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

Are you a local or a transplant? We live in a very interesting and unique part of the country. The Pacific Northwest is very different than virtually every other corner of our vast United States. We live only a few short hours away from both mountains and the Pacific Ocean. This also provides us with a relatively comfortable climate.

But this area is also unique for other reasons. The Puget-sound area has seen a great uptick in recent years. There are a lot of jobs and opportunities available in all kinds of fields here. With this great influx of opportunities comes a great growth in the general population. A recent census poll shows that 61% of the people currently living in Seattle were not born there. I feel like that is also true about our area as well. Some of us are from here and have been

living here for quite some time. Others are like me and who have only moved here in the recent few years.

There are a lot of transplants here, people who live here who are not from here nor have many roots here. Typically, people are looked down on, for some reason or another, for not being “from around here”. But I don’t feel like this is the case with our neck of the woods. Since so many people aren’t originally from here, there are fewer people who look down on transplants.

Of course, it is a bad reason to look down on someone just because they are not from here. But it is certainly something that happens all over the globe. But that is something that is also unique to America. We are a nation of immigrants. Of course,

there were people living on this continent before it was discovered by Europe in the 1500s. But for the most part, all of us can trace our lineage back to people who came over here for some reason or another.

In this epistle we have before us this morning, James is also writing to fellow transplants. In the first verse he writes, **James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.** He was writing this letter for several reasons. These people who were scattered abroad needed encouragement. They were being persecuted for their Christian beliefs. Be his larger point, which he gets into in our text, is for these Christians to put their faith into practice. His whole point in his letter is that a Christian's faith is witnessed by their works, or fruits of faith. He tells us here that we should **Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it.** And that is exactly what a Christian transplant does. They hear the Word and do what it says. This means being a part of this world, and yet at the same time not being of this world. Don't get entangled by the sin of this world, instead sink your transplant roots deep into Jesus Christ, the Savior! And so, we pray **MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.**

²² **Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it. Such people are deceiving themselves.**

The book of James is sometimes viewed as problematic to some. Martin Luther, at least earlier in his life, also had issues with it. He famously called it "an epistle of straw". Why would this letter cause some people to have doubts about it? The reason is James' emphasis on works. The reason that Luther had issues with it was that the Catholic Church was emphasizing works as a way for humans to help along/earn their salvation. Luther had learned from

the writings of Paul that man is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Works had nothing to do with man's salvation. And yet, James 2 says **You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.** So, how do we square those things together?

Well, first we acknowledge the fact that scripture does not contradict itself. It is the whole Word of God, and it is error free. Paul and James are not disagreeing with each other, they are saying the same thing but to different people. For instance, when Paul is writing to the Romans "**Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Romans 3:28)**" he is writing to newly converted Christians explaining to them that they could not justify themselves by the deeds of the law. James was writing to more mature Christians who had faith but were lagging behind in putting their faith into practice.

That is why James says here, **Be people who do what the word says, not people who only hear it.** It is faith alone in Christ that saves us. But hearing the Word will naturally lead to doing what Word tells us. Paul says something almost identical in **Romans 2:13** ¹³ **(for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified;** Luther summarizes these two things like this, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone."

James' whole point here is that those who have faith in Jesus will do what Jesus tells them to do. We sometimes call these things fruits of faith. Of course, we often fail to produce these fruits. But, through the Holy Spirit, we are able to produce these fruits since we have been converted and now have the New Man inside of us. We are not saved by these fruits, rather we show that we are Christians who have living faith inside of us by letting our light shine.

²¹ **So after getting rid of all moral filthiness and overflowing wickedness, receive**

with humility the word planted in you. It is able to save your souls.

Being a “transplant” is a term that has come to mean “someone who is not originally from this area”. But the term “transplant” is a term that first derived in the plant world. It is when you remove a plant from its original environment, move it, and plant it in a different place. I have many “transplants” around my house. The previous owners planted many different plants that do not originate in Washington State. We have a Palm tree, and at one point we had bamboo as well. These are not from here, but the soil and the conditions that we have favor growing just about any kind of plant.

That is why “transplant” so aptly describes us Christians today. How are Christians any different from this? We were once a part of this world, born dead in trespasses and sins like everyone else. But now no longer. We are different. We have been made alive in the blood of Jesus. Because of our conversion, we are truly no longer of this world. God implanted His life-saving Word inside each and every one of us. **Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

And yet, this world continues. There have been some who acknowledge that the world is sinful, and they conclude that they must isolate themselves from that world. This world is sinful. But we shouldn't try to isolate ourselves from it. Rather, we are told to go out into the world. But we are not supposed to blend into it, rather stand out. How do we do this? By letting our light shine!

God has implanted His Word in us, and He now wants us to plant that same Word into others. To be both a hearer and a doer comes down to this. To be in this world, preaching the Good News, but at the same time knowing that we are not of this world. You cannot isolate yourself if you are to carry out the great commission, but you need to remain unstained and unspotted. The only way to do that is

by continually going to Jesus and His ever-flowing font of grace.

²³In fact, if anyone hears the word and does not do what it says, he is like a man who carefully looks at his own natural face in a mirror. ²⁴Indeed, he carefully looks at himself; then, he goes away and immediately forgets what he looked like. ²⁵But the one who looks carefully into the perfect law, the law of freedom, and continues to do so—since he does not hear and forget but actually does what it says—that person will be blessed in what he does.

A mirror is a very practical thing. Getting in front of a mirror is something that we do almost every single day. There's a good chance that you used a mirror this morning before you came to Church. Why do we use a mirror on a daily basis? It is because we cannot see what we look like. Sure, you can look at your own body and see what you look like. But you cannot see your own face. You need a mirror to be able to see what your face looks like. We use mirrors to make sure we are brushing all of our teeth, to make sure that our hair is in order, and to determine whether or not we could use a shave.

But we also use the Word of God as a mirror as well. It shows us what we look like spiritually. This is a specific function of the law. It shows us our sin. It shows us what God tells us to do. When we compare what our lives are to what God commands us to do, we see how far removed we truly are from what God's will is. But the Gospel also shows us something, rather someone. The Gospel shows us our Savior, Jesus Christ. In every area in which we are so far gone, Jesus was absolutely perfect. The Bible shows us our sins, but it also shows us our Savior who took those sins away!

But how do we show that we have this faith? Just like we cannot see our own face without a mirror, so also we cannot see faith. Faith is something that is found on the inside, it is something that only God can see. And yet, as Christians, we are supposed to

make the fact that we have faith in Christ very clear and evident to everyone around us. How are we supposed to do this if faith is something that cannot be seen?

²⁶If anyone considers himself to be religious but deceives his own heart because he does not bridle his tongue, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled in the sight of God the Father is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

How are to show that we have faith in Christ if faith is something that cannot be seen? By our fruits of faith. It is true you cannot see into other people's hearts and they cannot see into yours. But you can see what they do and what they say. This is James' whole point throughout this letter. A Christian will show you that they are a Christian by acting like it. **James 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**

What does it mean to be religious? Different people may have different answers to this question. But our text addresses what it really means to be religious. James says here that to really be religious is to control your tongue, to help those people who need help, and to remain unstained by the world.

Are you, then, a religious person? Asking this question here in church is probably unnecessary. But out in the world, it is a safe question. "Do you consider yourself to be a religious person?" Hopefully, we would all answer in the affirmative if this question was asked of us. But, the way we live our lives should also answer this question. That is the point here. People shouldn't have to ask that question of us, it should be obvious from the things we say and do. We show that we are Christians by living Christian lives.

The problem, of course, is this is something that we fail at constantly. We know that we should live like Christians, but our sinful flesh often prevents

us from doing so. How often we don't do what we know we should. How often our deeds don't reflect the love that God has for us? How often we don't keep our tongues locked down and in check?

That is another one of James' points in this book. It is easy to get caught up in sins of action. For example, the sins of the fifth and sixth commandment get emphasized. And yes, committing sexual immorality is bad. Yes, committing murder is also very bad. Almost everyone in the world will agree upon this. But what often gets overlooked are the sins of the tongue. These are not looked at in the same light. "It was just a white lie". Or how easy it is to gossip or speak unlovingly about someone. It is so easy to let these things slip. But James says that **James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.** Sins of the tongue are just as serious. And the sins of words and thoughts are so much easier to forget about than the sins of action. And yet, as James reminds us, they are as deadly as a little fire that starts a whole forest fire! **²⁶If anyone considers himself to be religious but deceives his own heart because he does not bridle his tongue, this person's religion is worthless.** This should definitely grab our attention!

So, how should we react then? Pick up that mirror! Go back to the Bible! Look at it and see how your reflection needs to be corrected! It shows us our sin; it shows us that we don't look like we are Christians. This should grieve us. But don't put down the mirror in sadness! If you looked in a mirror and saw that you had something on your face, you wouldn't just be sad about it and leave. You would fix it!

This is the other part of the mirror. Yes, it shows us what we did that was wrong. But it also provides a solution! We can see from the Bible how many times we have failed. But we can also see how Jesus Christ went to the cross to fix those stains! We are now spotless in the blood of the Lamb! We need to return to Him time and time again. He is the

reason we have the Word implanted inside of us, and James says, **It is able to save your souls.**

Yes, we are not from around here. We were born here, but we are not locals. We were born in trespasses and sins, just like the rest of the World. But then we were transformed into Children of God by the washing and regeneration of the Word. So, don't live like you are from here! You are transplants! You should look different because you are! It is easy to fall back into the ways of our sinful environment. We do this all the time, with both sinful deeds and words. But then we pick up the mirror, we ask for forgiveness, and then we go back to living like Christians through Christ's help.

We are transplants. This is deliberate. We are put here for a reason; to spread the seed that has been implanted in us! SO, spread the seed! Be ready to preach the Word in season and out of season. Do so by going out into the world and proclaiming Christ crucified! It is good to remember that this world is sinful, but we can't fulfill our true role as transplants by isolating ourselves from the world. We need to go out into it. And yet, we do so with the goal of trying to not look like it. This is hard. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us! Go out into the world, but don't become entangled in its weeds of sin. Instead, sink your roots deep into Christ! When we lose focus on Him and instead focus on the world, we become stained by sin. Then we go back to the Word and our God. We confess our sins, God corrects our mistakes, and we go back out there to let our light shine!

We aren't from around here. That is because we do not plan on settling down here. We are all going to a much better place. A place where sin is not lurking around every corner, a place where there is everlasting joy and comfort. Heaven is our home, that is where we are from and that is where we are going. There is only one way to that place, it is through Jesus Christ our Savior. We let His heavenly light shine through us by our fruits. Those fruits don't get us there, but with the Spirit's help, they can help others get there! Those fruits of faith speak loudly. What do they say? **Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, who saves us by grace and allows us to spread that same message to others! AMEN!!!**