

James
Look in the Mirror! (Part 2)
James 1:19-27
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Well, I invite you again to take your Bibles and turn to the first chapter of the letter of James. We began last time to look at a portion of this first chapter that calls us to respond properly to the Word of God. Specifically, we saw that we are to listen; that is we are to expose ourselves to the teaching of the Word of God. But it occurred to me this week, as I thought about that, that there may be people in our church who think they know how to respond to that and in fact think they are listening because they are having some interaction with the Bible, but perhaps their entire perspective, their entire approach to the Bible is flawed. So, I thought it would be important as we begin this morning to take a few minutes even before we look specifically at James to sort of step back and look afresh at how we approach the Scriptures.

There are several common ways that Christians view the Scripture today in the church that are in fact seriously flawed. As I look at each of these flawed approaches and these flawed views to Scripture, I encourage you to sort of analyze your own approach to Scripture and make sure that you're not guilty of one of these misled and mistaken approaches to the Word of God.

A first flawed approach I think that's very common in today's Christianity, I hope it's not common here in our church, I don't believe it is, but I need to mention it because we are all susceptible to its influence, is what I would call the relativistic or post-modern approach to Scripture. This particular view of Scripture or approach to Scripture refuses to acknowledge the concept that there is absolute moral truth in the universe. This is post-modernism's view of truth, and it's absolutely pervasive in our society. I recently read an article by the most conservative writer in *Newsweek*, George Will, and he argued that the problem in today's world is that there are people who believe in certitude; who believe that something can be known for certain. That's the problem he said with the Muslim extremist's around the world, and that's the problem here in our country essentially pointing the finger at each of us. This is part of the culture in which we live.

I quoted it last Sunday night, a survey by George Barna. There was one simple question, is there such a thing as unchanging moral truth? He asked this to a large number of Americans, enough to get a proper sampling. Twenty-two percent of those surveyed believes believed that there is such a thing as absolute moral truth. Sixty-four percent opted for relativism, no there isn't, 64% of Americans. And when you got to teenagers, teenagers in America, 83% believe there are no moral absolutes. Nothing, no truth that is unchanged by circumstances, and only 6% of American teenagers believe that there are in fact moral absolutes. You say, well yeah, but that's the world. What about Christians, what about those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ? Well, he also distinguished based on that criteria, if they claim to be born again, now admittedly all of those who claim to be born again are not, but that was the question he asked and if they claimed to be born again he asked them the same question. Thirty two percent of the adults who claimed to be born again said yes, there are moral absolutes. And of teenagers who claim to be Christian, only 9% believed in absolutism. So, this is pervasive in the culture.

You what are the what are the ramifications of this sort of view of truth? Well, to the relativists or to the post-modernists the text of Scripture has no fixed meaning. It's subjective and open to interpretation, essentially it can mean whatever I think it means. Walter Truitt Anderson in his book, *Reality Isn't What it Used to Be*, illustrates this flawed approach to truth using a baseball analogy. He says if you want to understand the difference between free modern thought, modernism, and post-modernism, he said imagine these three umpires having a discussion about how to determine if a pitch is in fact a ball or a strike. He said the pre-modern umpire would say something like this, "I just call them as they are." Then he goes to ask the modern umpire, the modernist, so how do you call strikes and balls? And the modernist umpire would say something like this, "well I just call 'em like I see 'em." And then you move to the post-modern umpire and then you ask him well how exactly sir do you go about determining balls and strikes and his response would be, "They ain't nothing until I call them, because I determine meaning."

This is how people approach the Scripture, they take this sort of relativistic approach and the practical result of it is they end up using Scripture like a sort of cafeteria. Peas, carrots, here I'll have some of those, broccoli, no thanks. The love of God, yeah dish some of that on my plate, God's holiness, hmm no thanks. Yes, I believe what the Bible says about the cross, but I'm not so sure I want those first three chapter of Genesis that talk about you know an absolute six-day creation. That's uncomfortable. I'll embrace

Paul's teaching you know except that part about the respective roles of men and women in the church and in the home. I think Paul's right about hatred being a sin, but I just don't buy his rhetoric about homosexuality. This is how post-modernist's approach the Scripture. Because they give it meaning, it has no objected meaning apart from the meaning they give it. Compare that to what the Scripture says about itself; listen to Psalm 119:89, "Forever O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven."

Psalm 119:160, "The sum of Your word is truth."

Isaiah 8:20, "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light." Now that's a very interesting verse because it says both that there is absolute truth, it says we can understand that truth, and we ought to judge others against that truth.

In Isaiah 40:8, "the word of our God stands forever."

And of course, when you come to the ministry of Christ in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth may pass away," [Jesus says] "but My words will not pass away."

A relativistic approach to Scripture says I can pick and choose. Jesus says not one Hebrew letter and not one curve of a Hebrew letter will pass away until all is fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle. That's one flawed perspective of the Scripture, a relativistic; pick and choose as you want.

But there's a second that I think is a little more common, even among the folks who attend our church. It's common across Christianity. It's what I would call the magical or superstitious approach to Scripture. Pagan religions often approach their scriptures this way. I was talking this week with Doug Briggs. He was telling me about a particular Tibetan priest, a Tibetan Buddhist priest that he has had interaction with. And this priest's primary function in the temple there is to read their scripture, the Buddhist scriptures out loud each day. That's his job. And he does this for 11 hours every day, in fact he said he told Doug his goal in life was to get it down to 8 so he'll have a little more time for himself. The reason he reads the Buddhist scriptures out loud is not for the benefit of those who hear, he's just reading them, some may hear, some may not. It's to gain merit for the people of the village. But here's the punch line; the scripture that he reads is in a different dialect than he and the people in that village speak, so he can

phonetically pronounce the words, but he has no idea of the meaning of a single word he reads for 11 hours every day.

Sadly, there are some Christians who take a similar approach to the true Word of God. If you've been sucked into this approach to Scripture, if you somehow imagine if you put in your time you know if you take your five minutes and you check it off your calendar that you've passed your eyes over the words on the page that somehow that's going to dramatically change you. If you sit in a service like this, and you hear the Word of God, check it off the list, I went to church again, that somehow the Word of God is going to change you. It's going to magically transform me. You have a magical view of Scripture. This is a really an ancient view. Turn back to 1 Samuel; I want you to see this in the life of Israel, 1 Samuel 4. Israel was battling again their nemesis the Philistines and in verse 1 of 1 Samuel 4 they were camped for battle, verse 2, there was the battle actually spread, and we're told that Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about 4000 men on the battlefield. What a terrible tragedy for Israel. And so, verse 3,

“When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?” [somebody had the bright idea] “Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the LORD,” Let's take the box that has the written covenant of God, the Scripture on it and let's bring it in.] “that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies.” So [they] ... sent to Shiloh, ... they carried the ark of covenant of the LORD of hosts who sits *above* the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, *were* there with the ark.

As ... [it] came into the camp ... [everybody] shouted,

Alright, the ark of the covenant is here. The box with God's word is in it, is here. We'll take it before us into the battle and of course the Philistines had heard about the greatness of Israel's God, they become frightened, but they say look, you know we only have two choices here; one is to become the slaves of these people and the other is to fight and die and they said oh well, let's go fight and die. Verse 10,

“So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for their fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken.”

The elders of Israel said, “We were defeated, we’ve got a solution, let’s just put the Bible on the shelf and God will bless this place.” Let’s bring the box with the Word of God in it, and that will help. But in fact, they were defeated and the ark was captured. You know many Christians still think this way. They have the idea that by osmosis somehow the Word of God, by magic the Word of God is going to transform their life, make them a success, bring God’s blessing.

The most humorous example of this I’ve ever encountered personally was when I was at *Grace to You* and running the radio ministry there. It was my responsibility, is probably the best word, each year to attend the NRB, the convention of the National Religious Broadcasters. And let me tell you there was everything there from soup to nuts, with an emphasis on the nuts. And each year there were also by the way, I should say some wonderful people who I enjoyed fellowship with who loved Christ.

But there was a convention floor with a number of exhibits, and for several years running there was an exhibit that I just had to stop at, because it absolutely transfixed me. It was a booth to pitch some wares; and the wares were this, you could buy what was called a fetal Bible memory program. Now, what this consisted of was a little walk-man type tape recorder and a series of tapes with the Bible being read on it, and then where normally there would be plugged into that a little set of headphones in or umm, yeah a set of headphones instead what you plugged in was a cord and on the other end of the cord was a suction cup and buried in the end of that suction cup was a little speaker. And the theory was, that the expectant mother was to take this little tape recorder and this little suction cup and get it a little wet and pop it on her belly and play this Bible tape, and here was a wonderful way to expose your child to the Scripture before they were even born. The womb would resonate with the Word of God. That’s ridiculous. Poor child’s in there thinking would you just turn that noise off.

But as ludicrous as that is, it’s every bit as ludicrous to think that you can be changed by osmosis, by simply being exposed to the appearance of the letters of Scripture or to the sound of them passing through your ears. The Bible is not a magic book. For it to produce change in your life, you can’t merely read it or hear it, you have to act on it. This is a wrong approach to Scripture. If you believe that happens in your life, then you are taking a wrong approach to Scripture.

The third flawed approach to Scripture, I call the mystical or experiential approach. Some Christians assume that when they read the Bible, God is sending them these sort of coded personal private messages. And the message that God is sending them may have nothing to do with what the original author meant when he wrote those words. It's a pure subjectivistic approach to Scripture. It's a kind of practical post modernism where the text meaning doesn't matter, I give it meaning. Me and my interaction with God gives it meaning.

A number of years ago I read an example of this. There was a young pastor who had been called to come and pastor two different churches, and he was absolutely struck with the struggle of which of these churches to accept. And he was having a difficult time, torn between the two until one day he read Jeremiah 3:12. And Jeremiah 3:12 says, "go and proclaim these words toward the north." And as he read that text he was just confident that God was speaking to him and telling him that he should take the pastorate that was farther north. Absolutely disregarded the context in which those words occurred; instead, God was giving him a private message.

Perhaps you've been tempted to treat the Bible like that. Listen to me, the Bible is not your personal ouijia board. God does not use its words to give you some mystical direction. The first question is not, what does this mean to me? Who cares what it means to you, the first question is, what does it mean? What did the author mean when he wrote those words to his original audience? Only then are you qualified to ask, how should I apply this text to my life? You see the content of Scripture is objective, it is outside of us, it's not subjective, some meaning we give it. Luther referred to the Word of God as the external Word. Paul refers to the Word of God as the treasure of sound doctrine. This isn't some mystical private message to you and me where God sort of, there's code buried somewhere in there, and He gives us direction about who to marry, and you know what car to buy. Instead it is the sound doctrine, teaching He wanted us to know about Himself and about our world and about our own lives.

The fourth flawed approach to understanding the Scripture is the emotional approach. Some people read the Bible merely looking for a sort of emotional recharge. And the Bible does effect our emotions. I'm not arguing here for some sort of a dry-eyed completely cognitive approach to our faith. We're to love the Lord our God with our entire being and that includes our emotions. But the emotions should never be the engine driving the train; they should always be the caboose. John tells us that one of the reasons

he wrote his first epistle was to make our joy complete. Scripture does effect our emotions, but we should never be satisfied with having our emotions propped up with sort of a superficial devotional reading of the Bible aimed solely at pumping up our emotions.

We've all seen examples of this. Just turn on the television. My wife gets tired of me - for a hobby, for a distraction - watching television preachers. You know, it's like a train wreck, I don't want to watch, but I can't help myself. And I've seen these guys as you have pump up an audience. I mean they can build an audience to an emotional frenzy, and those people leave an emotional high. But in the process, they have utterly perverted the text that they use to work up that emotional frenzy. The true meaning of Scripture is to be comprehended not by the emotions, but by the mind. In John 5:39, Jesus told the religious leaders of Israel, "search the Scriptures so you can understand about Me." Now what was Jesus implying there? A straight forward, rational, cognitive understanding of the Scripture. If your approach to the Scripture is to be propped up emotionally, then you're approaching the Scripture for the wrong reason. Emotions are propped up, I find myself absolutely carried to the heights with joy when I read the Scripture, and sometimes I find myself picking myself up off the floor from the shame that I'm not what the Scripture commands me to be. My emotions are affected, but that follows the mind.

There's a final approach to Scripture that I think is terribly flawed, and that's the theoretical or academic approach. Some people study the Scriptures solely out of academic curiosity. This is a common trap and, unfortunately, it's especially a difficult trap in a Bible church such as ours where we care about the Scripture and understanding it. This is a flawed approach however. Some of the most fleshly divisive and immature professing Christians I have ever encountered in my ministry were in some of the most well read, most theologically astute as well. They studied the Bible for years, but all they do with their research is use it as ammunition in theological and biblical debates. As one author puts it, "the result is an abundance of doctrinal correctness, but a scarcity of biblical godliness."

Now don't misunderstand me. You know me well enough to know that I place no premium on biblical ignorance or theological stupidity. We have to be careful and diligent students. But if we have a reputation for defending proper theology but at the same time we leave a trail of damaged relationships and divisiveness in our wake, then we are using the Bible only theoretically. They have a flawed approach to the Scripture.

Relativistic, magical, mystical, emotional, theoretical those are all wrong ways to approach the Scripture. And in fact, Scripture says it claims to have exactly the opposite to each of those terribly flawed perspectives. The Bible says it's not relativistic; it is the absolute eternal and unchangeable truth of God. It is not magical, it must be studied, understood with the mind, personally applied and acted upon to be of any benefit. It's not mystical, subjective, but it's objective truth that stands outside of me. The Bible doesn't receive its meaning from me the reader, but from what the original author meant it to say. The Bible is not primarily emotional, instead it appeals first and foremost to the mind. It is not theoretical but practical truth to be taught, to be believed, and to be lived. I'm laboring this point because it is so absolutely crucial to our Christian lives and experience. You will receive no benefit from the Bible if you don't approach it the right way.

In fact, James tells us that how you react to Scripture is the surest indicator of the reality of your faith. Turn with me to James 1. James 1, we began last time to look at the paragraph that begins in verse 19 and runs through the end of chapter 1. Let me read it for you. James writes,

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But the one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."

Now everything so far has been introduction, I don't usually do that, but I thought it was so important. Because it's one thing for me to tell you to listen to the Word of God, but if you're not listening the right way, if your approach is wrong, then you are not going to be benefited at all. When you look at this paragraph that I just read for you, the whole paragraph drives home one great spiritual reality. Your response to the Word of God is God's perfect spiritual diagnostic. You can accurately discern both the legitimacy and the maturity of your faith by how you respond to Scripture. Do you want to know if you're a believer? Here's a way to test yourself. Do you want to know how mature you are? Then look at how you respond to the Scripture. James in this paragraph identifies three qualities that should characterize our relationship to Scripture.

We looked at the first of those qualities last time. It's in verses 19 to 21; a teachable heart, a teachable heart. Verse 19, says we're to be quick to hear, not in the general sense of you know be quick to hear your mother, or be quick to hear your teacher. The context here means quick to hear the Word of God. And slow to speak, that is slow to speak in our defense when the Scripture runs across our conduct or across our own beliefs. Slow to anger, that is our response is not to be angry toward the messenger, or toward the Scripture, or toward God Himself because of what Scripture says. The point is, verse 21, we're to, in humility, receive the Word. We're to have a teachable heart. We're to welcome the Word of God into our lives, eagerly.

Now that brings us to the second quality that should describe our interaction with the word of God. Not only should we have a teachable heart, but secondly, we should have a consistent obedience. This is in verses 22 to 25, a consistent obedience. In verse 22 he gives us the command, and then in verse 23 to 25, he gives us two illustrations. First, he illustrates what it means to be a hearer only and then he illustrates what it means to be a true doer. We're going to look at that next Lord's Day, Lord willing. Today, I just want to concentrate on the command in the few minutes we have remaining. Verse 22, here's the command for a consistent obedience in our response to Scripture. He says, "But prove yourselves doers of the Word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

In verses 19 to 21, James essentially said stop talking and listen to the Word of God. In verses 22 to 25, he gives us a second basic instruction which is: stop merely listening and start obeying the Word of God. James has just told his readers, to listen to the Word. But he says merely to listen to what is read from the Word or what's taught from the Word is

not enough. To study the Word, to read it, that doesn't go far enough. Verse 21 says, in humility receive or welcome the Word.

But notice how verse 22 begins, it begins with that little word, but. James says receive the Word, welcome it, listen to it being read and taught, but don't stop there. Receiving the Word in humility is not where your duties end. Be or become doers of the Word. The rest of 22 could be translated like this. Keep on being doers of the Word and not only hearers deceiving yourselves. He says be or become is probably a better translation than prove yourselves. Be or become doers of the Word.

Now the first question to ask is what word? What does he mean? Well remember James is the first book in the New Testament written, so he's obviously referring to the Old Testament. But James also is permeating his letter with the teachings of Jesus which is the heart and core of the New Testament. And in fact, what James is telling us is that the word is both the Old Testament and the New Revelation that came from Christ and is now being disseminated through His apostles. So really, what James is saying when he describes the Word is, he's talking about the entire Scripture that you and I have today. And he says of that Word we are to be doers. We are to carry out what we find there.

Now notice that he has an unusual expression, he doesn't say, do the word. He says be or become doers. And he uses both in Greek and in English the noun form, be a doer. What is the implication of that? Well James means that we are to be known as or to be characterized as one who consistently practices or does what we hear. Be known as a doer. Be a doer. When people think of you, do they think of someone who as a pattern of life sets out to do what you learn from the Scripture? Are you known as a doer?

One of the greatest biblical illustrations of a doer I came across recently. I was reading through Kings, and turn to Kings, 2 Kings 22. Powerful illustration of a doer in the life of Josiah, of course you know the story, in Josiah's time the priest found the book of the law. What a terrible tragedy that it had been lost, but they found the book of the law, and they bring it to Josiah and it's read in his presence. In verse 11 "when the King Josiah heard the book of the law, he tore his clothes." If you want to know what Josiah's response was to the Word of God, look at what Huldah the prophetess said about him over in 22:18. She says tell

“... the king of Judah” [that is Josiah] “who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, “Regarding the words which you have heard,” [Here’s your response he says, she says of the word of God] “because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you,” declares the LORD.”

You want to know what Josiah’s response was to the Word of God. First of all, he received it, he welcomed it. He humbled himself before it in humility. But it didn’t stop there. Josiah also responded with obedience. If we had time I would take you through chapter 23 which details time after time and way after way in which Josiah demonstrated his obedience as he read something that the law forbade he would take steps to eradicate it from Israel, even at great personal cost at times. Listen to what 23:24 says.

Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols of all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, in order that he might” [And your side note there reads perform and I think that’s a better translation.] “that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.” [Now watch verse 25.] “Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any arise after him.

Josiah not only welcomed the word, he set out a pattern of consistent obedience. He was a doer of the Word.

Now turn back to James 1:22, James says be a doer, and then he adds, don’t merely be a hearer. Merely there is the key word. This keeps us from misunderstanding James. James is not disparaging the role of listening to the Word. He’s just explained how crucial it is that we faithfully expose our souls to the Word. He doesn’t say don’t be hearers of the Word. He says don’t merely be hearers of the Word.

Now this word “hearers” is a very interesting word. When it was being translated from Greek into Latin, they used a Latin word that you’ll recognize it was the word “auditor”. Don’t be an auditor; it’s not a slur on the financial profession. This word was used in the first century this Greek word, it was used to refer to “those who attended a lecture”, but weren’t disciples of the lecturer. In other words, they weren’t responsible to learn or to practice. They just listened without any sense of responsibility. It’s like in our day when somebody audits a college course. He’s saying don’t be an auditor; don’t audit the word of God. Don’t just come to listen. Don’t be merely a hearer.

Now why is it so important for James to stress this and for us to hear it? Listen to me, it’s because there is a serious danger. Notice the end of verse 22, he says, “... [be] doers of the word, not merely hearers for mere hearers delude themselves.” To delude literally means “to reason alongside yourself”. The only other time this word occurs in the New Testament is in Colossians 2:4; there it means to lead someone away from the faith. You see if you only listen to the Word but you aren’t actively involved in putting it into practice in your own life, then you are deluding yourself. You are deceiving yourself about your salvation about the reality of your true spiritual condition. This becomes clear when you get over to chapter 2; we’ll look at this in the months to come. Chapter 2 beginning in verse 14, “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says” [I believe] ... “but he has no works?” [There’s no obedience.] “Can that faith save Him?”

James is simply saying, listen, he may claim to have faith, but it’s not true faith. This doesn’t mean works combined with faith to save us. No, we’re saved by faith alone. James’ point is the same as Paul, but he’s making a different emphasis. He’s saying to be saved by a kind of faith that is genuine means that faith will be accompanied by and followed by obedience. You see obeying the Word is a test of genuine faith. You see this in the Old Testament, but you see it particularly in new light in the New. I wish I had time to go back and talk about Ezekiel and Jeremiah and the new covenant, but I really don’t have time to do that. But let’s just come to the ministry of Christ. Listen to what He says to His disciples, Matthew 28:20, He says,

“... make disciples.” [Make Christians. And] “[then] ... teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

So that’s what it means to be a disciple, teach them all that I have commanded you, but teach them to observe it.

Douglas Moon in his commentary says, “in His message of the kingdom, Jesus announced the overwhelming amazing wonder of God’s sovereign grace reaching down to reclaim sinful people for Himself. But no one emphasized as strongly as Jesus, the need for people touched by God’s grace to respond with a radical world renouncing obedience.” Luke 11:28, “blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”

John 8:31, Jesus said to those Jews that had believed Him, “if you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”

First John 2:3, “by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”

First John 3:7 and 8, “little children make sure no one deceives you, the one who practices righteousness is righteous, the one who practices sin is of the devil.”

But no where does Christ make this more clear than in the text we looked at on a number of occasions before, but I want you to turn to Matthew 7, Matthew 7. The most chilling words, I think in the entire ministry of Christ. He ends the Sermon on the Mount by saying in verse 21 of Matthew 7.

“Not everyone who says to Me ‘Lord, Lord’” [here a people claiming a relationship with Christ, and He says not everyone who claims that] “will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. Many will say to me on that day” [That is now we fast forward to the day of judgment, and He says there are going to be many people standing before Me on that day who say,] “Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons and in Your name perform many miracles.” [Well look at what we’ve done. We thought you knew us.] “And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME.” [And here’s the key] “YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”

And then He gives an illustration, verses 24 to 27. Some songs have been written about this, some children’s songs, even the song we sang this morning, *The Solid Rock* that are good songs and have great theology, but they miss the point of this parable. If you ask most Christians, so what is the rock that these wise men built upon? Their answer is

what? Christ. Well, there's a sense in which that's true, of course. But that's not His point here. Notice verse 24, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and" [literally does] ... them, "can be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock." Verse 26, "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand."

You see the difference between the sand and the rock was one obeyed and the other didn't. And that doesn't mean we're saved by obedience, it means obedience proves that we're built on the right foundation. It proves that we have true saving faith.

Listen, it doesn't matter if you prayed a prayer in years past. So many people I've talked to cling. You know in 1963 I prayed a prayer, of course I've lived like a pagan ever since, but I'm a Christian. Listen it doesn't matter if you've prayed a prayer, it doesn't matter if you've walked an isle. It doesn't matter if you've signed a card, were baptized and faithfully attended church ever since, if you talk about God, if you've had some experience. According to the words of Christ here, if you aren't actively seeking to live out what you know and what you're learning from the Scripture, then you are not a Christian. You've deluded yourself and someday, some tragic day, you will stand before Jesus Christ and be shocked to hear Him say, "I never knew you, depart from Me you who practice lawlessness."

Paul says we are to examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith, and there is no clearer test of the reality of your relationship to the person of God than your response to the Word of God. James says do you have a teachable heart? And do you respond to the Bible with a consistent obedience? Are you a doer, or are you just an auditor? Let's bring it down very practically. Can you think of a time in the last couple of weeks when you made a decision to think or to act or to speak a certain way solely because you wanted to obey God's Word? Are you a doer? As we prepare to take of the Lord's Table let us take just a few moments to be honest in our own hearts, to make sure that there is really evidence that we belong to Christ. And if you are in Christ, I encourage you to take just a couple of moments to confess your sin so that you do no damage to the reputation of Christ by tolerating sin that He died for and taking the celebration of His death. I'll ask the men to come as you take a moment of silent prayer.

Father, these are hard words. I pray Your Spirit would be speaking to the hearts of perhaps some here who have clung to some experience or some prayer they've prayed

years ago. But there's no sign of life, there's no obedience, there's nothing that indicates true heart change. Father, I pray that today would be the day you would cause them to have their eyes open to stop deluding themselves. And that they would truly come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord, for those of us who know Christ, we come to You now in confession, acknowledging that we are sinful. Lord, even though the direction of our life is obedience, we sin against You, we disobey the Scripture. Lord, I pray that You would forgive us, don't let anyone here take of this celebration while they still cling to, hold to, coddle their sin. Lord, we thank You for this reminder of the death of our Lord for us. Amen.