

Guest Preacher Rev. Callum Macleod

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Preacher: Rev Callum Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to the letter of James and chapter 1, and we can read at verse number 22. James chapter 1 and verse 22.

But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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. For he looks at himself and goes away, and at once forgets what he was like. And so on down through the following verses. I guess when we read the New Testament, we can notice two things. And we have the story of the birth of the church in the New Testament in the book of Acts. So we see how things begin. When we read the letters of the New Testament, we see that different writers, they give us a window into different places and into different stages and different experiences of the church.

And these windows help us to see the things that flourish. These windows help us to see the problems that can arise. And these windows help us to look at the people who were in the church in these days and to reflect on where they were at and where they were going.

[1 : 21] Where they were going right and where they were going wrong. Where they were doing the things that God was commanding them to do or not. And James is one of these writers. He is writing a letter to those in the beginning in verse 1.

And they are the twelve tribes of the dispersion. They are scattered all over the place. And sometimes we do feel that that's exactly how we are. We perhaps feel that we're not just far from heaven itself, but sometimes we feel perhaps that we're far from God.

And we feel scattered in the world. And in our scattering, we are thankful that God speaks into our hearts wherever we are in order to bring us back to Himself.

And in order to restore our life living with Him and having God as our Lord and King and having Jesus as our friend. And as we go through this letter, we see, of course, at the beginning that there are difficulties and trials.

And we all know that that's the case. At one point or other, we are going to struggle in life because things don't work out as we expected them to work out. And these things kind of throw us off course perhaps for a while because we cannot understand what's happening in the light of what we think God should be doing and God is like.

[2 : 43] And James helps them to work through that. But when we come into verse number 19, there is a particular interest that he wants to highlight.

And that is what it means to hear the Word of God and to do the Word of God. And today, if we are the people of God, we can be sure and it will be true that the Word of God should be and is at the center of our lives.

And we want to think about that today, the importance of the Word of God in our lives. There is an interesting reference to the Word of God in the book of Amos in the Old Testament where God is saying that He will send a famine to the people.

It's the judgment of God. And He says in verse number 11, it's not a famine of bread or of water, but of the Word of God.

They were no longer going to hear the Word of God the way that they used to hear the Word of God. And we can carry that with us and carry it with us also in this sense that sometimes the greatest famine with regard to the Word of God is the absence of the Word of God in our lives.

[4 : 00] And we have to acknowledge that there are times when this is the case. Where is the Word of God? Sometimes it can be out there, but not in here and not working in our lives.

So against that background today, I want to think of the evidence of genuine faith and the blessing of God. I want to notice, first of all, the progress.

There should be progress. And we may ask, progress from what or from where? Well, the progress is from the work that God does in our hearts.

And that's what we see in verse number 18, the way in which He speaks of, so in verse number 21, And then in verse 18, He speaks of the God who, in accordance with His own will, brought us forth by the Word of truth.

So there is an action on the part of God that brings about the great change that should show itself in the progress that we have in the life of faith.

[5 : 17] And that action of God is based on the will and the purpose of God. And today, if we think that our salvation is dependent, first of all, on the things that we are going to do and the choices that we are going to make, that is our first mistake.

To be the children of God, to be the people of faith, is dependent upon the work of God, the choice of God, and the choice here in coming and bringing us forth by the Word of truth.

It was such a joy to see so many children here at the beginning of the service. And that's the image that James has here. Children have been brought forth.

The people of God have come into existence as children. They are born into the kingdom of heaven because of the work of God Himself. And that being born into the kingdom of heaven, normally perhaps we think of that as the work of the Spirit of God, which, of course, it is.

But James wants to emphasize here that we are brought forth by the Word of truth. It is the Word of God that brings about this birth.

[6 : 38] And, of course, the Word of God is the gospel itself. It's the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Word of God is the Word that's breathed out by God. It's the expression, the revelation of who God is.

And Paul speaks in Timothy of God breathing out His Word. And when we read the Word of God, it's what God tells us about Himself. And here that Word is a Word that brings us alive.

And we know that Paul speaks in Romans about faith coming by hearing. We cannot today be the children of God without hearing the Word of God.

That's when and where and how it happens. And Peter, speaking about the same idea, he speaks of the way in which we are brought forth, not from perishable seed, not from the seed that corrupts and vanishes and feeds away, but by imperishable seed.

And what is that imperishable seed that God plants in our hearts in the moment that we are born into the kingdom of God? It is the living and the abiding Word of God.

[8 : 01] And the inference is that if that's how we're brought alive, that the life that God brings about in our hearts is a life that will never end, because the Word of God is like God Himself.

And that is the basis for everything that we're going to do as those who seek to live our lives in dependence upon God. It's the seed of the Word of God that He has planted in our hearts that brings about new life, a life that is looking for expression.

Some days in our springtime, we see evidence of life underneath the surface because seeds are growing and germinating, and they're pushing through the surface.

And we see the ground breaking up because the seed is producing the fruit. And that's the kind of image James wants them to have of what God has done in our hearts, that when He comes to bring us alive through His Word, by His Word, this living and abiding Word that never fades away, then that's going to burst into the surface.

You cannot resist it coming to be seen and to become visible. And we can ask ourselves, in the light of what James is saying about being the children of God, we can ask ourselves where the Word of God is in our lives.

[9 : 33] Is it at the center because God has put it there? What is it in our hearts that moves, that motivates? What life are we conscious of more than anything?

That's the will of the life, our lives and the world. What do we feel like in our hearts? Do we sense that God has worked, that His Word is living and powerful?

Is it in our thoughts and in our decisions? Everything that we choose in life, do we sense that God, by His Word, is telling us not to do the wrong thing and telling us from His Word to do the right thing?

It's the beginning. It's the work of God. Everything else is dependent upon God and the Word which He has implanted in our hearts.

What today is seeking to do, burst out of your heart, is it rebellion against God or is it embracing the Lord Jesus?

[10:39] If the Word of God is in our hearts, there is that embrace of the Lord Jesus. It's the natural response to the inner work of God and Jesus becomes irresistible.

And of course, John calls Jesus Himself the Word that was with God. There is that necessary first work of God. And it is on that basis that there must be progress.

He speaks in verse 21 of receiving with meekness the implanted Word which is able to save your souls. receiving.

We all arrived here at church today and we are received. We were welcomed. We were invited in. There was a sense of gospel hospitality shown to us.

We felt this is what we wanted to be and the church of Jesus welcomed us in being here. And that's something of what this receiving means.

[11:47] The Word of God is not something that's out there. It's something that I welcome into my life, that I give hospitality to, that I want this Word of God in my heart and in my mind.

I want it inside of me. It's no longer enough to have it out there in the lives of others, to have it out there in church or in the Bible when we come to hear the Word preached.

It's welcoming it in here. And the very fact that we do so is in itself evidence that God has planted His Word in our hearts. And today we come to hear what God has to say to us.

And our hearts are wide open. We want to give hospitality to the Word of God, to the Lord Jesus and to God Himself. And in doing so, we're receiving with meekness the implanted Word.

It's that right attitude for children to have with regard to their God. We can be rebellious as children.

[13:00] We can see rebellion in children. This is the opposite of that. It's the condition of mind and of heart that's full of respect, that's full of dependence, a heart that submits to the will of God, and a heart that is teachable, open to hear what God has to say.

It's not a heart that hears the Word of God and says, that's for someone else, not for me. And when I hear the Word of God saying something, pointing the finger at others, submission to the Word of God is hearing, reading, studying, and under the Word of God, receiving it for myself, letting it challenge myself, and letting it show me who I am and who I am not.

And the very picture here of receiving with meekness the implanted Word, it's not so much the welcome when I come to believe in Jesus, although that's important.

It's what I do with the Word of God every day, receiving every morning, receiving every evening, such as the preciousness of the Word of God, that my life, my mind, my heart is open to it constantly.

And James is there saying to them, receive the Word of God every day, welcome it into your life, let it change and transform you, let it influence every decision and choice, let it influence the way in which you are to live, because this Word alone is able to save your souls.

[14:53] The salvation that we see to be precious, the salvation that we have through faith in Jesus, that we cannot love Jesus without loving His Word first, that we cannot learn about Jesus without learning about His Word, and in that whole process that there is progress, developing my understanding of the Word of God and of Jesus through that very Word.

And as we move on, we can ask ourselves whether there is that sense of progress in our hearts and lives. sometimes when we're younger, not just in the faith, but younger in life, our minds are more open, we're more teachable, we suck in a lot more information, and that information shapes our lives and our thinking.

And God today is asking us to use our ears, to use our openness, to use our attitude to life, to use it in such a way as to absorb as much as possible of the Word of God, so that having our minds and our hearts filled with the Word of God, it will filter out and flow out from our lives and will progress, not just in the knowledge of the Word of God, but in our relationship with God and with Jesus, which is the key to our salvation.

can you say today that you are making progress? And perhaps your first response is, I cannot see any progress.

Perhaps your first response is that you feel as if you're going backwards instead of forwards. But despite that, today, if you are the child of God, whom God has brought alive by His Word, then you will be making progress.

[17 : 03] And to your own surprise, perhaps, you understand and you know and you have learned and you experience a lot more of God's Word and of God's salvation in Jesus today than you did yesterday or last year or the year before.

There must be progress. this. Secondly, we see in the passage that there is a problem. And that's life, isn't it? There's always a problem. Nothing is ever plain sailing. The proof of being the children of God, says James in verse number 22, be doers of the Word and not hearers only. It's great to hear the Word of God, to learn about God Himself and about His salvation in Jesus. But every time we come in and contact with the Word of God, God wants us to be doers of that Word, to put it into practice.

God Himself was the great doer. He's the creator of the ends of the earth. We see in His creation that He is the doer, the creator. The evidence is before us.

[18 : 22] And James and God wants us today to be the same with the Word of God, to be doers. So, this written Word that we study and hear preached, that this written Word is lived out in our hands and in our feet as we live long life's way.

It's walking the walk of the Bible. It's ensuring that everything that we claim to believe and everything that we know, putting that into practice every day.

And that's the hard part, if we're honest. It's when we get up in the morning. It's doing the Word of God.

It's reading and studying the Word of God. And the hard part then is going out into life. Whether we go to work or to school or to meet with friends or whatever we're going to do, the hard part is taking what we know and giving it a profile and a visibility in the world through what we're doing and what we're saying and to where we're going.

That's our responsibility. And we spoke at the beginning about the famine of the Word of God. And today in the community of Barres here, there should be no famine of the Word of God because we are all here to hear the Word of God and to take the Word of God with us as we leave here and to walk it and to talk it and to live it out so that it is visible in our homes and our families to our neighbors and to our friends.

[20 : 05] This is what the Word of God is like. This is what the Lord Jesus is like. This is what God Himself is like. I see it visible in the lives of all those who are here as they live their lives from now until next Lord's Day, as they live their lives as the people of God.

But the problem is that we can deceive ourselves. That's what James is saying. And normally, deception is something we do to someone else.

And the Bible repeatedly in the New Testament speaks about false teachers deceiving the people and leading them as three. we expect that kind of deception, that kind of attack, enmity from the outside.

But the problem here is that the deception is from within ourselves and we deceive ourselves. It's hard to explain how that works, but what James is saying is that we deceive ourselves into thinking we're saved and at the same time not doing the Word of God.

And we're deceiving ourselves into believing that the disconnect between the way that we live our lives and what God tells us in His Word that yet still despite that we will be saved.

[21 : 33] We do need to carry that with us because that deceptions can be so engraved in our minds and in our thinking that we can walk away from here and from the Word of God and think we are saved and do what we please for the rest of the week not realizing that by doing what we please it is confirmation that we are not saved.

We are deceiving ourselves and we can do so for so long that we lull ourselves into a false security where we think we're safe when we are further from it than we ever were before.

That's the problem and James goes on here to make a comparison in verse number 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 for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forget what he was like.

I think I'm pretty safe in saying today that all of us at some point this morning looked into the mirror and we did that because we're coming here and we did that to make sure that everything was in place to make sure there were no blemishes nothing that would distract to present ourselves in the best possible way.

We are familiar with using a mirror. mirror. It's there for a particular purpose and we give thanks that it is there and we give thanks for the purpose for which it is there.

[23 : 17] But I'm also sure that all of us today who looked into the mirror that we didn't simply walk away and ignored what we saw. The whole point of being at the mirror was to look at ourselves and to take whatever action was necessary in finally preparing ourselves to come in to gather with the people of God.

We simply naturally will not do that. But James is saying here that that's exactly the problem. We come to hear the Word of God and we look in the mirror of the Word of God.

And James speaks about looking at his natural face in a mirror. And the basic meaning of that is the face of his Genesis.

Which is interesting because the natural face is the face that we have that the Bible tells us we have. And that face of our Genesis because of Adam's sin is a face of sinnership.

And we come to the mirror of the Word of God and we come so that we will see our sinnership. And so we will see the stains of sin on our lives.

[24 : 35] And how foolish is it to come to the mirror where God is telling us this is what you are like, this is why you need to have the salvation that there is in Jesus. Will it not be foolish to walk away and to ignore that?

But that's exactly the problem here. He goes away and at once forgets what he was like. It is as if this person is putting the Word of God in a parallel universe out there that has nothing to do with everyday life.

And that parallel universe comes to overlap on the Lord's Day when we come to hear the Word of God. It's momentary. It's for a short period of time.

And then I disconnect from that. And I live my life in a universe that's disconnected from the Word of God. It's a theory that I hear explained.

It has no impact upon my life. The impact is for one hour and five minutes on the Lord's Day morning. And after that, I forget it.

[25 : 50] Push it out of my mind as if I never heard, never taken note of. It's something that is meaningless and something that has no relevance and something that has no importance in life.

And I want you to ask yourself today, could that possibly be your own problem? Is it possibly the case that such as your disregard for the Word of God?

That you show your appreciation for it on the Lord's Day and able to go on the weekday and ignore that it even exists? That's a real problem.

There can be no salvation if that's the kind of life that we live. And God is asking us today to think about a relationship with the Word of God.

Is it respect, is it hunger, is it desire, or is it a deliberate disregard? It's a real problem because that's the real famine that leaves you beyond the salvation of God.

[27 : 08] The Word of God is at the center of the salvation that we are seeking and the salvation that we wish to enjoy. The problem.

Let's allow ourselves to pause and to think that that problem may be deep rooted in life. And if it is, today God is saying you need to move on from there.

You need to make progress from there. You need to realize that that disconnect simply cannot exist any longer, that you must hear and put into practice the implanted Word of God, which is bursting to show its fruitfulness and its beauty in your life.

So there is the progress, there is the problem, and we conclude with a promise. The Bible is full of promises. It's what God promises to do, and sometimes these promises are dependent on a response.

If you do such and such, I will do this. There are other promises and God comes and He blesses us with no conditions attached. But here we have a promise that's attached to the lives of those who make progress in their faith.

[28 : 39] What is the promise? verse number 25, But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hero who forgets, but adieu who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The one who looks into the perfect law of liberty. And that's what the message of the Bible is. It's about freedom.

Paul speaks in Galatians chapter 3 to stand in the freedom with which Christ has made us free. Jesus has paid the cost of our freedom.

The cost of our freedom is the cross for Jesus. And He has died for our sins. He has paid the penalty. Freedom we have in the gospel.

people. And here is the promise to the person who is responding to the word of God the way that they should. And it's looking into the perfect law, looking into the mirror of the word of God, and seeing two things in that mirror.

[29 : 55] Seeing the way in which our sinfulness is rubber stamped on our whole being. And seeing how God in His mercy and in His love gives us the makeover of all makeovers.

That we see that Jesus Christ died for our sins. And that in the one looking into the word of God, we are face to face with the two critical issues in life.

That we have sinned against God and that we are under God's condemnation. And that corresponding to that is the fact that the word of God says there is no condemnation because Jesus has set us free.

And that double image that we see in the mirror of God's word, the perfect law of liberty, is one which gives us a beauty in the presence of God, which we cannot give to ourselves.

only God gives it to us as we look into the perfect law of liberty. And it's interesting to note that the looking into here is not something that I do from a distance.

[31 : 17] I admire something on the horizon. it's the stooping down and it's the examining of something up close to make sure that I see all the detail and that I don't miss out on anything.

And that's what the child of God does. It's not enough to see it from a distance. Let me come close to what Jesus has to see.

Let me come close to what Jesus has done. Let me be captivated, let me peer into that with all of my attention. And let me not miss any of the detail of who I am because that highlights for me the detail of who Jesus is and all of the details about me are addressed in all of the detail of what Jesus has done.

And he wipes my slate clean. He gives to me forgiveness. He sets me free. And then I'm living in this kind of universe, this new heaven and this new earth that has already begun because I sense my freedom.

And when I do that, there is the promise. He will be blessed in his doing. And one way or another today, we came in here to worship God, seeking the blessing of God.

[32 : 47] And we will all have our different opinions and our understanding as to what blessing means. What are we looking for when we're looking for the blessing of God? God? The blessing of God in the Old Testament, it does two things.

It does the empowering of God's Word, and it is an empowering that enables us to do what God wants us to do. And when all of these two things are together, it gives us joy and peace and satisfaction.

That's the blessing. the empowering of God. That God comes not only around me, but that God comes into my heart, and that I sense His greatness, that I sense the power of His mercy and of His grace and of His love, that everything about Him is powerful and great, fills me with a sense of awe and a sense of adoration.

It's the empowering of God by the presence of God in His Word. And once that blessing is there, it's not just the inspiration, the blessing itself, it's what gives me strength to do the very things that I cannot do myself.

And that's a blessing, to be somewhere at some point, and for God to be so close, and God to be so present, that the whole experience is transformed.

[34 : 28] It's full of God, it's full of the love of God, and full of wanting to do the will of God, these moments. And the way that James speaks, he's not referring to moments, he's referring to a life that is also filled with the same thing.

moments are so precious, that even today, right now, if we felt that sense of the power of God, the love of God, and the presence of Jesus, but isn't it even more special to have that every day?

So it's not just in church on Sunday, but it is every day of my life, to sense the power of God, the power of Jesus, to sense satisfaction in him, and to go on my way, enjoying his blessing, the promise every day, I will be with you, I will enable you to do the things that I command you to do, I will give you strength, the promise of God.

And so today, let's hear what God has to say. He demands that we make progress, we must grow in our faith and in our knowledge of God's Word.

It requires us to think of the problem that may be at the root of our failure to accept Jesus as our Savior, our disregard for the Word of God.

[36 : 06] And he wants us to lay hold of the promise that will motivate us to embrace his Word, to embrace himself, to look into the more every day, to be reminded of who we are and of who he is, and to know the peace and the blessing of God as we journey on through life's way.

May God bless his Word to us and may help us to have regard for his own precious Word. We bow our heads in prayer. Most gracious God, we do rejoice in you that you have spoken to us your Word, you have made known to us so many precious things about yourself.

And we are thankful that you have done so by speaking into our lives in such a way that is relevant to our experience, that recognizes where we are and that speaks into our every concern.

And we are thankful today that at the center of the way in which you have made yourself known, that you have spoken to us of the way in which you are our Savior through Jesus Christ, your Son.

And we pray that you will bless your Word to us so it will be lodged in our hearts and our minds will be filled with a longing to learn more about you, to trust in you more, and to lean upon the Lord Jesus more, and to know your blessing in our lives.

[37 : 23] Day by day, we do pray. So hear our prayer and accept your thanks. We pray these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. So, closing psalm is in Psalm number 119.

And we're singing at verse number 89 in the Scottish Psalter. It's on page 407. Psalm 119 at verse 89.

Thy word forever is, O Lord, in heaven settled fast, and to all generations thy faithfulness doth last. Sing from verse 89 to the verse Mark 94 to God's praise.

Amen. Thy word forever is, O Lord, in heaven settle fast.

All to all generations thy faithfulness doth last.

[38 : 41] The earth thou hast established, and it abides by thee.

This day they stand as the Lord is, O Lord, for all thy servants be.

God bless in thy most perfect love, my soul delights hath found.

I should have perished when us thy troubles did abound.

Thy precepts I will ne'er forget, they quickly to be brought.

[40 : 06] Lord, I am thy, O save thou me, thy precepts I have sought.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen. Theb cares.

Amen. Amen. Good night. Loud trouble. Amen. Notice the fear. Amen. It's in the peace. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you. Amen. .