

WEDNESDAY 24 August 2022 "Walk the Talk"

James 1:23-27

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Have you been frustrated or even wounded by a person who hands out very good advice to others but does not 'walk their talk'? I mean the person who does not follow their own advice. Their actions contradict their words! Do you know anyone like that?

These days we're sitting with James as he writes his little letter of encouragement to Jewish Jesus followers, scattered all over the Roman Empire, near the middle of the first century. It had been almost 20 years since Jerusalem had been shaken by that Passover/Easter weekend of Jesus' arrest, trials, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The story of Jesus' life and the recollections of His truth messages had been spreading by word of mouth all around the empire, but the harsh reality was that *any Jewish person who trusted in Jesus as their Messiah and was found to be a follower of Jesus was harshly persecuted by Jewish leaders and often by Roman soldiers!*

It was a terrible time to be alive if you were a "Messianic Jew", a Jewish Christian! That's why James was led by God to write this letter so let's get back into his writing room and sit with James as he thinks, prays and writes these powerful words.

Like many of us, I think James probably spoke each word as he wrote it, so let's listen: ***"Do not merely listen to the Word of God and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says! Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at their face in a mirror and after looking at themselves, goes away and immediately forgets what they look like! But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do."*** (James 1:22-25) James put down his stylus and again walked over to the window to look out into the busy street and just watch people. *So easily any of us, all of us, do things and say things we know, down deep inside our hearts, is not God honoring, not helpful to our reputation, does not contribute to the good of society.* Why is that true of all of us?

I wonder if Matthew had told James about the day Matthew and hundreds of other people had gathered on a hillside as Jesus was talking. Years later Matthew wrote down what Jesus had said that day, as the Holy Spirit reminded him. To me it sure sounds very similar to what James is writing. Jesus had said: ***"Whoever hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like the foolish man who built his house on sand.***

The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matthew 7:24-29)

So, my friends, let's look around wherever you and I live. Do you see crumbling marriages and families? Do you see schools unable to produce educated children? Do you see governments and political systems unable to keep corruption out? What does 'a great crash' look like where you live? *Look closely, do you see a significant absence of God's Truth has contributed to the crash? You see, when we push God and His truth OUT of anything, that thing will eventually collapse!* Do you agree?

Do you see both James and Jesus warning us about this very important truth? So what is your DAILY practice? *How MUCH of God's truth do you intake into your mind and heart EVERY day?* What TIME of day and what is your PROCESS of taking in God's truth? And how do you keep it fresh and vibrant in your life? How do you make sure that as you take in God's truth it doesn't run off your mind like rain on a tin roof, but rather like rain on thirsty ground it soaks in... *soaks into your mind and heart and then flows out of you in your words, your attitudes and your actions?*

Now ponder that a moment my friends! I think James spent a long time reflecting on these powerful truths. Before we go further, I wonder if James was also thinking about Psalm 119:10 ***"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word! I seek You, O God, with all my heart, do not let me stray from Your commands. I have hidden Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You."*** And do you remember this powerful word of agreement which comes from Hebrews 4:12? ***"The WORD of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. The Word penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, bone and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of HIM to whom we must give account."*** (Heb. 4:12,13)

James picked up the stylus and next wrote: ***"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongue deceive themselves and their religion is worthless!"*** (James 1:26) I wonder if James set down his stylus and went over to the window and looked toward the great Temple in Jerusalem and all the priests, Levites, Pharisees and other very religious people who were busy receiving devout Jews who had come to offer sacrifices and pray. James wasn't satisfied with only this one statement, even though it's powerful.

So, in a few days we'll look at James chapter three in which James goes into much greater detail about the power and danger of the **tongue**. Again, I wonder if James thought about the book of Proverbs, so highly regarded by all Jews and containing *so many warnings against talk that defiles reputations, disqualifies people from being trusted, and so easily wounds other people, breaking relationships*. Oh, we all have so much to learn about how to manage our tongues, don't we, my friends?

Finally, James picked up his stylus one final time for today: ***"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*** (James 1:27) In the first century, as today in many places, widows and orphans received no help, no special care, no protection from the government. They were entirely on their own and relied upon their extended family if they had some, or the kindness of friends or even strangers. *But God had made it clear, down through Israel's history, that HIS eyes were on and His heart tender toward widows and orphans and He wants His people to do the same!* Do we? How do you measure your compassion for these and other people in need, especially if you consider yourself religious or spiritual?

And did you notice the phrase I underlined in which James had said: ***"...to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*** How do you do that my friends? Do you remember King Solomon had written in Proverbs 4:23 ***"Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of your life."***? So, what safeguards do we have in place to protect our hearts from anything that would pollute us, as James says?

And a few years later Paul was writing to Christians in Rome when he wrote: ***"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - God's good and pleasing and perfect will."*** (Romans 12:2) Can we be honest with ourselves today? Do we find ourselves conforming to the world's values, or the pattern of communication in this world, especially social media communication? Or do we conform to the world's fear about COVID or are we caught up in the political fray? Do we find ourselves conforming to the world's vocabulary or priorities or prejudices or contagious anger? *Do you see the key to standing firm and being a nonconformist is a continual renewing of our minds by the purifying work of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit of God in our lives?!*

And finally, do you notice friends that it is ONLY then, when we are refusing to conform to this world's evil ways and when our minds and hearts are being renewed by God's Word, that *then and only then are we positioned to test, discern and submit to God's perfect will!* Now let's ponder these things today my friends, and here's a song to help us...

Today's Scripture is James 1:23-27.