

# **FAITH ATTENDS & ACTS**

***James 1:19-27***

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**May 10, 2009**

**PURPOSE** – To call people to a faith that listens and acts on God’s Word, teaching skills for such living.

**MAIN IDEA** – True faith listens for God’s word with an open heart & quiet spirit, then acts on that word as it directs us to care for those in need and keep our life pure.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Let’s open our Bibles to James 1:19 (p. 1881)

1. Moms, we have an excellent section of Scripture for you to hear covered this morning. It’s titled: LISTENING & DOING.

The title reminded me of this Lynn Johnson “For Better or Worse” comic strip I once came across (she drew from her family experiences):

*GO OVER - Why panic when you have someone else to panic for you!?!*

*... Listening ... and ... Doing!*

2. The overall purpose of this letter of James to the Church of Christ is to help us see what true, living faith actually looks like:

(i) In the context of TRIALS, you SEE true faith in PERSEVERANCE – and PRAYER, asking God for wisdom, trusting Him for it.

A. So when someone’s going through a hard time, you know they have faith when you hear them say, “With God’s help I’ll get through this as a stronger, better person – in such a way that God will be glorified!”

(ii) Then, in the time of TEMPTATION, true faith is seen in the person who takes responsibility for temptation – LOOKING IN ... and LOOKING AHEAD – if I give in to this, it’ll only bring sin & death into my life; and LOOKING UP – I’m a new creation, born of the word of truth – If I give in, it’s denying who I most truly am!

➤ I won’t, I won’t, I won’t – I am more than a conqueror through Him who loves me – Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world!!

3. Today's lesson on the Look of True Faith is about something even more PRIMARY than its look in Trial & Temptation.

- It's on LISTENING & DOING

Listening to God; Doing what He says – it's as basic as breathing in & breathing out.

(i) Listening (breathe in) – Doing (breathe out) – True faith aspires to be good at both.

Let's read what James has to say about it:

***Read James 1:19-27*** (keep Bibles open)

## **II. FIRST LISTEN – To The Implanted Word**

1. It's important to remember that this teaching comes on the heels of James' description of faith in trials & temptations.

So in trials ... v. 19 – *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger (which rises so readily in life's trials) does not bring about the righteous life God desires.”*

I.e. – Think back to our Comic-Strip mom – When Michael hasn't finished his breakfast or brushed his teeth or gotten his homework ready to take to school ... IN THOSE KIND OF DAY-TO-DAY TRIALS & TEMPTATIONS, be “quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”

(i) WHY? - cause hasty anger, fast words, closed hearts do not bring about the righteous life that God desires!!!

2. WHAT DOES bring about that righteous life?

V. 21 - *“It is the WORD PLANTED IN YOU that can save you.”*

(i) THE WORD PLANTED IN YOU. It's CRITICAL to understand what James is here referring to because the next verse – 22 – he adds, “Do not MERELY listen to that word, and so deceive yourselves. DO what it says.”

A. The “WORD” is critical. Faith first LISTENS to the Word planted in you, and then DOES WHAT IT SAYS.

(ii) That word that faith listens to is GOD'S WILL in Jesus.

There are many terms that the Bible uses to describe this implanted word:

- It is the Spirit, with whom we're sealed (Eph. 2)
- It is the seed of life (1 Jn. 3) - It's the heart of God (Jer. 31)
- It is the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2)
- Later here, it's called "the perfect law that gives freedom"

It is the Word of God PLANTED. This (Bible) is the Word of God WRITTEN. It nourishes & guides the word planted. This (Bible) is a Word we listen TO. The word planted is the word we listen FOR – in living relationship with God.

ESSENTIALLY, it is Jesus living in you – NEW LIFE ... GOD'S LIVING WILL.

A. In John 8:47 – Jesus told the religious Jews who were disputing with Him, *"He who is of God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."*

B. But those who are truly of God – born of His Spirit (Rom. 8:14) – have the word – which is the will of God in Jesus – PLANTED IN THEM!

3. Faith LISTENS for that Word – especially in times of trial and temptation!

For, as C.S. Lewis famously stated, *"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain."*

DO WE HAVE EARS TO HEAR?

(i) So, assuming this mother, Lynn, is a Christian (screen), what might the implanted word (Jesus) be saying to her in the context of this particular trial?

A. Simplest level – STOP BLOWING UP – "Be slow to anger". But the Word always takes us deeper, right? – It's not just about what to do, but about who we are – lest we just live a "behavioral Christianity" – trying to do right. The Word gets us to look within ourselves, so that Jesus can be formed in us through repentance.

B. So maybe the Word is telling this woman – "Train your child to be responsible for his own life. Why are you taking on his responsibilities? Why are you stressing out about it? He should be ... because if he doesn't finish his breakfast, brush his teeth, gets his homework ready, there will be painful CONSEQUENCES he'll experience that he doesn't want!"

The Scriptures teach that each of us stand responsible for our own sin. Good parenting trains children in that! Good parenting disciplines, even as the Heavenly Father does!

So maybe the implanted word is saying – in the context of that trial – disciple your child.

C. But maybe the Word is going deeper. Maybe the Word is prompting you to ask, “Why have I allowed this situation to arise? Might there be some emotional investment in it for me?”

- Might I LIKE to get frustrated deep down? If so, why?

- Do I like over-mothering my son – at the cost of his maturity and my stress?

- Am I stuck in the identity of being a mom more deeply than being a servant of Jesus who obeys his command to disciple others?

- Am I following family patterns where women look after the men?

(ii) THE IMPLANTED WORD ASKS those kind of questions – because those are Biblical questions to do with our sanctification – the growing of Jesus within us.

GOD SOVEREIGNLY GIVES US types in children and all sorts of other trials at home / church / school / work - so that the LIVING WORD – JESUS - CAN GROW IN US.

... as we listen & do it.

### III. HOW TO LISTEN

So, assuming that that word of Jesus is planted in you, HOW CAN WE first LISTEN FOR IT – especially in trials – in order to DO IT?

James, inspired by the Spirit, gives 3 practical instructions: Verse 19 – Be quick to listen / slow to speak / slow to become angry. That’s what it takes.

1. BE QUICK TO LISTEN = means to be INCLINED to listen / to DELIGHT in listening for God’s word in your trial.

One commentator – “The Greek word implies an attitude of EAGERNESS to take in the word from every angle.”

= WHAT ARE YOU SAYING TO ME, LORD, IN THIS TRIAL?

= I love your living word!

(i) THERE ARE NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS OF A PERSON QUICK TO LISTEN:

A. Negatively ... such a person is NOT someone we know as a SELECTIVE LISTENER – someone who only hears what they want to hear – like the child who has to be told 3 times LOUDLY to do their chores ... but mention just once SOFTLY that it’s time to go get ice cream at Baskin & Robbins - and they’re there! (That’s NOT being QUICK TO HEAR – that’s selective listening)

Nor is such listening DISTRACTED LISTENING – like talking to your friend on the phone while she’s instant messaging on the laptop! That’s NOT being quick to listen.

B. In the context of listening to a sermon, Charles Spurgeon once said being quick to listen is this: “Suppose you went to hear read the WILL of one of your recently-deceased relatives, and you were expecting a legacy from him. You would hardly think of criticizing the manner in which the lawyer read the will, but you would be ALL ATTENTION to hear whether anything was left to you, and if so, how much!” ... This is the way to listen for the word of God (cause that IS what the living word of God gives us – our spiritual inheritance)!

C. James himself gives another illustration of eagerness to listen – down in verse 25 of our passage. He writes, *“The man who looks INTENTLY into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this ....”*

“INTENTLY” – That Greek word means to stoop & look carefully at something. It was used of John & Mary stooping to look carefully into the empty tomb after the resurrection (Jn. 20:5,11) – not a quick & casual look = careful peering – looking for the Lord

- This illustrates what it means to be quick to listen
- = eager, searching, attentiveness – searching for the living Lord!

## 2. BE SLOW TO SPEAK

- Have you ever spoken with someone who it seems that they only hear what you’re saying in order to say something back about their life?

I.e. – “Hey, I went downtown Chicago yesterday!” ... and you’re hoping they’ll respond by saying – “Oh, tell me about it / what’d you do? / Did you have fun?” ... INSTEAD ... they say, “Yesterday, I was at my grandmothers ... and they go on & on to say how much older their grandmother’s getting & how they like her perfume & how she might need to move ...”

- So you - your heart & your “word” is left FAR BEHIND!

(i) That’s LOUSY listening. Good listening requires that you are SLOW TO SPEAK.

- that you listen to UNDERSTAND - BEFORE responding
- listening to the HEART of the person through those words you’re hearing and therefore you’re slow to speak.

(ii) Now in the context of trials, that's not easy to do! ... Cause we're quick to form opinions about these trials. ... and then we like to EXPRESS our opinion about them to others, rather than letting that trial and its pain be a means for listening to God for a word for MY LIFE.

- QUICK opinions & speech BLOCK US from listening to God's heart.

I.e. – How easy it would be for mother Lynn to get on her cell phone to her friend and vent her frustrations about Michael INSTEAD OF taking time to sit / pray & listen to that experience of getting her son out the door that morning.

(iii) BE SLOW TO SPEAK – Proverbs 10:19 – *When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.*

BE SLOW TO SPEAK – that's the message of our physiology itself - which has 2 ears and only 1 mouth ... and of those 3 organs, only 1 of them can you physically close!

BE QUICK TO LISTEN / SLOW TO SPEAK (James will have much more to say about the tongue later in his letter) ...

3. ... and SLOW TO BECOME ANGRY - An angry spirit is never a listening, teachable spirit.

(i) Mother Lynn cannot hear those questions that the implanted word is asking when MIREN IN FRUSTRATION.

A. That's not to say that she shouldn't be angry – for disobedience should anger us. The Bible says, "In your anger, do not sin." (Eph. 4:30). There's plenty to get angry about in this age – those things that God is angry about.

(ii) THEREFORE the focus of this instruction is to be SLOW to anger.

The reason being that much of the IMMEDIATE anger that rises in us during trials is ME-CENTERED more than GOD-CENTERED.

I.e. – I'm angry cause my life's busy & I have better things to do with my time than get you out the door.

- I'm angry cause neighbor Sue never seems to have these problems with any of her kids

- I'm angry cause my parents were never there to help me get out the door & I've pledged myself to be better than they ever were.

A. Whose are the center of that kind of anger? God? Your child? Love ? ... NOT!!! ...

- It's SELF! ... pride / envy / unforgiveness / my emotional needs – They surface rapidly in immediate anger.

(iii) That's why James adds, "*Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires*". That anger is only self-serving.

*Therefore – v. 21 – get rid of the moral filth and evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you.*

= Trials surface pride & envy & lack of forgiveness – that need to be pulled out of our hearts – in order to become SLOW TO ANGER and listen to the implanted word!

A. That "FILTH" is like the rocks & weeds in Jesus' parable of the sower. Those rocks & weeds prevented the seed from growing. They must be pulled out.

- We want our hearts to be GOOD SOIL – so we can hear what God is saying to us.

B. SO BE QUICK to listen / SLOW to speak / SLOW to anger ... and BECOME slow to anger through repentant "gardening" of your heart.

An angry spirit is never a listening teachable spirit.

In all of his writings, the only thing John Calvin ever mentioned about his own personal conversion was this one line: "*God, by a sudden conversion, subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame.*"

- He was saved when he became a listener!

#### **IV. THEN ACT**

But don't merely listen, DO WHAT THE WORD SAYS (v. 22)

"If you love me, you will OBEY my commandments", Jesus said.

1. So when you hear the implanted word speak to you about pride or envy or bitterness in the context of your trial, DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

First, get on your knees & confess it!

➤ "Lord, you've just shown me filth in my heart. Thank you. I'm sorry for it. Take it away. Forgive me. Heal me. Cleanse me. Fill me with your love."

➤

(i) Then CONTINUE to do what the word says:

- If you're angry because you're over-booked to properly minister to your child – and you know the Lord's speaking to you, change your schedule! Sit down and eliminate those things you need to.

- If you're angry because you're envious of another person's children – yes, confess envy – but then write a note of blessing to that other mother – to say thank you for her witness – how God is using it to challenge you in good ways.

- If you're angry cause there are still seeds of bitterness in your heart from parental neglect in your early years – yes, forgive (and you may need to speak to her about it – sometimes God leads us in that path for reconciliation). But that very day also go & bless your mom or dad – mindful of those gifts God has given you through her. Take her out for lunch.

## 2. Hear the word & act on it.

If you don't, you're like the man who looks in the mirror (v. 23) – sees some reality – (say, bad bed-head) – but just takes off to church, not doing anything about it.

WHY LOOK IN THE MIRROR IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT?!

(i) The point of that illustration is that, like a mirror, God's word speaks to us of a REALITY from His perspective.

- = the word brings us WHOLENESS

- = a perfect law living in us that brings us FREEDOM (v. 25).

A. But that freedom & wholeness only come when the Word is ACTED ON in OBEDIENCE!

## 3. Hearing the word, you will be "blessed in what you do!" (end of v. 25)

- It's when you reduce your schedule you'll be blessed in your ministry to your child

- It's when you serve that other mom with a thank you note, you'll be blessed with freedom from your envy.

- It's when, in the spirit of forgiveness, you talk through your early years with her, including the ones that were hard on you – but also blessing her with a thank you lunch – THEN JESUS is being formed in you.

... obeying the word, you'll be blessed in what you do!

## V. CONCLUSION

1. James finishes our passage with some practical examples of what the implanted word listened to and then acted upon LOOKS LIKE:

- Keeping a tight rein on the tongue

- Caring for orphans and widows – (those who cannot pay you back)

- Maintaining one's own purity of heart – (How many times don't we hear a word that we think would be so good for someone else to hear!) – *“Keep YOURSELF from being polluted by the world”*, James states.

(i) In the weeks to come, we'll be picking up on these examples of the look of true faith.

2. To conclude today, I couldn't help but think of the Biblical sisters Mary & Martha a number of times this week – listening & doing.

(Remember – Jesus visits ... Martha= the doer; Mary = the listener)

(i) Now I've heard that story wrongly taught that the Christian life is a mix of both sisters. That's not what Jesus said. Martha got frustrated because her sister wasn't helping. Then Jesus defends Mary – *“There's one thing needful – she has chosen it.”*

WE LISTEN FIRST to the implanted word IN ORDER TO do the things God wants.

A. Christianity is not doing our best for God, like Martha. It's not doing our duty. It is love / relationship. (She may have been preparing a salad and Jesus wanted steak!) That's religion. Just doing what we think God wants!

Christianity is first learning to listen to the implanted word ... then ACTING ON IT.

I.e. – As if Jesus, in speaking with Mary, asks her to fix him a steak sandwich! ... but with joy and strength and freedom!

3. Is God's word implanted in you?

If so, how well do you listen for that word – especially in the context of trials?

What must you do to improve your listening skills?

Be quick to listen / slow to speak / slow to become angry

How are you challenged to listen better to God?

(i) And, having heard the word, are you committed to doing it?

- It's usually NOT a glamorous thing to do God's word – take sin out of your life, keeping your mouth shut, caring for the needs of others who are unable to give back. But you will be blessed when you do them.

- What things has God been speaking to you about that you know you need to act on them NOW?

= Things you've been putting off, ignoring, afraid to do.

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

... in the name of the Word ENACTED, Jesus the Christ – AMEN.