

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

A Faith that Works ***The Epistle of James***

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)

“A Growing, Genuine Faith”

May 31, 2015

Sermon Text: James 1:21-27

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 4

Introduction-

James 1:19-21 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; (20) for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (21) Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the

implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. You will remember that formula of wisdom from last week. The “anger of man” is sinful anger, a product of our flesh, and does not work for good. We said that the anger of the Lord however does quite the opposite and noted that righteous anger *must* be something that characterizes a Christian. This righteous anger leaves vengeance to the Lord, but it does cry out against wickedness and unrighteousness and stands with the oppressed.

We should also notice here in verse 21 that James likens the gospel – the *implanted word* – to a planted seed that must germinate and grow in us if it is to “save our souls.” There are other places in Scripture that use the same idea for the gospel as a seed –

Matthew 13:18-23 "Hear then the parable of the sower: (19) When anyone hears the word of the

kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. (20) As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (22) As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (23) As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

And here is Peter speaking of this seed-

1 Peter 1:22-23 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, (23) since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

Elsewhere Peter compares the gospel to milk which is able to cause us to "grow up into salvation."

1 Peter 2:1-3 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (2) Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-- (3) if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

And Hebrews shows us plainly what the vital and essential element is that, when joined to the Word implanted in us (through the preaching of the gospel) causes that germination and growth:

Hebrews 4:1-3 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. (2) For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, **because they were not united by faith with those who listened.** (3) For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest," although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Faith, you see. That is why James tells us to "put away all filthiness and

rampant wickedness and receive with meekness” this Word seed. Because that is what faith does with it. Peter says the same thing – “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander...long for the pure spiritual milk.”

It is not enough (and James is going to say much more about this) to merely *hear* the Word of God preached, or read it. The Israelites ALL were with Moses at the Red Sea and saw the Lord’s deliverance. They ALL were at Mt. Sinai and heard His thundering Word. But what was it, *two of them* besides Moses who actually made it? Why? Because they did not hear that Word with faith. So this seed never took root in them. It didn’t grow up into salvation.

Now, listen very, very carefully. *Salvation in Christ is a one time, instantaneous event, and at the same time it is a lifelong event that requires our perseverance to the end.* I cannot say that I fully understand this, but I do know that the Bible teaches both truths. I think however that it is because the one grows out of the other. When Christ saves us and we believe the gospel and repent of our sin, we are fully and finally justified before God. *But we must keep on longing for the pure spiritual milk so that by it we may grow up into salvation. We must keep hearing and receiving and believing*

the Word implanted in us so that it grows up into salvation.

This is why then it is so dangerous to teach people that if right now at this moment they pray a prayer telling God that they believe the gospel and asking him to save them, that’s the done deal. No, genuine faith *perseveres. It keeps on receiving the Word implanted and that Word keeps growing.* A false faith does not persevere and that is why Scripture warns us about people who don’t persevere, lest we be one of them:

Hebrews 6:4-8 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Young people, let me address this to you. You cannot grow up in this church, hearing God's Word week after week, year after year, profess faith in Jesus Christ, be baptized, and then go out into life, and live your life your own way just like the rest of the world. Stop going to church. Stop reading your Bible. Stop praying. Stop obeying Christ. And all the while thinking that you are still ok with the Lord because you "tasted" the Word of God here. No!

You know that we realize there are many, many false churches and false Christians today. And that number is on the increase. We know and we have told you that it is not going to be easy for you to find a real church when you go to a new place. But real faith seeks out its own. Real faith earnestly desires to gather together with Christ's people regularly for teaching and encouragement and prayer. Let me tell you, I saw what failure in this regard did to my own parents over the years. They grew further and further and further away from the Lord and left us with no real assurance that they were saved. Don't let that be your story!

Listen to this parable of Jesus once again. Notice that HE opens it with HEAR! Listen!!

Matthew 13:18-23 "Hear then the parable of the sower: (19) When

anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. (20) As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. (22) As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (23) As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Of the 4 who all heard the Word, only one saw that seed grow into maturity. He hears, he believes, and he *keeps on believing* his whole life long.

Listen once more also to Hebrews 6 –

(7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it

bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Understand? You are this land that has had the rain fall on it often. In your homes, in this church, week after week all these years, God's rain comes on you. The question is, what kind of crop will you produce? A good one, or thorns and thistles? Blessed by God or cursed?

And the key is *faith*. Hearing AND believing, hearing AND obeying.

1 Corinthians 10:1-12 For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, (2) and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, (3) and all ate the same spiritual food, (4) and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

(5) **Nevertheless**, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

(6) Now these things took place **as examples for us**, that we might not desire evil as they did. (7) Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose

up to play." (8) We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. (9) We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, (10) nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

(11) **Now these things happened to them as an example**, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (12) Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

It is the very same message. Listen – you are going to be hammered all the rest of your life by the world and the devil telling you things like:

- Homosexuality is ok
- Immorality is ok
- The Bible is not relevant
- Everyone is going to end in heaven because God is love
- All religions are just as good as the other
- You can sin, God understands, and besides Jesus came so He could forgive us

And on and on it goes. If you yield to these things so that you don't have to suffer persecution for Christ, so that being a Christian doesn't cost you

anything, then do not deceive yourself into thinking that all will be well when you stand before God.

Now, that is the challenge – but with it comes the Lord's encouragement. First of all take very careful notice of this:

This faith by which we are enabled to believe the Word of God to the saving of our souls is the gift of God given us. Furthermore, it is the Lord who continues to sustain it in His people.

So, for instance –

Mark 9:24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Luke 17:5-6 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (6) And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Our part is, yes, to believe, but it seems that Scripture emphasizes that we are to repent, to put away the filthiness of the world, to be done with evil so that the seed of God's Word planted in us can grow unhindered. And that growth is something the Lord produces –

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Weed the garden of your life. **Water** it. And God will cause your faith to grow into salvation. Let the garden go to weed, let it dry out because you didn't water it with prayer and continued feeding on God's Word, and that faith is not going to grow. Where will such a person end?

We hear of such people frequently. They claim to be Christians. But they don't grow. They don't seem to be able to believe God's Word and promises and truths. They complain that His Word is so hard to accept. But look at their lives. They are overgrown with the weeds of love for the world and love for sin and careless neglect of the means God has given us for His grace to strengthen us – fellowship with believers, study of Scripture, prayer and so on. Jesus said that weeds choke out the seed:

Matthew 13:22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness

of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Now, I hope that you find this all challenging, convicting and ENCOURAGING! Jesus is the author of our faith – we did not write the book. Jesus is the Perfecter of our faith. All we are called to do is weed and water the garden where He has planted the seed of the gospel, and He promises to give the growth and ultimately the harvest of full salvation – resurrection, our inheritance in the new heavens and earth, eternal life – the whole deal!

Now, you see this in the next thing James tells us –

James 1:22-25 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (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. (24) For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. (25) But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

This was the Israelites' deception. You see it in Hebrews-

Hebrews 3:12-19 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? (19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

The Apostle here sets out an equivalence for us –

Disobedience = Unbelief

And that is what James is telling us. They were *hearers of the word*, but they were *not DOERS of the word*. Their lack of DOING evidenced the real state of their hearts – *unbelief*. We

must take care not to be **deceived** by the same lie.

James gives us this mirror illustration. The word of God (the perfect law) is like a mirror that shows us the true condition we are in. But if we look at the word, if we hear the word, and then just walk away and forget what it revealed about us, and what it told us, then to us that word is no more than a mirror on a wall *worthy only of a momentary glance*. In fact, there are people who profess to be Christians who will give MORE heed to what a mirror in the bathroom shows them about themselves than they will about the reflection revealed of them by God's Word.

“Oh, wow! I need a haircut!”
“It's a wrinkle!”

And they think and worry about this all day. But the mirror of God's Word – well, to a person who is a hearer and not a doer, he forgets it right away and fails to act upon what God has shown him.

Now, notice the blessing pronounced to the one who hears and DOES. Here it is again –

(25) But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who

forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Why does James speak of the “perfect law, the law of liberty”? Because that is what the gospel is. It is a law, unlike the Mosaic law, that sets us free.

Finally, James gives us hands on examples of what he means by DOERS of the Word –

James 1:26-27 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

(27) Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Religion. James will elaborate later on what this “bridling of the tongue” means. It means to not permit ourselves to sin through our words spoken to others. This is why a “reviler” (one who willfully hurts people with his speech) is not a Christian. His religion that he professes is worthless, and he deceives himself that he is set right with God.

This is something we all must be wise about. Not only in regard to examining ourselves, but in being wise to the tactics of the devil to deceive us and

discourage us. Satan would like us to believe many lies, and he uses revilers and liars to communicate those things to us. We need to be able to spot those lies when they come our way ESPECIALLY if the one speaking them to us claims to be a follower of “true religion.” A person who does not bridle their tongue with the bridle of truth and love is a phony Christian.

So be on guard for this. If you know someone who claims to be some wonderful Christian, but who regularly makes you feel quite uncomfortable, wary, discouraged, accused, shamed or guilty – think carefully about why that is. James says it is because their claim of Christ is a false one.

And then the second example. Marks of a genuine Christian, and thus of real faith that is a DOER of the Word –

- Visit orphans and widows in their affliction
- Keep oneself unstained from the world

This DOING the Word, not merely hearing it, you see. All through the Bible we have repeated commands that we are to help the oppressed, the widow, the orphan, the stranger in the land. We are to be kind to them and give to them. Seek them out. The phony religionist will talk much about how he loves others, but he doesn't

DO this love. Similarly, he loves the world and bears the stain of its evil.

Jeremiah 2:22-23 Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord GOD. (23) How can you say, 'I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals'? Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done-- a restless young camel running here and there,

The stain of the guilt of going after the idols that the world loves, you see. This is what we are to flee from.

For James then, and thus for the Lord, there is none of this “easy believism” salvation which consists of hearing, but not doing. Faith works. And those works are the evidence that faith is genuine.