

A Spiritual Checkup

Epistle of James

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Bible Text: James 1:26
Preached on: Sunday, August 6, 2017

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Turn with me in your Bibles to James 1. The title of the message this morning is "A Spiritual Checkup." Verse 26 is what we're going to focus on this morning and as we do, you think about as we get older, we have to go for checkups, or we should more regularly, right? It's just a part of taking care of yourself and, you know, often when you go in, most of the time you hope that you have a good report or, "Hey, you need to work on this," or whatever, some minor adjustments, but there are many times where someone goes for a checkup and one of the first things the doctor always asks you is, "How are you feeling? Anything out of the ordinary?" And sometimes the patient says, "I feel great. Never felt better." But then the checkup, the tests that are run, bloodwork, EKG, x-ray, other diagnostic tests can sometimes reveal that there is a problem and then they dig a little deeper and do some more tests and the person who felt like everything was great, in reality there is some serious condition and they had no idea. James is, in a sense, asking those to whom he writes that question that the doctor asks, "How are you doing spiritually?" And he anticipates that many of his readers would say, "We're doing great," that is we're going to see a key word is, "I'm religious. I'm zealous. I'm spiritually on track." And yet for some who feel that way, the reality does not match up with their initial assessment.

We've noted that James is writing to Jewish believers dispersed throughout the Eastern Mediterranean after the persecution described in Acts. Believers are dispersed and so he, as the leader of the church in Jerusalem and so many Jews who have been saved are now spread out, and so he writes this epistle apparently to encourage them in their faith. Now, we've seen that one of his main themes or really the theme we said at the very beginning, that first message, was that James is very practical and he wants these Christians that he cares so deeply about to be doers of the word; that that's really the theme, in a sense. He's all about being a doer; that your faith is so real that it is seen in your works, it is seen in your actions.

So as he's been talking about being a doer of the word in verses 22 through 25 which we looked at last time, he then I think in verses 26 and 27 provides some diagnostic tests to see how we're doing. So let's read verses 19 to 27, we are going to focus in on verse 26 this morning. James 1:19, a spiritual checkup.

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 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; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what manner of man he was. 25 But 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. 26 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. 27 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.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to your word, we acknowledge our great need of grace. We need you to take the word which you have inspired and now illuminate it in our minds and our hearts. Help us to see and understand, to repent and to believe and to obey. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So a spiritual checkup. There is a sense in which verses 26 and 27, there are three tests. It's like the bloodwork, the EKG and the x-ray, and if you think about that, the bloodwork, the EKG and the x-ray are trying to get a window into how the inside of your body is working. When you see something on the outside, you've got a problem, you know you've got a problem, it's obvious, you have to deal with it, but with something inside that sometimes you can't see or even feel, these tests help expose that. So these three tests, James is trying to get a window into how we are really doing spiritually.

It's kind of interesting as I was looking at this, I thought it's kind of like, verse 26 what we're doing today, is he is saying, "Stick your tongue out. Ah. Let me see your tongue." Then the next two tests, he's talking about your heart, "visiting orphans and widows in their distress," your concern for others in need and then keeping maybe your hands and your feet unstained from the world. But we're looking today at the first test, the tongue. This is a powerful tool in the hand of the Lord to examine our hearts and so that's what we each need to do this morning.

I want us to gather our thoughts around four points. So there are four points coming, four main points. The first point is: your initial assessment. Your initial assessment as the patient. My initial assessment as the patient. As I said, when you go to the doctor, "How are you doing?" is one of the questions they ask and so James asks that question too, in a sense, and we see this initial assessment of the person he's concerned about. They have already given their answer. Verse 26, the first part, "If anyone thinks himself to be

religious," the key word is the word "thinks." This verb means "to imagine; to consider; to compute; to account; to form an opinion." So if anyone has the opinion of himself that he's religious. "So how are you doing spiritually?" Well, he's anticipating those who think they are doing fine. They have accounted, computed, when someone asks them, considered and imagined that they are doing well.

"If anyone thinks himself to be religious." It's interesting how prone we are in just the very intrinsic sin of pride to always overestimate how we're doing. I find this astonishing too when you talk to somebody you know to be an unbeliever nearing death, you begin to ask questions. "I'm fine. Me and the Lord have an understanding." Tell me about that. "Yeah, I prayed and, you know, I'm good with that or I did something years ago," so you haven't darkened the door of a church in 40 years but you are good with the Lord, or you're going to a church that doesn't preach the Gospel and you're good. They just assume they are, "Yes, I'm fine." And yet you know based on the truths of the Gospel, the truths of the word of God, they are anything but fine.

But James doesn't really have that particular person in view. He has the person who comes to churches like ours. He's not talking about the unbeliever who just has sort of a cultural understanding of God and Christianity, he's talking about a person who thinks himself to be religious. This word "religious" is one that is rarely used in the New Testament and most of the resources say it's a word which focuses more on the external; their performance of duties related to worship; that the idea is you look at the person and they are religious, they are engaged in spiritual exercises. And sometimes it's used in sort of a pejorative way. Paul uses this term in Acts 26 to describe his manner of life as a Pharisee. But I don't think James has any pejorative meaning here. He's basically saying, "If someone thinks himself to be religious," I mean if he would have had a pejorative meaning, he would mean, "If someone thinks himself to be a Pharisee." That's not what he's talking about. He means it positively. If someone thinks himself to be religious, that is doing the things that a Christian ought to be doing, engaged in the activities that a Christian ought to be engaged in; that is, people who are attending the right churches, affirming the right doctrines, even involved in ministry; those who are teachers in those churches, deacons, elders, pastors. These are people who looking from the outside and as they look at themselves because it's a self-assessment, it's not our looking at others, we are invited to look at ourselves here, how do you see yourself.

And he's talking to those who are making a profession to be followers of Jesus Christ, those who in the first century have, in a sense, laid it on the line. So it's not an easy thing. It wasn't like it is in America, particularly the south, although it's getting less and less this way, isn't it, to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ? The Bible Belt used to be a little easier. It's one of the good things about cultural decline, I guess, it makes the lines clearer. But we grew up in America, all of us who grew up in America grew up in a culture that it was relatively easy, relatively so, to profess faith in Christ. These folks, it's not true for any of those James is writing to. For many of them, they had been excommunicated from their families. Persecution has caused them to flee their homes so they have expended great cost to follow Christ and yet James is concerned that some of them may be deceived. So he says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious," that is,

those who think themselves to be spiritually about the things of God and yet the test says this, you see that's the difference here.

So how do you see yourself spiritually? How are you doing spiritually? That's the first question. What is your initial assessment? How am I doing in my walk with Christ? What is your mental estimate of your personal spiritual well-being? That's the first thing to consider. Then the second point after the initial assessment, our first point, comes a second point: the test. We said we're going to see three tests but today we're seeing one. So point 2 is the test in verse 26, it's the tongue.

He says, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue." Does not bridle his tongue. The verb there "bridle," do you bridle your tongue or not? That's the test. James is so gifted at word pictures, these vivid descriptive word picture after word picture after word picture after word picture. I just respect that and when I hear that, there are some of you who talk like that. You think in analogies and you're like you're always making analogies and I think, "Man, that's just so awesome. I wish I could do that." I'm trying to learn. It doesn't come easy to me. Some of you just think that way. James seems to have that kind of gift. He's always thinking in a word picture. I mean, he could have just said, "Hey, you need to control your tongue." No, but he says "bridle your tongue." Think what that connotes.

It pictures a horse, this massive powerful animal without a bridle is out-of-control, rushing forward. I mean, if you're riding a horse and the bridle comes out. The only time I've ever ridden horses is like on those you pay for the hour and a half horseback ride. The horse is more bored than you are. He's like, "Been there, done that a thousand times." The most exciting part is when they try to stop and eat. That's when I've always said, "Yeah. Hey, they're going here, buddy. We're supposed to catch up here." But having that bridle, the last time I rode, I had a big horse. I forgot his name but he was huge and so he stops to eat and I don't really know what I'm doing, of course, but I started pulling on that bridle and I started to feel the power of that bridle. I mean, if you yank it enough, he suddenly, "Okay, we're moving on." But the bridle, that thing in the mouth, something in the mouth that controls this massive animal. That's the question.

So he says, "Your tongue is like an out-of-control horse. Are you learning to bridle it?" In fact, he picks up this same analogy, James, the tongue is such an important assessment tool for him. He talks about it first in verse 19 of chapter 1 when he said, "everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak." Then he comes back to it in verse 26, "if you don't bridle your tongue you deceive your heart and your religion is worthless." Then he spends 12 verses in chapter 3 talking about the tongue. Verse 2 of chapter 3, the same image, "For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." Same verb. Then he says, "Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well." Actually in verse 7 of chapter 3, he speaks of species and he compares the tongue to "species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures that are tamed." We tame all these different kinds of animals but verse 8, we can't tame the tongue. So he says the tongue is

this incredible, powerful, unrestrained entity but that the believer ought not to have an unrestrained tongue. The true Christian is learning to control his tongue.

You know, the tongue really is a great window to the heart. In fact, Jesus taught this. James is often borrowing on so much of his elder brother's, his half-brother, his elder brother's teaching. Luke 6, turn with me to Luke 6 and see how Jesus points out what a great test that which comes out of our mouth is of what is in our heart. In Luke 6:43 he talks about the fruit. You know someone is a believer by their fruit, he is getting to the point here. Verse 43, "For there is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they pick grapes from a briar bush." Look what he says next, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart." What he says is, "Look at their fruits." In other places we see that the fruit are our actions but what Jesus says here and what James is saying is, one of the great fruits to test is what comes out of the mouth. There is a keen connection between what comes out of the mouth and what's in the heart.

So James says what is it that comes out of your heart? And the way that we ask that is what is your speech like? Do you blow up in anger? Do you have a short fuse? "Yeah, but I get back under control quickly." Well, that's a concern.

And the idea here that James is talking about, verse 26 when he says, "If anyone thinks himself religious and yet does not bridle his tongue," the verb "bridle" there is in the Greek present tense. In fact, all of these verbs are in the present tense in verse 26, and so "bridle his tongue," it has the idea of if he does not go on bridling his tongue or if he is living with a perpetually unbridled tongue. If a man claims to be religious, he thinks himself to be truly a worshiper of God, one who is reverent and who is seeking to live a devout life before the Lord, if that's his claim, if that's our claim and yet we continually are not bridling our tongue, if we are living in habitual sin with our speech, that is a great concern. He says if that's the case, this person is deceiving their own heart, their religion is worthless.

So he says stop and examine what comes out of your mouth. Think about that. This morning on the way to church or getting ready for church. Isn't it amazing? You know, when you really stop and think about it, the image of a horse and the tongue is such a good image. Isn't it amazing how quickly things just come rushing out of our mouths? It can come rushing out in a lot of different ways. I think he's thinking about anger based on the context when he says back in verses 19 and 20, "everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God," and then he comes down here to verse 26, he's been talking about how to prepare your heart for the word of God and he says, "Listen, how are we doing with what I've been talking about?" Are you quick to anger and quick to yell out in anger?

Anger is certainly one of those things that comes out of our lips. You know, Dr. Street was sharing how in California, I haven't seen these, I haven't been looking for them

though, but he said that in LA, the traffic is so bad out there, even worse than here, ours is pretty bad, but that they have in the auto stores, auto parts stores, they sell these little things you put on your dashboard and you can push, like you have an assortment of weaponry and I guess the sounds, right? You did those yesterday. So like a machine gun, rat-tat-tat-tat. Like a missile thing, boom! Then a grenade launcher. And you have all these different weapons that you can shoot at the people in front of you to help yourself cope. No temptation but as is common to man.

Isn't it amazing how quickly? You know, my family is helping me to stop coaching people on driving as I drive. I kind of think it's a public service announcement for the people in my car. "Just in case you don't know, that's something you don't do." And that's actually appropriate if you do it in the right way but sometimes mine is not the right way.

But what is it in our hearts that rushes out? The concern James has, if it goes rushing out and there is no brokenness over it and there is no intent to change. We all have a sin nature and so these things are there. The Christian is one who is learning to put to death the deeds of the flesh. You actively kill it through the cross. But if we're not killing it, if we are not even concerned about it, if we don't even see it, then know there is something very seriously wrong that needs to be addressed. It may mean that we are not a believer or it may mean that we are a believer but we've got a long way to go and a big big blind spot.

So the test. Anger is one way that it comes out but you can even see I think in verse 19, you know, pride, self-focus, preoccupation. How quick are we to just rush ahead in speaking with other people? Are we quick to listen? Most of us are quick to speak, slow to listen by nature, our sin nature. Is that changing? Are you concerned about that? Are you working on that by God's grace? Anger can turn into slander. Our tongues can be instruments of violence where we murder people and their reputation. We bring them down in the eyes of others. When that happens, God is grieved, the Spirit of God is grieved. And when someone has a habitual pattern of slander, James is saying that is a red-light, warning light. That's an indication that the CAT scan has come back with something serious there that needs to be addressed.

So anger, pride, slander, gossip, related to slander, tale bearing. We have to help each other in these things because many of these things we are blind to. That's why the Lord has put us in a body where other folks can challenge us and say, "I think you didn't really need to share that with me." Gossip sometimes comes disguised as a prayer request. "You really need to be praying for So-and-so, do you know what they did?" It grieves the Lord and we need to help each other repent of these things and when someone is doing that and there is no concern for that, James says that is something that needs to be a concern for them. And of course, lying. How quickly lies can rush out of the mouth. That's what Paul deals with in Ephesians 4 where he talks about, "put off lying and put on speaking the truth."

So if our tongue, if we're not able to bridle our tongue, if someone has a tendency to be a habitual liar and they make a profession of faith and we're not helping them and we're not

seeing progress, we need to be concerned about them. If you were that person, you need to be concerned about yourself and you need to become accountable and get in the word and seek the Lord Jesus because when there is no growth in these areas, then what's happening is something very serious. So the test is look at what's coming out of your mouth. And I think a good way to do this too, this is one of the blessings of being married and having a family is my wife is sensitive to things, about the way I say things that I think I've been, maybe we had a conversation with one of the children or somebody else and I thought I really delivered the message gently, I felt I was okay about it. I think I did all right with that. What did you think? "Honey, why were you so harsh?" What? "Your tone." It's a window and, why was it? I didn't even know I was. So you go to the Lord in prayer and in his word. What's going on inside of me? What's happening in my heart?

We need to help one another put off the sins of the tongue because they are deadly in so many ways and ultimately what we're going to see in the next point, the result. So the initial assessment, the test, look at what's coming out of your mouth, that's the test. Thirdly, the result of the test. The test results come back. And he says, "does not bridle his tongue," the idea of continually, ongoing, unbridled speech, you know, where, like I said, someone may be very religious.

I was reading a thing about a pastor who had had someone come forward, I guess they were the kind of church that have altar calls or whatever, and so a lady came forward in the altar call and was bent forward with her head down, just down at the altar, and he went to her and she was crying and he said to her, "Ma'am, are you okay? Just go to the Lord. What's troubling you?" And she said, "Well, I'm afraid that if I give myself to the Lord, my employer is going to be harsh with me." And he said, "Well, if he's going to be harsh with you, don't worry about it. Forget that job and follow Christ. Who is your employer?" And he heard the woman say, "You are." It was an English pastor and it was his servant that was bending down and he didn't even know it, but he had the pattern of speaking to her with such harshness that she was even afraid of him as she was there trying to deal with the Lord and he had no idea and it broke his heart, and praise God for that. But the result, if it's that there is this ongoing pattern of lying or gossiping or slander or screaming in anger, yelling, or constant talking, dominating conversations, and there is no change in that, that result calls for action. We've got to deal with that. So when the result is that, there is something that must be done.

Now the fourth point is: the treatment. The treatment. We talked about the assessment, the test, the result and now the treatment. If you look at your heart and you look at your life and you look at what comes out of your mouth and you see patterns of angry speech or gossip or deceitful speech, slander, and you are grieved by that, what do you do? Well, he tells us that we may be deceived, we are deceiving our own heart if this pattern is not something we are aware of and dealing with and making progress in. For the Christian life, it's not the perfection of your life, it's the direction of your life. Are you moving toward holiness? And James is describing someone who is not moving toward holiness in these areas and when that's the case, they are deceiving their own heart, this man's religion, his profession, all of his spiritual activity, he says, is worthless. It's vain. It comes to no result. It's like when you go to the trouble of planting a garden and you till

the soil and you plant the plants and you water them and you weed the garden, you fertilize the garden, and then the plant grows up and it comes to nothing. There is still no fruit. That's the sense. All the efforts that are going on for this person spiritually are worthless, empty, vain.

So in that case, what are you to do? What is the treatment? Well, first of all, we need to examine ourselves to see if we are truly believers. When we have a pattern of persistent sin, it's always appropriate to do what 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves to see if you are in the household of faith." Are you believing the true Gospel? Are you repenting even now? Are you asking God to even break you over your sin? And are you looking to Christ, to his death, his resurrection? Are you trusting in him alone?

So when we see these persistent patterns, the thing is to get in the word so that you can go to Jesus and go directly to Jesus and the way you go to Jesus is you get in the Bible and you read Scriptures and you ask God to meet with you and you ask God to show you Christ. But I think James also has in view the believer who is not just the unsaved professor who professes Christ but is unsaved, but also the un-nourished. I think in the context with him exhorting us to be doers of the word, he understands that there is a tendency even for the true believer to become persistently just a hearer, and the need to be a doer of the word. So he's calling to us, you know, how do you tell the difference? Sometimes an unsaved person versus a saved person, there is very little outward evidence and difference. You can't see any difference sometimes.

I heard an illustration one time, it was a really helpful illustration to me. One of my seminary professors mentioned this, that there are certain areas in the Alps that if you go like in the Bavarian Alps or the Swiss Alps, you go to different places and you come to an area where like one side of the mountain is Italy and one side is Austria, or one side is Switzerland and one side is Germany. And if you go to those areas, what happens as you make your way into these little tiny villages, it used to be more than it is now with technology and everything, but you would make your way to villages and what you would find is the language changed as you were going up the mountain and over the mountain. On the bottom of one mountain they spoke German, on the bottom of the other mountain they spoke Italian or French, whichever one. I don't know my geography over there very well so supply the right language. But in the middle, they spoke some blend of German and Italian so that you would be there and the language, you couldn't tell if the person, what their nationality was, and then you didn't even know where the dividing line is that marked between are you a German or are you an Italian? All the people here look alike. You don't know where their true citizenship is just from looking at them and listening to them, but God knows.

And so it is with the believer who is not walking with the Lord as he ought. Sometimes we can look very much like an unbeliever and that's a dangerous place to be and James's urgency is, "Don't rest in that position. Deal with it." And how do you deal with it? You do the same thing that the person who knows they are an unbeliever does, you go to Jesus in his word and you start filling your heart with the word. You read the word. You hear

the word preached. And you try to do the word. That's what James wants us to do. Not just hearing it, but doing it.

I want to come back to something I shared last time that I had to cut short a little bit at the end of last week and that was from verse 25. I think one of the problems we have is that we are, all of us at some level, very few of us are as nourished as we should be spiritually. That is, that Christians today in America with access to so many sermons where you can listen online to so many wonderful messages, we have books, Christian books, we have information but the problem for the American conservative evangelical is the doing of the word, and one of the great challenges is we are so busy, we are so distracted. And I mentioned last time in the book that I referenced, David Saxton, "God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation," that quote from John Ball that, "The neglect of meditation," the fact that Christians don't meditate. He's writing in Puritan days. "The neglect of this duty is the very cause why many Christians enjoy not the tenth part of those privileges that God has provided for them in this pilgrimage." He's saying that many Christians enjoy less than 10 percent of what God wants you to have because we are not meditating on the word. A little meditating makes lean Christians.

So what is meditation? You know, un-nourished Christians make for spiritually unhealthy Christians. I was talking to my uncle who is a medical doctor last night, we had a conversation about various health issues and he just was saying some things that my wife has been trying to tell me for years, but the importance of nutrition to health. They are seeing more and more and more, you know, America has been cutting edge on pharmaceuticals and every kind of medicine and treatment but he said that we spend more than anybody else in the world per capita on healthcare, and the second place is way back, and yet we are the 23rd healthiest industrialized nation because we spend all of our time, he says, working on how to pull people back from the brink of death and we're really good at that, but we don't think about the long-term keys to health. He says as he's reading more and more and more, he sees stuff like one of the healthiest nations in the world is Japan and the Japanese have almost no incidence of heart disease and diabetes. Many cancers don't exist there. Why? It's got to be what they're eating. He was saying they are eating fish, they've got all kind of nuclear stuff in them because the fish are messed up in this world, right? But he said whatever they are getting in those fish and seaweed is so powerful that it is overcoming everything. So if you get nutrition, you get health. Well, we need spiritual nutrition.

I was sharing with one of the brothers after service last week, I was sharing how the issue of meditation and the metaphor that's really so biblical. Really, it's not played out for us in Scripture except through the impetus to meditate and meditate makes a whole lot of sense when you think that we are sheep. The Bible makes clear we are sheep. "All we like sheep have gone astray. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Jesus is the good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep." God's favorite way to describe his people in terms of a metaphor like that is sheep, and I said before I think he created sheep to be a picture of us. It wasn't like later he thought, "Hey, you know, they're kind of like those guys." I think he made the sheep to be like us.

And one of the things that you learn about sheep and I did some research this week to learn a little more about it, is the whole thing about chewing the cud. They are a ruminant, that is, they ruminate. And what I read from the research that I read online, the average sheep eats between 5 and 8 hours a day. They spend 5 to 8 hours a day eating, actually 5 to 7. So they go out in like the cool of the day or whenever they are pastured and they just eat and eat and eat and eat. And they are not very good chewers either, they are much poorer chewers than goats are according to the study. So they chew and they eat and they eat for 5 or 6 hours and then they go and they get comfortable somewhere where they can lie down and they spend at least 8 hours a day chewing the cud.

This will help us not be too hungry. They regurgitate. They have four stomachs and they regurgitate from the first two stomachs their food. It goes into the stomach and the first two stomachs separate out what can be turned into liquid and they digest that, but most of it is hard product that they then regurgitate, pull up and chew on. And they spend more time doing that than they spend eating. It doesn't sound too good to me.

But do you know what happens when they are chewing the cud? This was amazing. A sheep, 30 percent of their calories, 30 percent of the calories, that's the energy they take in, comes from the grass. Now, all they eat is grass, or all they eat is hay, whatever. What I'm talking about is whatever their diet is, 30 percent of the calories they take in comes from the grass or the hay, 70 percent comes from the fermentation process that happens in their stomach. That is, that what happens is they keep chewing the cud, the saliva keeps working on the cud, they are chewing, they are chewing, they are chewing, and they are breaking it down smaller and smaller and smaller, and in their stomachs, those four stomachs, microorganisms are working on that. There is a symbiotic relationship. Billions of microorganisms are inside the stomach of the sheep, bacteria, protozoa, fungi, and these things, they are eating the grass. Isn't it amazing how God has made these things? They are eating the grass and then they're getting happy and fat bacteria, I guess, and they are multiplying and then the sheep have ways of somehow the body, they get to eat some of those bacteria. I know the bacteria, they are not planning on that but they get eaten. So 70 percent of the calories are fatty acids and proteins from eating the bacteria. They get all their energy. So it's the chewing process that actually feeds the sheep. It's not the food, it's the chewing that feeds them.

So we are called to meditate on the word and it stands to reason, then, that if we spend only our time eating, we are living on about 30 percent of the calories that we need spiritually. I mean, not precisely. You get the point that we need to be in the word, not just in the word, hearing the word, but meditating on the word.

Two of the keywords in the Old Testament for "meditate," one is a word that means "mumble; to talk under your breath." It's a word that is used in Psalm 1, "In His law I meditate day and night." David is saying that in the law of God, he mumbles; he is talking under his breath about the word day and night. So he has the truth of Scripture and he's reciting it to himself. He's talking about it. Another key word for "meditate" that is used throughout Psalm 119, six times in Psalm 119, is a word which means "to ponder

or to converse with one's self." So the idea of meditation between these two words, it's like you're talking below your breath and you are pondering, you are conversing with yourself. And I think of course, too, it pictures, it's all in an attitude of prayer. So you are praying to God, "Lord, show me what this means. I want to apply this to my life." And you're thinking about it. You are pondering it. You are questioning it. You are trying to understand it. How does this relate to this area? How does this relate to this area?

And the more that you chew on that, and I think that's what James is saying in 1:25, remember there are three key participles here in 1:25 that we looked at last week. That the one who looks intently, that's the first participle, he stoops down, he looks intently at the law, the perfect law of liberty and abides by it. Remember that middle participle I said would be better translated continues by it; remains by it; perseveres by it. The idea is that he is staying there with it. We mentioned how the word can hurt us and in a sense, it's a two-edged sword, it pierces us, and so in our natural man we want to run from it, but it's the believer who looks into it and keeps abiding by it that then the third participle becomes not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work. The hinge is meditation. It's staying with it.

It's taking the word and turning it over in our minds and I said we're distracted. You know, some of us it's a good thing to think about, how much noise do you live with? You know, some folks, the first thing we do when you get up in the morning is you turn on the television to see what's going on in the news, or the radio. Driving in a car, you turn on the radio. The internet constantly. You know, the choice: I'm up, check my email on my phone, or the news, or read my Bible. There is something always pulling at us and the one who becomes an effectual doer, a doer of the work, is the person who is choosing and definitively choosing to look at the law of liberty and remain in it, making commitments to being intentional about applying the word. And the idea is if we're not doing this, then we are malnourished and we are going to look unhealthy spiritually, we are going to be unhealthy.

One of the verses that the Lord has had me working on myself is James 1:19. I've been turning that over a lot in my mind lately. "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." I mean, think about that. So you have the verse, you try to memorize it and that's an easy one to memorize, easier than a lot of them, isn't it? You memorize it, you put it on a card, whatever, so that you have it and then you determine that you're going to think about it and you're going to turn it over in your mind and kind of bring it, "Lord, I want to bring this to mind when it happens today." Say, "I realize that I spend too much time talking, not enough time listening. So when I have conversation, Lord, I want to think about this and apply it in that conversation." And somebody is talking and I think, I'm already thinking what I'm going to say. I'm looking for the opening to get my word in so that I can start...be quick to listen, slow to speak. "Yes, Lord. Thank you. For your glory, I'm going to listen to this brother. What is he saying? I'm not going to tell him what I was going to say, I'm going to ask a question."

So it's the word of God transforming us. Slow to anger because the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. I have believed through most of my life that the anger of man produces the righteousness of God. I've acted like it. You know, if I just will show a little anger here, a little righteous indignation, everybody will fly right. And I remember it didn't seem to work, it actually did sort of work. It didn't produce the righteousness of God, no, because it doesn't work, but it does make maybe a little better and attentive football player or baseball player. The anger of man does work for some things but it will not produce the righteousness of God. And to think about that. Wait a minute, here I am because I'm trying to accomplish something good for God here and, wait, I'm using the anger of man. And a lot of times it happens after we blow it, then we know, "Oh, I did it again." What do you do? Go to the Lord, repent, take the word and start praying that. Pray the Scriptures. "Lord, I don't want to be like this anymore. Help me." And then meditate on it.

You know, the Puritans had different methods. I was reading about in his book; some guys would like to set things on their clock. Of course, they didn't have the cool stuff we have now like here's a piece of tape at 12 and at 2, one of the guys did this, so every time the hand, the big hand hit one of those tapes, he stopped and he meditated. Now, you can do it. You can set your stopwatch, I mean, stopwatch, I'm so eighties. Goodness, that was way back there, wasn't it? So hip. But you could set reminders to yourself. Your phone tells you, it's time to meditate.

Take and harness these things instead of distracting us to focus us on the power of the word of God and let's see God's word do its work. It will nourish you. It will strengthen you. And if you're unsure if you're a believer or not, you get in the word and you keep looking at Jesus in the word and you keep looking at Jesus in the word and you keep praying and you keep clinging to him and it will do its work. He will establish you in his grace. He will help you look just to him for the forgiveness of your sins, to his sufficient blood and his glorious resurrection. But the Lord wants us to be healthy believers and so we use this test: what are we saying to realize where are we, and now let's address those problems with the word of God.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the riches of your grace. We thank you that you are a God who is mighty to save. We thank you for the beauty of the testimony we heard earlier this morning, of how you delight to show those who think they are Christians just like the man in the text, who thinks himself to be religious when his religion is worthless. You delight to call people like that to yourself in truth. You are God who says, "Come. Come." We pray that you will help each one of us to come to you, those that do not know you, that they might come to you that you might grant them repentance and faith, that they might turn from their sins and rest in Christ. And for those who belong to you but who are going through life unhealthy, malnourished, dishonoring you in so many ways, grant us grace to repent and to cling to your word and to know that it is your word, the implanted word which is able to save their souls. It is able to sanctify us through and

through. May you be glorified in the hearts and lives of people who are more and more delighted in you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.