

## Doing the Word

*Exposition of James*

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**Bible Text:** James 1:22-25  
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Let's now turn to the book of James as we continue to work our way through this magnificent epistle. We've come to verse 22. We're going to read from verse 22 through to verse 25.

22 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 observes himself and goes away and immediately forgets what kind of a man he was. 25 But he who looks into the law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Let's turn now and seek the Lord's help in prayer.

*O Lord, we have been reminded several times today of our need to turn to You and so, Lord, before we go any further, we would begin by humbling ourselves before You and confessing that we need You, O Lord, to be our teacher in this situation. And we thank You for this word, we thank You You've given us this word of truth and, Lord, we know that many of us here have heard many many sermons and we know as we've already discovered from the book of James how easily the ground can become hard, and so we pray before we come to the word that You would come by Your Spirit and that You would plow up the fallow ground and make us tender and make us receptive to this word this evening. We ask for Your help, we ask for Your blessing. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

In 1988 there was a meeting of advertising executives working for the sportswear company Nike and they were trying to think up a new slogan, a slogan that would really capture the imagination of the American people and would really establish Nike as the leading sportswear manufacturer in the States and even in the world, and a few ideas got bandied around and a few whiteboards got scrubbed during the course of the meeting, and then finally one of those Nike executives hit upon it, "Just do it," he said, "Just do it. That's it! That's it! Just do it!" That was the slogan, the catchphrase that they chose and superstars were then drafted in from various branches of sports: Kobe Bryant, Lebron

James, tennis star Andre Agassi, Ronald Denu from the world of soccer, and so was born one of the most famous taglines in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also one of the most successful. Nike's "Just do it" campaign launched in 1988 over the next years would help them to increase their market share from 18% to 43% and increase total sales from \$6 billion to \$64 billion by the end of the century.

So you can see that concept of "Just do it" in the world of sportswear, it was highly successful, it was highly effective. Now what James is saying here in this part of the letter in the spiritual realm, in the whole area of applying God's word to our lives, then having that same motto text, "Just do it," engraved upon our minds, that too for the Christian can be highly successful, highly profitable. You see, James here is speaking to churchgoing people. He's writing to Christian people who found themselves very often sitting under God's word and maybe some of them were tempted to derive comfort from that fact, you know, maybe some vestiges of the old Jewish religion making them think that there was some kind of virtue or merit simply in going through the ceremonies, but James here is writing to disabuse them of that. James is writing to tell them when it comes to the word of God, there's only one way to approach it, there's only one way to derive benefit from it and that is just as those advertising men would put it, just do it. Just do it. Don't be hearers of the word only. Make sure also that you are doers of the word also. That's really what it's all about. If you're not approaching the word in that way, if you're not coming away from the word in that way, then it's all in vain. You're simply deceiving yourself. That's what he's going to tell them in these verses.

So this evening, let's dive into these verses. They're very well-known, aren't they? We often cite this maybe in prayer, "Keep us from being like the man who goes away and forgets what he looks like." We know these verses quite well, let's try this evening, then, to dig out some more of the meaning. And two headings. I've taken this from John Blanchard's commentary; I couldn't do any better than his own division here. Firstly, the danger of casual observance, and then the second heading will be the development of careful obedience.

So firstly, the danger of casual observance. "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 observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was." So now here is James as we've said this before, he's a pastor in the Jerusalem church, he's writing this letter to these believers in the early church, one of the first New Testament letters that was written, and he's counseling them here, he's instructing them here on how to handle trials, and they're not to blame God, they're not to point the fist or even the finger to God. That can be one of our tendencies in trials, isn't it, to say, "Well, it's God to blame. It's not me. It's God. He's the One who put me in this situation." That can be our tendency. No, James says, resist the temptation to think like that. You need to remember what you know about God. You know that he's good, unchangeably good. You can see that all around you. He's good. He cannot, James says neither be tempted by evil nor does he tempt any man to evil. You know that. You see that all around you. In fact, he says look at your own life, see what God has done in you as believers. He has brought you to new life. He's brought you forth

to new birth by the word of truth and that then leads him on to this new section which he's going to focus here upon the word of truth and how we should receive the word of truth, and that is with meekness. We said this last time. Not with a proud, haughty, obstinate spirit that gets all prickly and agitated under the word. No, with submission and lowliness and a teachable frame. With meekness, he says, you are to receive the implanted word.

So that's how we are to receive it. The soil of our hearts is to be broken up, it's to be plowed up, ready to receive the word. And so when we come to the sermon, we should come well-prepared, and we thought about this last time, that when we come to God's word there are already three things to remember when you go to the sermon: there's a before, there's a during, and there's an after. And so before the sermon we come and we prepare ourselves and we listen well so that we might receive the word, but then there's also an after the sermon and that's what James is going to deal with here, what you are to do after the sermon. And what is that? Well, basically it's do it. Just do it. You must go out and you must be a doer of the word.

Now the word "doer" as one commentator says, it's a word that describes a creative action which springs out of an inner desire to do, a creative action which springs out of an inner desire to do. So that's what will happen if you've heard the word and you've heard it rightly, that hearing then will always be accompanied by a desire to do. Right hearing always needs to prompt action. Right listening leads to right living. That's what it means to hear something properly. If you've heard it properly, you will then go out and do it. Well, to put it the other way, the word of God is not something that you can sit in on and audit. When I was at seminary, there were certain classes that it was possible for you to sit in on and audit. Maybe you didn't actually want to take a credit in that subject and perhaps a professor was coming in from another part of the world, a brilliant man, and you really wanted just to hear what this man had to say, and so it was possible if you wanted you could just go and sit in there in the class and you could listen to a whole week's worth of wonderful lectures and you could soak it all in, and at the end of the week you could come out and say, "Oh, that was wonderful! And what's even better is I don't even have to apply it. I don't have to sit any exams. I don't have to work this thing out. I can just listen to that. That's wonderful."

Well, James is saying here you can't come to church in that way. You may be able to go to college that way, you may even be able to go to seminary that way, but you cannot go to church that way. You cannot come here as a spiritual auditor, or if you do and you think that you can still be a real Christian, then you are deceiving yourself. You're wrong, badly wrong, deludedly wrong is really what he says here. The word "deceived, he's deceiving himself," that's a word which in the original it means literally to put something alongside something else. So we would say in our English, "He's beside himself." It means you're out of your mind if you think like that. You're crazy, we might say. It's also a word that's used in mathematics, it means to miscalculate, a gross miscalculation is what it means. So if you think that you can come in and hear a message and go out and not do it and still consider yourself to be a real-deal Christian. Wrong. Gross

miscalculation. You're badly, deludedly wrong. James is giving us all of these kind of terms here to make us understand the folly of thinking in that way.

Blanchard in his commentary says it would be like a person who comes to a restaurant and thinks that because he's read the menu, he's eaten the meal. Or a person who goes to the doctor and gets the prescription and thinks because he's read the prescription, he's taken the medicine. No. Wrong. Badly, deludedly wrong. You're crazy if you think like that, James is really saying.

James, himself, gives us his own illustration, doesn't he? There are, I don't know if you've noticed this when you read through James, there are many wonderful illustrations. It's sometimes called the picture gallery, this book, because there are so many very colorful, graphic images that he uses in this letter, and here we have another one. He talks about the mirror. The way that someone looks at himself in the mirror. Well, two different people, in fact, he describes for us here. The first person comes along and he takes a look but it's just a glance. It's not a long look, it's just a brief glance. And then another person comes along and he looks very closely, very carefully, very intensely. So two types of looking going on: once is a glance, the other is the gaze.

Now Walter Chancery, he sort of develops this illustration a little bit. I suppose he, I don't know if he had children but I guess he did. He gives it sort of a homespun American twist and I think this is quite helpful to really bring out the meaning of what James is saying here and he says imagine an American family that's sitting down for mealtime and they're finishing up the meal and they have a 10 year old boy, and he's finished his food and he asks his mother if he can go out and if he can play baseball. And so she says, "Yes, you can get down." And as he's going out, she says, "But first check your face. Go in the bathroom, clean your face." And so the 10 year old boy, he goes in there, he looks at the mirror as much as to say, "Yup, that's me," and he's off, he's out the door. That was the glance. That was the look. But then also imagine that he has an older sister who is 16 and she's also going out that night, she's going out with a group of friends, and she goes into the bathroom after him and she looks in the mirror as well but she's going to look into that mirror in a totally different way than her 10 year old brother did. There's a difference, isn't there, because when she goes in there, she's going to make a very careful inspection to make sure there are no blotches on her skin, to make sure that every hair is in place, maybe she might even look behind herself just to check the hair is alright at the back. Do you see the difference? There's the look, isn't there, of the 10 year old boy, one look and he's gone and he's out the door. And then there's the stare, the very careful inspection.

The glance and there's the gaze and this is the illustration that James is using. It's a brilliant illustration that James has here and all he's saying is that this is how we can come to the word of God. Some people approach the word of God the way that a 10 year old boy comes to the mirror, one look and he's gone. Very brief. Very hasty. Very cursory. Just can't wait to get out, "Yeah, checked that." Want to get out into the world. Want to get back out there, get back to the ballgame or whatever it is. No real lingering there. No real engagement with the word. No thinking deeply about the word. It's just,

"Yup. Done that. Been to church. Heard the message. Didn't really listen that closely but, you know, I was there. I heard it. I can check the box on that one." And that's the way some people come to church, just enough, they hear the sermon just enough to say that they've done it.

Or Bible reading, you can apply the same principle. Guy King in his little commentary on James, he speaks of the man who "dutifully rushed through his portion for the day and has thus entitled himself to tick off the verses as read, but it has all been to such little purpose for the passage has really said nothing to him, and certainly he has seen nothing of himself there. He has not been serious enough to notice the spots and blots that disfigure his spiritual countenance and consequently he will do nothing about them. There will be no cleaning. There will be no correction." And that's the way some people will come to the word, very brief, very hasty, but that isn't what the Bible is for. The Bible is given to us so we can see what we look like. It's a mirror, isn't it? I mean, that's what a mirror is for, it's so you can see what you look like. It's actually if you think about it, it's actually quite difficult to see what you look like unless you have a mirror. I mean, you can see what everybody else looks like, you can see all their spots and all of their flaws. But your own, you know, that little piece of spinach that you had in your teeth and you went through the whole day without noticing, you needed a mirror for that, didn't you? You didn't have one.

And it's the same spiritually. We're very prone to deceiving ourselves and having faulty perceptions of ourselves, and we've got all kinds of blots and blemishes and flaws covering our souls and yet we don't see it. We're not aware of it. We miss it because we need a mirror so that we can see it, and the mirror is God's word and when we come to see ourselves in the mirror, we see it holds up a description, a perfect reflection of us and what we're like. The Bible is the discerner of the intent and thoughts of the heart, and it will show you with absolute precision exactly what you're like on the inside. So that's, of course, why so many people don't like it and they want to get rid of it, because it shows them exactly what they're like.

There's a story of a missionary who was working in a jungle area and he had a mirror and he hung it on a branch outside his home, and a tribal woman came along and she caught a look into this mirror and saw many of the tattoos over her face. She'd never seen them before and so she came and she asked this missionary if she could have his mirror, and it was the only one he had, he really didn't want to sell it but in the end he let her have it and she took it and she went and smashed it on the rock and said, "I will not have that thing making faces at me again." She didn't like what she saw in the mirror so she got rid of it and many people are like that with the Bible. They don't like what it shows them. They don't like what it says about them.

Asa was like that with Hanani, didn't like the prophecy that Hanani brought to him. Or Ahab, think about Ahab there with Micaiah, the same thing, isn't it? He wanted to know what was going to happen if he went into battle at Rameth-gilead and he said, "Well, bring on Micaiah. Let's hear what Micaiah has to say." And Micaiah was the true prophet of the Lord and in the end he said, "Go on into battle, Ahab, but know that you will die.

The dogs will lick your blood." And Ahab said, "I hate that man. He's never got anything good to say about me. Take him away! Throw him into the dungeon!" He wanted instead to listen to his own prophets, 200 of them, who told him exactly what he wanted to hear. "Go on up! Go on up! Yes, you will win! You'll go to win the battle!"

That's what he wanted to hear and that's what people want, isn't it? They have itching ears. Paul says that, 2 Timothy 4, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine," they don't want to look in the mirror, "but according to their own desires and because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables." They don't want the word of God. It's too searching. It's too penetrating so they say, "Get rid of it!" Or else as James says here when they come to it, they come to it in a very superficial way, the way that a 10 year old boy comes to the mirror and looks there, not very closely. Or in James's day, you know, they didn't actually have mirrors in those days. The way they would look at something would be in a highly polished piece of metal and, you know, Paul talks about seeing in a glass darkly.

It was quite difficult to see anything in a mirror in those days. It wasn't the kind of mirrors that we have today and so you would have to look very very carefully and maybe hold it up to a certain light in order to get a good impression, and as James is saying here that this type of hearer doesn't want to do that. It's just brief. It's hasty. It's just a glance. It doesn't really take much and just looks enough just to make sure they look respectable, make sure there are no big blotches, no big moral flaws in their life, make sure that they're coming across well to other people. That's the main thing, do I present myself as respectable. Not really concerned about having a deep, searching, penetrating examination, the kind the psalmist speaks of in Psalm 139, "Search me, O God, and try me and see if there be any evil way in me." That's what we're to do, isn't it? Search me, try me. Not just a brief outward inspection. No, we are to come and say, "I need to know what I look like on the inside, not just what I look like in front of men but what do I look like in the sight of the holy God." And it's only the Bible that can do that for us because when we come to the Bible, then we come before God's holy standards and when we come into his presence and we see ourselves as he sees us, that's a very affecting, that's a very transforming experience.

Think about Isaiah and Isaiah was a great man. He was a man who was held in very high esteem in the society of his day, very well-educated, he moved around the royal courts very smoothly, very highly respected man, and yet one day he came into the temple and he came into the presence of the Lord and he saw the Lord and then he saw what he, himself, was like in the presence of the Lord and he said, "Woe! Woe is me for I am undone! I've never seen myself quite the way I've seen myself in the light of such a God." Or Peter when he was out in the boat on the lake and suddenly he got a sight of the glory and the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the living Word, and saw himself in comparison and he said, "Away from me! Away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!"

And that tends to be what happens when people get close to the Lord and when they see what he's like and by contrast they see what they are like. It tends to be a very affecting,

very life-transforming experience. In the days of the revival in England, you had preachers like George Whitefield and John Wesley, they would go out and they would preach and they would preach to people who stood on hillsides, working class people, many of whom had never heard the word of God before. And these men would come and open up the Scriptures and hold their lives up to the looking-glass of God's word and for many of these people it was a very transforming experience, and you can read the journals of men like Whitefield and Wesley, they say things like this, this is Wesley after one open air service, "One dropped before me as dead and presently a second, and a third. Five others sunk down in half an hour. Most of them were in violent agonies." Basically they were seeing themselves for the first time, for the first time in the looking-glass of God's word they were seeing what they were really like and it was a very affecting experience.

Now we may not have the same experience here today but we can apply that principle, can't we? Ask yourself how are you coming to the word? What's your attitude when you come to the word? Do you come so as to be changed? Do you come so as to be searched and to challenge by the word so that you go out and you seek to put that right in your life? Is that the way you come? That's the only right way to hear the word. If you hear it and go out and don't apply it, then you haven't heard it right. You're like the 10 year old boy who takes a quick look and rushes out. Or you're like the woman who goes to the mirror and sees a piece of lettuce in her teeth and she leaves it there. Or the rich young ruler, think about the rich young ruler, he came to Jesus, the living Word, and Jesus showed him what he needed to do. He showed him the changes he needed to make. But then he went away and he wasn't willing to make those changes, and that's the point, he went away and that's what we're doing. As long as we're not applying God's word, we're going away from him; we're showing that we have no real connection with him because Jesus brings us to new birth by his word, and a sign that that word has taken root in our hearts is that, as James says, we become meek and teachable under the word and we want to apply it and we want to be changed by it, and that's one of the fruits of the new birth. But the fact that we don't want to do that should cause us to question whether we've actually had that new birth at all because James says that this is the sign, this is the way that you can know for sure, it's when you hear the sermon, you say at the end of the sermon as one old Scottish man said when the sermon was finished, there was a man next to him who got up and said, "Well, that's that done." And the old Scotsman said, "No, this is where it begins." This is where it begins. Do you think like that? Will you think like that as you go out this evening? Will you say, "Well, that's that done"? Or are you going to go out and say, "No, now this is where it begins"?

And that brings us onto our second point this evening. We've only two points. That was the danger of casual observance, let's now think about the development of careful obedience. "He who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." So there's a contrast here, a contrast in between the way the previous man looked who came and just took a look, just a glance, now here is someone who doesn't glance, this is someone who gazes, this is someone who really looks very closely and very intently. It's actually a different word for "look" that's used here. It's a word which means "to stoop

down; to bend and to look." It's used of the angels in 1 Peter, the way the angels peer into man's salvation with great fascination and a spirit of inquiry, looking into it. It's used of John and the woman when they rushed to the tomb on the morning of the resurrection and they bent down and they looked into the tomb. And you can imagine that, that wasn't just a glance, that wasn't a cursory look. No, the whole credibility of the resurrection depended upon their testimony there.

You can imagine they looked with the utmost care and scrutiny all around that cave and James is saying that's what this person does when he comes to the mirror of God's word. He doesn't look, he stares. He gazes into the word, the law, the perfect law of liberty, James calls it here. That's a phrase that's unique to James. He's the only one who uses it. He uses it these two times, the perfect law of liberty. What does he mean by that? Well, he's describing its nature, first of all. The law of God is perfect. It's unchanging. It's unchangeable. It's enduring. Also it reflects the character of God himself who is perfect. And so when the law of God says, "You shall not murder," that is reflecting the perfect character of God who is the life-giver. And when the law of God says, "You shall not bear false witness," that's reflecting the perfect character of God who is a God of truth. And when the law of God says, "You shall not commit adultery," that's reflecting the perfect character of God and his absolute perfect faithfulness. And so we could go on. The law reflects in a perfect way the attributes and the character of God.

It's also perfectly suited to us who receive it. It describes our state as human beings, as sinners in the sight of a holy God. It shows what will be our end, whether it will be salvation or destruction. It shows us the path to heaven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and everything else in between. The word of God binds up our broken hearts. It's comfort for those who are downcast. It gives peace to those who are troubled in heart. There's no book, is there, that's so perfectly suited to the human condition as the Bible. It's the perfect law of God.

The perfect law of liberty. Here James is giving this a new covenant application, reminding us how the Old Testament law with regard to laws and ceremonies, many of those were cultural and political and dietary and they applied just to that nation of Israel and so now many of those civil ceremonial laws, those things have been done away with. Christ has brought us to freedom by his own perfect redemptive work. We have been brought to liberty in the Gospel and that's what James is talking about here. It's the Gospel, really, is what he's saying or it's the Bible, one commentator says, it's the whole Bible seen through the finished work of Christ.

That's what the law of liberty is and that's the law that we are to look into, we are to peer into. Not like the other man who just looked and ran off. No, we're not to be forgetful hearers, we're to continue in it and not forget. The Westminster Confession, again, is helpful here. This is chapter 14, it says, "By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the word, for the authority of God, Himself, speaketh therein, and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth, yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come." So he's saying here that the word



of God, it places a claim upon us and we know that, and if we are real believers, we feel that when we read it. And so as such, we are to yield to that when we feel it and we are to make the right response.

Now how do I make those right responses? How am I to do that? James in this letter gives us a number of examples, ways that we can do this. In the next chapter, for example, he really takes this up. He talks there in chapter 2 about the royal law of love. You shall love your neighbor as yourself, and so what does that look like if I'm going to be not a hearer only but a doer only? Well, James talks about visiting orphans and showing care for the widows in the previous chapter. He also talks about the poor and the way you treat the rich and the poor, and if you show preference to the rich, and if you give preference to the rich over the poor, that's not fulfilling the royal law. Or in your dealings with the poor, perhaps you've come across a brother and he says, he's naked or he's without food and you say to that brother, "Well, depart and go in peace. Be warm. Be filled." But you don't do anything to help that brother yourself, then how is that fulfilling the royal law? No, you're just a hearer of the word, you're not really being a doer of the word.

Or you know, we could make a contemporary application of that. Maybe you receive a letter from a missionary out in the field, and they're telling you how it's going and they make known to you some financial need that has occurred in the work there, and perhaps you have a little money left in your account but you write back to them and you say, "Praying for you, brother. Thinking of you, brother. Praying for you." Well, James is saying, yeah, that's good you do that but at the same time you write the check as well if you have the means to do it. That's what he's talking about here. You're moving beyond the realms of theory into the realm of practice. The theory takes on flesh, as it were.

Davis gives the example of a surgeon. A few years ago, I think this was in the States, a man called Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane, he was in his 60s, he'd been in medicine for many years, he'd performed surgery for over 37 years and he had this philosophy, he was sort of skeptical about anesthesia and he thought that anesthesia was used far too much for even major operations, and his theory was that more often they should just use local anesthetic even for major surgeries. Now of course, in the world of medicine you've got to be able to test your theory to make it stand up in front of all the other academics, and so what he needed was a volunteer, a candidate for major surgery who was willing to go through it with just a local anesthetic.

Now Dr. Kane himself had done some 4,000 appendectomies in his career and so a patient was brought in who needed that surgery and was given local anesthetic and Dr. Kane began the whole process, you know, the patient was opened up and he did the clamping and he began the incisions and all of that kind of thing, and throughout the whole process the patient only experienced minor discomfort and after two days, the patient was sent home. It was a milestone surgery. This was 1921. Dr. Kane had proved his point and he had done so by operating on himself. That's the kind of doing of the word, if you like, isn't it? Not just holding something in theory but really putting it into practice.

There it really does take on flesh and that's the kind of thing that James is talking about here. That's the duty we have as believers, a duty in doing the word. But then just briefly, also there's a delight in doing it as well. Just look at verse 25, "he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." There's blessing here for us in this. There's blessing in the doing. Joshua 1:8 as the people were preparing to go into the land, Joshua says, "Keep this book of the law always on your lips and meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it, then you will prosper and be successful." Be doers of the word and not hearers only. He's saying, "Yes, think on it, meditate on it, ponder it, but then after that make sure you do it." That's the way to blessing.

That's the way to joy and satisfaction, isn't it? You could go back to the restaurant example, couldn't you? Ask yourself have you ever had a great sense of joy and satisfaction just from reading the menu? Just from reading those ingredients? Have you ever gone away feeling really satisfied? Or have you ever felt wonderfully rested and refreshed by flicking through the holiday brochure and reading about the warm blue seas and the lovely, soft, white sand? Have you ever gone away feeling really relaxed? No, you need to get on the plane, you need to get in the car, you need to go to that resort, don't you. And spiritually it's the same. You'll never be renewed, you'll never be refreshed, you'll never be transformed simply by hearing that there is grace available in the Gospel. You need to come. You need to embrace it. You need to receive it for yourself. You need to believe for yourself. "Come, you who are weary," the Lord Jesus says, "and I will give you rest." You need to come to him. That's where the blessing is, the blessing is in the doing, not in the hearing. There's no true blessing in that. Blessing comes by doing.

One of the best examples of this is in the Old Testament and in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. And you know the story, we looked at this a while ago, but there is Nehemiah, he comes all the way back, he helps the people to rebuild the city and the walls are built up again, he does it in 52 days, an amazing accomplishment. That was the physical work of rebuilding but then there was spiritual rebuilding to be done in the city as well, and for that what do you need? You need the word. And so they bring out the word and they call for Ezra, the scribe, to bring out the book, and Ezra began to read it to them and they stood and they listened, and they listened for hours and hours and Ezra explained it and gave the sense of it. You've got to know what you're hearing. And explained it to them, at the end of it all, then they mourned and they wept because they realized they had fallen short, and they rejoiced in the forgiveness there was through the mercy of God. And that went on that day and then the next day they went and did the same thing again, and this time when they were listening to the word, they found that there was in the word of God a law that they hadn't been observing concerning the Feast of Booths, and they should have been setting up little booths all around Jerusalem but it hadn't been done. It hadn't been done for years and so the people were very perplexed. In chapter 8, verse 16 of Nehemiah it says the people went out and brought and made booths for themselves each on his roof and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God. You see, they didn't

just hear that word or let that wash over them like sweet music. They didn't say, "Well, that's an old law. It doesn't really apply to us today." No. No, they searched themselves and when they saw that they fell short of that law, they went out and they implemented it. In verse 17 of Nehemiah 8, what does it say? It says afterwards there was very great rejoicing. There always is when we come to God's word in that way. If we come the other way and hear only with no intention of doing, that will lead only to sorrow and to deception. But we come and we hear and we intend to do, that leads to joy and to fulfillment and to blessing.

Jesus said that, James's brother. Probably this is where James heard it. Jesus said, didn't he, he said there are two ways to hear the word of God. Basically there are two different types of hearer, Jesus said, and they come to two very different ends. There's the one man, Jesus said, who hears the word and he does it and he puts it into practice, and he is like a man who builds his house on the rock and has a very very solid foundation. When the winds and the waves beat against it, it stands firm because it's built on the solid foundation of Christ and his word. But then there's another man, he says, and all that man did was listen. He listened but he had no intention of putting it into practice. He was just auditing Jesus' sermons. That's all he was doing and Jesus said that man is like a man who built his house on the sand. It looks very much like the other man's house. To all outward appearances it looked exactly the same until the wind and the rain and the storms beat against it, and then you could see that that man's house had no foundation. He was deceiving himself and Jesus says, "So it is with everyone who hears My words but does not do them."

And if that's your case this evening, then the Bible says you have no foundation to your life. Your life might look good, it might look like everyone else's life, might look very respectable, might look like a good Christian person's life but there's a storm of judgment coming that will reveal all and it will reveal your foundations, that you were just a hearer and not a doer; that you heard that Jesus was offering salvation but you never received it; you heard there was forgiveness at Calvary but you never went there; you heard there was the offer of eternal life but you never ever received it. And so on that last day, you may well say to him, "But Lord, Lord, I went and I heard many many sermons," and he will say to you as he says in Luke 6, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?"

It's not enough just to be a hearer because there is this day coming, this day of judgment when the foundations will be exposed. How will it be for you on that day? Will your house stand firm, built upon Christ and his applied word? Or will it fall flat, built simply on hours and hours of unapplied sermons? Not enough just to hear the word. Not enough to go out the door and shake the preacher's hand and say, "That was a good word." There needs to be more. James says there needs to be more. Jesus says there needs to be more. You need to hear it and you need to do it.

John MacArthur, he tells of a time when he was a much younger man. He was at college in those days and on Saturdays he would play football in the college football team, and then the next day he would go and teach Bible at his father's church. And every Sunday

morning when he'd get up, he would be so bruised and battered from the day before that he was always glad if there was someone else in town who could take his Bible class for him. On one occasion, he met a man called Billy Strachan who was a friend of his father, a fiery Scotsman, and he asked Billy if he would take the Bible class for him and Billy agreed and came along and a powerful Scottish preacher, he took the Bible class, he poured his heart out in front of these students and they were blown away. And afterwards John MacArthur went up to him and he said, "That was a wonderful wonderful message." And Billy Strachan looked at him and said, "Yeah, and what are you gonna do about it?" And John MacArthur, he said, "I never remembered anything about his message but I will never forget those words to my dying day. What are you gonna do about it? Well, I guess Billy Strachan was saying the same thing as James is saying. When it comes to the word of God, just do it.

Let's pray.

*Father, we thank You for Your word and we treasure Your word and we pray this evening that You would keep us from being auditors. Lord help us to go out with a desire to apply this to our lives. Oh, help us we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Let's conclude by singing together from our black supplement #23, "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer." Let's stand to sing.