

Disciples Hear & Obey (James 1)

Introduction

Last Sunday we began our new GWAC teaching series on the Epistle of James. This sermon focused on James 1:1-27, and serves as an introduction to series, just as chapter one serves as an introduction to the topics then discussed in the following 4 chapters of the Epistle. The first few verses of James give us an indication that this book is a little different to many other NT letters, as it's not written to any particular church community, but rather to the dispersed believers throughout the empire. It's also a little different to many of the letters, in that the epistle reads more like the OT book of proverbs. James is full of helpful advice that is intensely **practical**, wonderfully **concise**, and beautifully **illustrated** with rich imagery.

- Take some time to read through James 1:1-27, and see if you can make a list of all the topics that James might then speak about later in chapters 2-4. Try not to read ahead into the following chapters, but simply record what you observe in chapter 1.

The Pursuit of Being Whole

One of the key themes in James is the idea that in following Jesus, we are slowly being made whole again, until that day where we reach perfect wholeness. Ben reminded us of how some of the OT laws given in Leviticus were there to remind the Israelites of this truth. They were given, not because they represented what was good/evil or healthy/unhealthy, but to be visual reminders of what symbolized 'wholeness' or 'completeness'. God's people function best when they live up to how they were created, and only then are they whole. Below are a few of these examples from Leviticus...

- Cloven hoofed animals that chew the cud may be eaten (cows, sheep), while others may not (pigs, camels).
- Only fish with fins and scales may be eaten.
- Flying insects are unclean, but hopping insects are clean.

James says... "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything (1:4). Perseverance brings about wholeness.

- Where have you had to persevere in order to grow in some area?
- Can you think of a time where you have had to persevere in following Jesus to grow in your faith?
- Is there an area in your life where you're called to dig in, submit to the challenge, and persevere right now?

The Pursuit of An Integrated Faith

The second key theme we see developed in James is the idea of a faith that is integrated with one's actions. This is a faith of consistency, whereby a believer's internal faith is aligned to their external behavior. We're told in 1: 22-23... *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Those that listen to the word, but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and, after looking at themselves, go away and immediately forget what they look like."* Basically, these people see themselves, and see what needs to change, yet fail to do anything about it. This is not to be the attitude of a true believer. We are to be constantly seeking to integrate our internal faith with our external actions, for it is our external actions that truly show what we actually believe.

- When has been a time where you have been prompted to change your behavior to be more aligned to the faith you hold/desire?
- Where given a few examples in verses 26-27 as a checklist...
 - How are you going with your anger?
 - How are you caring for the poor and the powerless?
 - How are you going at staying away from the "pollutions of the world"?

The Pursuit of Freedom

It is our sinful desires that have the ability to enslave us (1:14-15). If these desires are not kept in check, they lead ultimately to death. The philosopher Rene Girard makes a similar case with his theory "Mimetic Desire". If you wish to understand this further, watch the following video and discuss what you learn/observe (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNvgIb-mPf4>). James states quite simply that true freedom can only come when we give up our own desires, and walk in obedience to the Word. Freedom comes, not by doing whatever we want, but by doing what God wants.

- Where has been one area that you have been called to obedience?
 - How has that produced freedom in your life?
- What is the desire that God is currently confronting? You may wish to take a look at the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Mtt 4:1-11), and the three areas Satan tempted Him.
 - Ambition - That desire to be greater than you are.
 - Approval - That desire to find your value in the approval of others.
 - Appetite - That desire to acquire and consume.

Final Thoughts

- Is there something that you sense God calling you to act up from either the sermon or study?
- What are you going to do about it?
- Who is going to hold you accountable to this?