

In the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

²⁶ If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. **This is God's Word for our meditation.**

Dear Friends,

Do you know anybody that goes to a Christian church – this one or a different one – but as you see them and listen to them during the week, you would never know that they are a Christian? Their actions and words just don't match the life of a Christian? That's what James was addressing in this book of the Bible. People were listening to God's Word but not doing what it says. They were hypocrites. That was a problem 2000 years ago and it is still a problem today.

Now if you are settling in your pew and thinking to yourself that I am talking about someone else, you better take note, because these words are for you and they are for me too. We don't always act like Christians and we are far from perfect. So, as we consider this portion of scripture, we want to see where **“God's Word is in Our Actions.”** First we want to look at **“How God's Word Comes to Us** and then **“What we do with God's Word once we have it.”**

When something good comes into your life, to whom do you give the credit? If it's a job promotion we usually credit ourselves – the hard work we have put in to get that promotion. If it's a great birthday gift or Christmas present we credit the person who gave it to us. But do you realize that everything in our lives that is truly good comes from God. Even those things we work hard at ourselves – it is God who gives us the abilities and the opportunities. Even those

great presents we get – it is God who has given us loving parents and friends and relatives. But even better than that, it is God who has given us salvation.

James points out that this is something God has been doing forever because God doesn't change. He loved Adam and Eve thousands of years ago and he loves us today. That is why he continues to give us 'good things.' And we're glad he doesn't change because that means His plan of salvation doesn't change either. **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”** (Hebrews 13:8). He is the Savior promised to Adam and Eve and he is our Savior today. Those facts help us to understand James when he writes, **“God chose to give us [spiritual] birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.”**

Everything God created was good, but Adam and Eve were created in a special way and they were given the job to rule over the animals and take care of the Garden of Eden. They were the “Crown Jewel” of God's creation. Sin ruined our relationship with God but God brings us to faith so that we might once again be the “Crown Jewel” of his creation. That is what ‘the first fruits of all he created’ means. That's what God wants us to be and what Satan tries to drag us away from

Satan does that by getting you to puff up your chest and brag about what you have done and then tempts you to think you can do pretty good all by yourself. When you start thinking you can take care of things all by yourself, don't forget these words of James, **“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”** It is God who blesses us with everything good in our lives including forgiving those sins of pride and arrogance that might lead us away from him. It is God who has created faith in your heart so you can believe in Jesus as your Savior. James points out that our faith in our Savior and our thankfulness for this great gift from God determines how we live our lives as Children of God.

James gives us some specific direction on how to live our lives as Children of God, **“Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”** When we don't listen to God or to one another we have all kinds of trouble. Many of us have spoken without thinking and regretted what we have said and anger doesn't solve anything. James advice sounds so simple and yet we are tempted to speak before we think, without listening to anyone else and then to get angry when things don't go our way.

That's why James says to not only listen to what God's Word says but to put it into practice. To work at it. It's not always easy to follow God's Word, especially when we have the world trying to pull us in the other direction, but if we work at living our lives according to God's Word we have his promise that we will be blessed in what we do.

James concludes this section by pointing out that if you live your life as a Child of God, your faith will be evident in three ways:

- A. Your speech. How and what you say says a lot about who you are. A mouth that lies, curses, swears, abuses other people, and destroys reputations is a disgrace to God and erodes faith.
- B. Help orphans and widows in distress – in other words, Don't look out just for yourself. There are many people around you in need of your help.
- C. Keep yourself from being polluted by the world. Are you living a life of faith or a life of an unbeliever? Does God guide your life or the world? Who are you hanging out with? What kind of movies and TV shows do you watch? What is forming your values and how you think?

Recently people remembered the 10th anniversary of hurricane Katrina. It was devastating and even after 10 years people are still suffering from the effects of this hurricane. And there have been quite a few natural disasters since – fires, earthquakes, storms and much more. We have an opportunity to help those in need. We can give to the Red Cross or to our Synod's Committee on Relief which organizes aid for many of these disasters. is organizing aid for this stricken area of our country.

At the end of this month we will have a blood drive – another way to help those in need. You can also volunteer on our Care Committee, help or donate to the food bank, volunteer at the hospital or Winona Health, be a Big Brother or Big Sister and many other opportunities. God has richly blessed us with abilities, in some cases wealth and gives us many opportunities to show our Christian love in so many ways. He gives us many opportunities to put our faith into action.

You are Christians – followers of Christ. You have the message of salvation and know Jesus as your Savior. You have God's Word and you have many opportunities to put your faith into action. May these words of James encourage each one of us to let our faith shine as we try to live our lives guided by the love of our Savior. Amen.