James 1:22-24 “The Man in the Mirror”

**Introduction**

Good morning! Please open your Bibles to the New Testament Epistle of James. Today we will be looking at chapter 1 verses 22-25. The title of today’s message is “The Man in the Mirror.” Last week I gave you the warning that this week I would be mentioning the singer Michael Jackson in the sermon. The reason I am referring to him is because he performed a song in the early 1980s titled “Man in the Mirror.” Here are the words to the chorus of that song: “I'm starting with the man in the mirror, I'm asking him to change his ways, and no message could have been any clearer, if you wanna make the world a better place take a look at yourself and then make a change.” As we look at these words together let’s take a moment to see what Michael says is the way to make a change in the world. He says that the first step is to look at yourself in the mirror and then make the change for yourself. If you can start with yourself and make that change then the change you start will begin to spread to others and then big changes can be made to society. The question that he does not answer in the song, however, is what change he is speaking of? Also, why is a change necessary? As we look at James 1:22-25 today we will find out that looking at ourselves in the mirror is indeed important to do, but the reason we do so according to James is quite a bit different than why Michael wants to see that change. Let’s read our Scripture together: **“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; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who has looked intently at the perfect law, the law of freedom, and has continued in it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be blessed in what he does.”**

The main idea of the message today is to understand why being a doer of the word, rather than a hearer only, is essential to experiencing the blessings of this life as originally intended by our Creator God the Father. By way of application, we will be discussing four ways that those who believe and trust in Christ can be obedient to the word in their lives.

**Scripture Analysis**

Let us begin today by looking at verses 22-23 to unwrap this metaphor James is using to show us how being obedient to the word is like looking in a mirror. “Mirrors in the New Testament times were made of polished metal. People used them to wash their faces, shave their heads, apply cosmetics, and comb their hair. Then they quickly left, giving little thought to the image they had seen. People can repeat this experience in the spiritual realm. We give a quick glance into God’s Word, find a morsel of truth, and jump into another task without remembering or applying what we read” (*Holman New Testament Commentary: Hebrews & James* p, 266). ***How many times have you looked in a mirror and not liked what you saw?*** This is something that is very familiar with people today. When looking in a mirror the goal is to see what you look like and to make any alterations or improvements that you can so that you may look your best. The natural face that James mentions is the life that all mankind lives without God. This illustration brings up the point of reflection, or looking inside to see what is going on that needs to be changed. If we were to look in the mirror and just glance at what we saw not making any changes based upon what we saw even if we saw what we didn’t like then would using a mirror have any purpose at all? I would say not. If we only look at our reflection with our physical eyes we will never be able to see who were really are apart from Christ. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes it possible to see where we are dealing with sin on our lives, and it makes us aware that a change is needed. Only through the power of the Spirit can we come to this realization. **“And He, when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me; and regarding righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you no longer are going to see Me; and regarding judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged” (John 16:8-11).** The Holy Spirit guides the believer in Christ with knowledge of sin, righteousness, and judgment. It produces in the believer the realization for the need of salvation, the way to live righteously in Christ and the fact that all people will one day face judgment for what they did in this life.

Using the knowledge that the Holy Spirit gives to us through the Word, which has been implanted (as James mentioned in verse 21 we discussed last week) James is challenging his readers to take this knowledge and use it to make a change in their lives. The change is to become doers of the word and not just hearers of it. Now that we have laid the foundation of this passage let us now look closely at verse 24.

James is now showing the difference between someone who sees who they are naturally and refuses to act upon it with the person who sees their reflection, but rather has become a doer who acts upon what they have heard from the word. Looking intently (focusing) on the perfect law is when someone hears what the word of God teaches and reacts to it by humbly (with a desire to learn) acknowledging sin, repenting of that sin, placing trust in Christ as their Savior, and living in obedience to that word. God’s Word is referred to in this verse as the “law of freedom.” When James discusses the law and the word he is referring to the same thing (Scripture). There is so much freedom provided through God’s Word because it frees us from the bondage of sin that has been dragging us down when we lived outside of God’s will. Being freed from the bondage of sin allows us to experience the new life in Christ that only He can provide. James reinforces the teaching of Christ that when we do what the Word of the Lord says we will experience blessing in all that we do. Now, blessing does not specifically mean that we will reap in this world everything that we want such as fortune, perfect health, or possessions. Rather this means that God’s blessing and approval is upon those who hear the word and do it. Being a disciple of Christ means that someone not only listens to what Christ taught but lives out what is taught. Now that we have unwrapped the verses today let us look at four ways that we can apply what we have learned into our lives today.

**Applications**

According to verse 24 in today’s passage James provides us four ways that believers in Christ can be obedient to the Word. The first way is that believers in Christ are being taught to “look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom.” When reading Scripture, we are taught in our verses today to look at the word as an opportunity to learn. Reading the Bible is not an exercise we do for entertainment, but it is something we do to nourish our souls with the truth of God. When we are filled with this truth it changes the way we look at life, it will help us to adjust our priorities and it will give us new insights to help others come to the knowledge of God. The Psalmist in Psalm 19:8 says “The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.” God’s word results in joy and wisdom.

People who are obedient to the word also continue to do what the word says (commitment). There is a commitment to live out what the word says. If I tell my students that they should act kind toward each other, but then I show no patience with them then I am not living out what I have asked of them. Our God not only gives us commands, but He also acts in ways that are in accordance with that law as well. God is always faithful in that He always keeps His promises and acts in ways that are consistent with His law. The Apostle Paul writes these words to Timothy “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). We should do what the word says because we serve a God who has always been faithful and has never forsaken His people. At no time in all the pages of Scripture has God lied or not kept the promises He made to His people. Nehemiah, who faithfully served the Lord in returning to Jerusalem after the exile to Babylon to rebuild the wall, verifies this truth about God in his prayer at the beginning of the book that bears his name. “Please, Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps the covenant and faithfulness for those who love Him and keep His commandments: let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open, to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have committed against You; I and my father’s house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, please, the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place where I have chosen to have My name dwell.’ They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. Please, Lord, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man” (Nehemiah 1:5-11). God is committed to honoring the promises He has made. We need to be like Him in honoring the pledge we make to Him. Continue to do what the word says shows others that our faith is real and that I will honor what we say we will do.

The third way believers in Christ can be obedient to the word is by not forgetting what they hear. To not forget what the word says it is imperative that we spend time in it every day. This is something that we as a church family can do when we devote ourselves to reading the Bible every day. On the back table you will find copies of the 2024 Turning Point Bible reading plan. In addition to the paper copies, we have here, I have also provided a link on the church website so that you may access it any day you need it. A good place to start if you have not been reading the Bible every day is to start with 15 minutes of uninterrupted reading time every day. Find a time in your day when you can devote that time without having anything else scheduled. I do understand that having small children or working full time makes this more challenging, but I want to encourage you that if you make God’s Word a priority you will reap the benefit of being able to recall it when you face a trial or have a friend facing one. In addition to making this commitment you also need to have an accountability partner you can check in with at least one time per week to discuss how you did that past week. If you missed a day or had a struggle with staying focused on the daily reading share that with your partner. This way you will have their support and prayers to sustain you. I am asking for everyone in the church to make it a commitment this week to read the Bible for fifteen minutes per day. Don’t worry where to start or which book to read. Just start with a book you have not read for a long time and allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten you with the truth of the word. Please grab a copy of the reading plan and next week we will begin the process of diving into this reading plan as a church. We will do it slowly and carefully so that we do not overwhelm ourselves too quickly.

Finally, the fourth way to be obedient to the word is to do what the word teaches us to do. Living out our faith in God is not a requirement, rather it is something that we should be willing to do out of joy. We have been given a very special gift, which is salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. We have been saved from our sins even though we have done noting nor can we do anything to deserve. God’s grace is sufficient to cover all the sins we have committed and makes us righteous in His sight through Jesus Christ our Lord. Being a Christian in both words and deeds glorifies the God who has saved us by His might hand. Jesus promises us that if we remain faithful to Him despite the trials of this life there is waiting for us eternal life in paradise with Him. In the gospel of Matthew, He shared these words with the people in the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are you when people insult you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (5:11-12). Doing what the word says will many times cost us something, but Jesus reminds us that staying obedient results in a reward in heaven. Let that promise be the hope that encourages us to do His will.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, today we have discussed how those who are obedient to the word of God can show that obedience in their lives. When we look into the mirror of our lives let us see not only what we were without Christ but let us also see the new creation God has made us in Jesus Christ. This new creation must be manifested not only in our words but need to be confirmed by our actions. When others speak of Nankin Community Church may they say that we love others and that the love we have is shown in our actions. Jesus Christ is glorified when we show His love to them and share the gospel to them. By doing so we prove we are of Christ, and we will bring Him the glory and honor He so richly deserves. Please join me in a word of prayer as we close.