

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

**<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,<sup>20</sup> for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.<sup>21</sup> 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.**

**<sup>22</sup>Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.<sup>23</sup> 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<sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.<sup>25</sup> 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.**

**<sup>26</sup>If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.<sup>27</sup> 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. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Be a Hearer and a Doer

You know what you look like. You stare in the mirror every morning and night—and for some of us, many times in between. You have seen pictures of yourself from all angles and video of you has been taken. You could pick yourself out of a lineup. This may not have been the case if you were a Jew to whom James wrote 2000 years ago. Of course no one back then ever saw a picture of themselves let alone a video. Mirrors at the time weren't what they are today. They were made of polished bronze—not readily available to the average person and didn't an exact reflection anyway. You can figure that there were many people who lived their whole lives without ever knowing what their face looked like—and many people probably only saw their reflection a handful of times. So it would perfectly reasonable to think that someone back then couldn't remember what he looked like—

especially if had been awhile since he looked in that polished-bronze mirror.

What if you had a mirror—or better yet, a video camera following you around wherever you went, recording your every move. And I'm not talking about a reality show; but an honest and authentic look at your life. Just one camera recording everything you did, everything you wore, how you looked on every occasion. And then you sat down and watched the footage. I'm sure you would be appalled at some of the things that you would see—maybe even a little embarrassed. “Do I really look like that, do that, talk like that?”

What if that camera didn't just show you everything you did and said; but it was also able to read your thoughts and what you believed in your heart? You wouldn't just be appalled or embarrassed. You would be ashamed of yourself as all your sins would be laid out in front of you. It would look as if you forgot who you are—not what you look like, but who you are: a Christian.

But when you watch yourself you realize that you don't always act like a Christian. Oh you come to worship on Sundays; and perhaps for Advent and Lent services, and all the special services throughout the year. You may even attend Bible study. You are eager to do so, you look forward to it and you hang on to every word that was sung, read, or spoken by the Pastor because it is the are the very words of God! But the tape often reveals that you forget what you heard on Sunday mornings. It's as if you don't give it a second thought, and that you forget who you are. You leave this building and you go out and live the life that you want to, not thinking about God or his Word. You act as if you are part of the world: bad language comes out of your mouth on a constant basis, you can't stop gossiping about that friend you have, or that celebrity you can't stand, or you are always complaining about this or that. You're tape may reveal how selfish you are—you see someone in need but you look the other way or make excuses as to why you can't help them. But in your mind, that's okay—you're a Christian, “I go to Church,” you say. But you act at times as if all you have to do is hear God's Word instead of doing what he says. This reminds of what John says in his first letter, **The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.**

It's as if you looked into that mirror and then forgot what you looked like—you heard God's Word but then forgot what it says. You are a hearer of God's Word, but not always a doer of God's Word, you don't always obey him. This is really just the result of not loving the Lord with your whole heart—of taking God's Word to heart or treasuring up in your heart everything that he says. Instead other things get in the way and they become more important to you, causing you to forget who you are. What is in your heart is really what matters—even if you do obey the Lord, but your heart is not in it, that too is displeasing to him.

So let's look back at that tape again so that we can see just exactly who you are. James writes in verse 18, **He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.** James was writing to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the known world. Most of these Jewish Christians were adult converts—the gospel was shared with them by the Apostles or other Christians and the Holy Spirit worked faith through that gospel and brought them to faith. And that may be the case for you. But for many, you may have to look further back on your tape—toward the beginning of your life. You'll see your parents bringing you up to the baptismal font, where the pastor poured water on you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And something amazing happened at that moment—you were born again, your sins were washed away, faith was worked into your heart by the Holy Spirit, Christ clothed you in a robe of his righteousness, and you were saved. Who are you? You are a child of Christ—welcomed into his family through the waters of baptism.

You became part of his firstfruits. The firstfruits of a harvest were the first and best fruits to become ripe. Typically this fruit is the best fruit. That is what you are. God chose you and made you his own. You are better and more special to him than unbelievers because you are his own dear child through faith. Mankind is the crown of God's creation, but you are firstfruit—better than the rest because you are his! And as the firstfruits of a harvest are a guarantee that more fruit is to come, so the Jewish Christians of James' day and you are a guarantee that more Christians will follow—just as Christ and his resurrection is a guarantee that we'll rise from the dead on the Last Day.

When you look back at that tape, when you watch yourself it is clear that you aren't always a doer of God's Word—you may not even always be a hearer of God's Word. You don't live a perfect life, and you never will. But Christ did for you—he was not just a hearer, but also a doer. Paul calls him, **the one who had no sin.** The Writer to the Hebrews says **he was without sin.** Our anger and our sins can't bring about the righteousness of God. But Christ did. His righteousness, his perfect life, he gave to you. What the Lord did has been credited to you when he suffered and died on the cross to pay for all the times that you have forgotten who you were; for they times that you heard but didn't do.

Because of what Christ has done, you have been set free—free from sin's curse and condemnation. For your sins have been taken away and drowned in the depths of the sea. It is as if that tape that has recorded all of your sinful thoughts, words, and actions has been wiped away, or like it never existed. Then he brought you to faith through his gospel so that you have received the blessings that Christ won for you. As a redeemed child of God you are free now, and you will be free in heaven, where you will live with the Lord forever.

Don't forget that—don't forget who you are: you are a forgiven child of God who is pure and innocent in his eyes. You are a Christian—that is why you hear the Word. But not just be a hearer, but also a doer as James says in verse 22, **Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.** James give some examples of what to do as a Christian: guard your tongue, that is, watch what you say and how you say it—not using foul language, gossiping, or getting angry at others. Taking care of those in need: specifically orphans and widows—in other words, those who are helpless with no one to take care of them. And generally speaking, stay away from the wicked deeds of the world—not letting yourself getting polluted by their sinful ways.

2. What is the best way to be a doer and not just a hearer? The first step in being a doer of God's Word is by hearing his Word and taking it to heart. The command God gave the Israelites thousands of years ago is still a fitting warning for us today, **be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.**

When you take the Lord's Word to heart as a hearer you won't forget

who you are and you won't forget what to do. Keeping his Word front and center in your life will lead you to obey and do his will throughout your life. And when you do so—when you are both a hearer and a doer, the Lord will bless you and what you do in his name. Amen.