

James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; **20** for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **21** Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. **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 observing his natural face in a mirror; **24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. **25** But 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. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.”

Being Swift to Hear

We come now to the second message from the Book of James: Last week we considered “The Joy and Crown of the Church” where we learned that it is God’s gracious gifts of faith and wisdom that enable us to joyfully endure the trials and temptations of this life. James told us that if we face them without God’s gracious gift of faith, then we are like the wave tossed to and fro on the sea.

- This morning I had planned to move on to James’ challenge for us to practice the Mercy of the Church, which is what is on the outline and in the order of worship!
- However, in listening to my lovely help-meet I realized we need to divide up what I had planned for this morning.

She cautioned me about covering too much in one message and I realized I was about to do that with two important topics and two more illustrations.

I was tempted to simply pass by the first subject quickly because it hit home pretty hard, but I did not and thus we add one more message to the series. I may step on a few toes with the applications this morning, but please understand that they are almost all drawn from my personal experiences and weaknesses! And the applications are important because last week we concluded with verse 18:

There we learned that God of His own will “brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures.” Now at verse 19 James begins to explain how this bringing forth takes place: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

“So then” can be read as a “therefore” reminding us that what we learn this week flows from our first lesson: This is what we were brought forth for.

So James first says we are to be, Swift to hear...

- This sounds very strange to our modern ears – We are swift to speak, swift to act... Sadly, even in the Church!

And yes, that simple challenge to be swift to hear is what hit me so hard! Down through the years in my work at the Capital, my home and family and even here at Church of the King I have had to be reminded over and over again that I need to listen better and to stop speaking over other people! So please believe me when I say that any insights I might have this morning come from personal, and often painful experiences!

Here is what the Geneva Bible notes say about verse 19: “Though the Christian community places high regard on the talent of eloquent speech, James places the accent on listening. It is the person who listens intently to the Word of truth who progresses in godliness”

- This should certainly remind us of the importance of our **REGULAR quiet** times and personal Bible Study.

Are we swift to hear what God is speaking to us or are we just looking at what confirms what we think we already know?

- It should remind us of the importance of gathering on the Lord’s Day to **HEAR** what God has to say, and **NOT** just looking for a pleasant experience!

You will find the word “listen” almost 150 times in the Scriptures and “hear” over a thousand!

As we would expect, the Book of Wisdom encourages us to be swift to hear, with insights about how it works. At Proverbs 2 we read: “My son, if you receive my words, And treasure my commands within you, 2 So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; 3 Yes, if you cry out for discernment, And lift up your voice for understanding, 4 If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures; *[how swiftly would dig up a buried treasure?]* 5 Then you will understand the fear of Jehovah, And find the knowledge of God.”

Proverbs 4:20: “My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings.”

Proverbs 22:17: “Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your heart to my knowledge; 18 For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you; Let them all be fixed upon your lips, 19 So that your trust may be in Jehovah; I have instructed you today, even you. 20 Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge, 21 That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, That you may answer words of truth To those who send to you?”

Calvin also sees James giving a sober warning in his comments: “When God so freely and kindly presents himself to you, you also ought to render yourselves teachable, lest your slowness should cause him to desist from speaking.”

- As we move on we must note that neither speech nor wrath are forbidden, just required to be under the control of the Word of truth as we first learn to be swift to hear!
- In our age that searches for a “peaceful” Jesus, we must remember that it was the wrath of God poured out against our sin which **DID** bring forth righteousness for us as forgiven sinners who are in Christ!

As James moves on we learn the practical applications with regard to being swift to hear...

Verses 21 & 22: “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

- James tells us pretty plainly what to reject and what to accept!

We must focus on getting rid of the filthiness and wickedness (ALL, not just overflow)

- At the same time we see that being good listeners, “swift to hear” is the key to having the right foundation for our Christian life!

But James insists that we must be doers of the word which brings us back once again to those final words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7: 24: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

- **Just as we saw with the lessons on the Joy & Crown of the Church, the circumstances here did not change: The only question is how does our house hold up when the storms come?**
- **Now James brings our illustration for today: Which is stunning in its simplicity**

Verses 23-25: "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. But 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."

- **James is saying it is simple to know what we look like and foolish to forget our appearance. [Who knows what they look like? -- Give the spinach example or spot on a shirt]**
- **It is simple to be doers of the Word: Simply DO what it says and do not act as if you did not see what the Word showed about you!**
- **The DOERS will be blessed!**
- **Verse 18 said we are brought forth by the Word: Now James says that we walk in the Word.**

Colossians 2:6: "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him"

Verses 26-27: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. "

- **Bridle the tongue: Being swift to HEAR not always speaking!**
- **And not just one who listens, but ready for action!**
- **In two weeks Lord willing we study how a faithful Christian must be a doer of the word when it comes to showing mercy!**

Now comes the tough part where we ponder the practical impact being swift to hear might have in our lives.

- **As we have already gone over at length we must be ready to listen to God!**

However, we must also be swift to listen to others that God brings into our lives.

Clearly, there are some basic examples that should be pretty clear:

Children: Who do you think you should be swift to listen to? Yes, God has given you parents along with a promise of long life if you honor them which of course **MUST** include listening to them.

What do you think that would mean?

Ignoring them is out! Arguing with them is out! Yes, even grumbling it out!

- **IF you learn to be swift to hear, you will obey right away, all the way with a smile on your face!**

And as you grow older, the principle does not change, the subjects just become more and more important, a lesson that our young people must remember!

When you were little your parents told you where to play so you were not in danger and as you grew older they explained the dangers of wrong relationships or places and Lord willing you were and will be swift to hear!

As a quick aside for parents, we teach our children this by example as well as instruction: Your children should know not to interrupt or ask for your attention more than once, BUT you must be swift to listen when they address you, else how will they learn to be swift to hear you or others?

There is an obvious application for marriage! You could not count the number of books on marriage that discuss the importance of couples listening to each other, and yes it cuts BOTH ways.

Again, some of it is pretty simple:

- **You cannot ignore what you spouse has to say.**
- **You must be swift to hear, so that you understand what your spouse is saying, even if you might disagree with them in the end.**

And yes, you must NOT speak over your spouse assuming you already know what they are trying to say or think you can say it better! Consider the importance of this with the image of the triangle we often use in marriage counseling: God is at the top and the husband and wife are on either side. The closer they are to God the closer they will be to each other...

- **Thus IF we are swift to hear what God has to say, it will make it much easier to listen carefully to each other!**

And finally we come to our interaction with each other here in the Church or the world at large!

- **What does it mean to be swift to hear?**

Just as with the marriage relationship we must have respect for the other person [use the Schaeffer example of debating Bishop Pike]

- **Do we truly hear what they say before responding?**

When it comes to those in the world are we listening in such a way that we can find those opportunities to witness to them?

When we engage in discussions are we interested in the other person or just wanting to win the argument?

If you are not swift to hear even with unbelievers you will likely get things very wrong.

This obviously has serious implications for our public discourse today: We are a nation that is more and more divided and at risk of seeing our very civilization crumple because of our wandering from God's principles.

- **Are we among those who go out and proclaim all that is wrong in the wrong way, failing to first be swift to hear?**

How many of our Facebook posts would be different if we had taken just a bit more effort to hear what the other person was trying to say?

- **How can you even be swift to hear when all you have is a few characters in the twitter universe?**

Now I am not suggesting that Christians should abandon the public square [though I could be convinced when it comes to twitter],

- **But I believe we have a call to practice what James stresses when it comes to being swift to hear.**

So as we go forth this week to serve our risen and reigning Savior, I trust the Words of James will ring in our ears as we all reevaluate whether we have learned to be swift to hear in all areas of our lives!

Communion meditation: Isaiah 55

**“Ho! Everyone who thirsts,
Come to the waters;
And you who have no money,
Come, buy and eat.
Yes, come, buy wine and milk
Without money and without price.
2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
And your wages for what does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good,
And let your soul delight itself in abundance.
3 Incline your ear, and come to Me.
Hear, and your soul shall live;
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—
The sure mercies of David.”**