

Profiting from the Word

Exposition of James

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Bible Text: James 1:19-21
Preached on: Sunday, September 1, 2013

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We want to continue our studies in the book of James this evening. We're going to read from verse 19 to 21. That's where we've come to as we've been working through this opening chapter. James 1:19-21.

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.

Let's come to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we delight to be in Your presence. We thank You for every opportunity that we have to open the word of God and we pray this evening as we come to study this passage that You would help us to put aside all that may be crowding into our minds and would distract us. Help us now to muster up the best of our powers to give You the best that we have, O Lord, to worship You through attentive listening to Your word. Help the preacher to be clear, help Your people to listen, we pray, that You would be glorified in all that transpires here this evening. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

A few weeks ago I told you about a young man called Ralph Deesley(ph) who was a car thief from Dundee and by the age of 17 he had ended up in a Scottish prison where he was visited by a group of Christians who left him a Bible and the presence of this Bible in his cell was so antagonizing to him that he picked up the Bible and he tried to force it between the bars of his cell window to get rid of it, but it was just too thick and he couldn't get it through the bars, and so in the end the Bible just sat there for a number of weeks until eventually at the end of himself and in a state of some despair, he eventually picked up the Bible again and he offered a silent prayer to God. "O God, if You're there, if You're real, would You speak to me? Would You help me?" And so he flicked open the Bible and it fell to Psalm 142:7, "Set me free from my prison that I may praise Your name." And literally the text did just that, it set him free from his spiritual prison and he was born again, he was born anew. And what I didn't tell you last time was that he then

went on to become a student of the word himself. In fact, even now he's training to become a pastor in a church in Scotland so that he can teach others the word of God.

Now what is that but a picture of what the Bible can do, how the Bible is not just the means and the instrument that brings us new life but also it's the means that God uses to promote growth and progress in the spiritual life, and so what we need to do, then, if we want to grow in that way, if we want to develop as full-orbed, mature, Christian people that God would have us to be, what we need to do, then, is not to resist the word and not to strive against the word but rather once we've been made new by the word, we need to submit to it and we need to yield to it, we need to receive it. That's what James is really saying to us here in these verses.

He's writing here to these believers, new believers, born again believers. They have been brought forth to life by the word taking root in their hearts, and now James is telling them that in order to move on from that and to make progress from that, then they must not resist the word or strive against the word, they need to receive the word into their hearts and allow it to go down deep so it can do its growth-producing work in their own hearts, and that's really what we want to think about this evening, how to truly profit from the word; how it is that we should come to this word in order that it might be to us not just a means of life but it might go on from there to be the means of spiritual growth in our lives. That's what we're gonna think about this evening, how to really profit from the word and there are three considerations that we have this evening. We're going to think about a restraint, a removal and a receptivity. A restraint to exercise, a removal to undertake, and a receptivity to develop.

Firstly then, the restraint that you must exercise. "Let every man be quick to hear, slow to listen, slow to become angry." So here is James, he's the brother of our Lord, he's the pastor of the church in Jerusalem and he's writing to this group of believers many of them who have been converted out of Judaism, and he's writing to them to give them instruction and there is much instruction in this letter. We've seen that as we have been going through the imperatives, the commands that there are in this letter. We have some here from verse 19 onwards, "Let every man be quick to listen." That's a command. "Be slow to speak." It's a command. "Be slow to anger." That's another command. Verse 21, get rid of the moral filth. That's another command. "Receive the implanted word." That's another command. So James is like a spiritual sergeant major, he's firing out this orders one after another, 54 imperatives in all in this letter, and James, you see, wants to show us how to live the Christian life. He wants to show us how as believers we have a belief that behaves. That's the title of one commentary, actually, on the book of James, "A Belief that Behaves." Yes, we're saved by grace, not by works, but the faith that saves us is a faith that works and demonstrates its reality, its authenticity by its works, its fruits, its deeds, and that's a big concern of James in this letter. It's very much part of his style.

Now he has a technique that he uses when he's writing this letter and that's what we might call a kind of a stepping stone technique because what James does in this letter when he's making a point, towards the end of his point he will throw in a word and then as he moves on to his next point, he'll pick that same word up again and he'll use that as a

stepping stone to take you through what he's saying, and that's what he does here. In verse 18, he tells us that it was God who chose to give us new birth by the word of truth, and then in verse 19 all the way through to verse 25, what's the theme he wants to take up now? It's the word of truth. So God brought you forth by the word of truth. Okay, let's now think about the word of truth and how it is that we should approach the word and what we should think about and how we should relate to the word.

What's the first thing he says here in that context? He says we must be quick. We must be quick to listen, he says, and slow to speak. Quick to listen, slow to speak. Now what's he saying here? Is he saying don't be the blabbermouth? Don't be the person who always puts his mouth into gear before his brain is really engaged? Don't be the person who's always shooting his mouth off? Is that what he's saying, you know, the helpless chatterbox who is always blabbering on about this, that and the other? Is that what he's saying? Don't be that kind of person, the loudmouth, the talking head, intoxicated with their own verbosity and that kind of thing? Well, you know, certainly the Bible does speak to that, doesn't it? The Bible does generally counsel us against that and there are passages of Scripture which really speak a lot about that in the book of Proverbs, for example, it's a book filled with all kinds of teaching warning us against that. Proverbs 10:19, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise." Proverbs 13, "He that keeps his mouth keeps his life: but he that opens wide his lips shall have destruction." And many others in Proverbs that we could quote.

So there are those verses, aren't there, which counsel us in that way and warn us of the danger and the folly of being the person who talks too much, the kind of person who enters into every situation with an open mouth. Yes, the Bible says, "No, don't be like that. Make sure you're not that kind of person. Don't be selfish and self-centered in your speaking." But also don't allow yourself to be selfish and self-centered in your hearing as well. The Bible speaks to that subject too, the importance of being a good listener; the kind of person who has time to listen to the cares and concerns and the burdens of other people; a person who has an open ear and is willing to listen to the troubles and anxieties that others may have.

Well, that's the kind of person the Christian should be because that was the kind of person that the Lord Jesus Christ was. That's why people were drawn to him like magnet. It wasn't just the gracious words that came out of his mouth, it was also because he always had time to give people an open ear and into his ear they would pour their heartaches, their sufferings and their cares, and that is the way that we, as Christians, are to be: tenderhearted and patient and kind. That's a great grace if you can listen to people in that way. I'm sure you've come across the opposite when you've come to someone and you've really had something weighing on your heart and you really wanted to unburden it to this person and you began to share it, but then as you began speaking, suddenly they began speaking and speaking and speaking and so you then slowed down because you realized this person didn't really have the heart to take on what it was that you wanted to say. They just wanted to get their point over. They didn't want to listen to you. Like the old man that I read about in a Reader's Digest once, the old man in an old folks' home and having an argument with the old gal in the chair next to him and he said his point and

then when he was done, he switched off his hearing aid so he didn't have to listen to what she had to say.

We can be like that, can't we? Maybe not that extreme but not really listening to what the person is saying or just waiting for them to stop so that we can get in next what we want to say and so, yes, the Bible does speak to that too. The Bible does counsel us against being like that, exhorting us to be a good listener and a slow cautious speaker. And so, yes, those things are clearly taught in the Bible, but is that what's being taught here? Is that what James is speaking about here? Make sure you don't talk too much and make sure you're a good listener. Is that what he's saying here? Well, I think if we think about the context here, we'll see that James's main concern is not here about the way that we respond and relate to each other, he's going to deal with that later on, no, his main concern here is the way that we respond to God, the tendency that we have in certain situations to speak rashly and foolishly back to God, to start to point the blame, to point the finger at God. That's what his concern is in this section of the letter.

Do you remember the context here? He has been talking in these verses about those times when we fall into a deep trial and that trial then becomes to us a temptation, and in that situation James knows the tendency of the human heart is to look around for other people to blame. "It's not my fault, it's her." Ultimately to point the finger at God and say, "It's not me, it's You, Lord, You're the One who's to blame for this. You're responsible for this. It's You, Lord, not me." That's the way we're prone to think. That's the context here. I think that's what James is referring to primarily in these verses. He's saying, "Don't be like that. Don't respond like that. Don't speak back rashly and hastily, foolishly, to God."

Now that doesn't mean to say that you should never cry out or you should never ask, "Why, Lord, why?" You only have to read the Psalms to see the Psalmist is a man who's in that condition very often, and that's the kind of question that he sometimes asks. So it doesn't mean that we should never do that, we must always sweep our troubles under the rug and pretend they're not there. No, but there's a difference, isn't there? As one man has put it, there's a difference between a broken heart and a raised fist. There's a difference between godly despair and an angry outburst that lashes out at God. That's what James is concerned about here and warning us about here.

"Be quick to listen," he says, "and slow to speak," to speak back to God, he means. Restrain yourself from that. Keep yourself from becoming angry and embittered and lashing out and speaking rashly against God. Maybe you've come across somebody, perhaps somebody who seems to have a good Christian profession, they've been going on with the Lord and then something happened in their life, maybe they suffered a serious accident or they're diagnosed with a particular condition, I mean, they lost a loved one and after that they began to say things like, "I just don't know if I can forgive God for this. I don't know if I can trust God anymore." An angry, embittered response fired back at God, James is saying, "No, don't be like that. Restrain yourself from that."

"Be slow to speak. Be slow to anger. But be quick to listen." Be quick to listen, to listen to the voice of God. In your conscience at those kind of times when this temptation

nearby, listen to the voice of God and your conscience when he speaks to you like that, sounding the alarm. Take note of that. Pay attention to that. And also, most of all, listen to the voice of God in his word. Be swift to hear that. You know, the Bible does place great emphasis on hearing. Hearing the word of God. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." God's people were called to hear and to listen to the word, to pay very close attention to the word.

You know, if you read the Old Testament, you see many occasions where Moses is reading the word or Ezra is reading the word and the people are standing out there for hours listening, listening, listening to God's word. And in the New Testament as well, many in the early church like James's readers, this would actually be the way that they would receive God's word. They didn't have their own copies of the Scriptures and so how were they to get it? It was by hearing. By hearing, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So, yes, the reading of the word is very important, it's absolutely vital, we must be doing that, but hearing the word is just as important. That's God's chosen method, isn't it? "How shall they hear without a preacher?" God sent his own Son into the world and what did he make him to be? He made his Son to be a preacher. And when he sent him into the world, he said with a loud voice from heaven, "This is My beloved Son. Listen, listen, listen to Him," God said with a voice that they could hear.

So this is God's way. This is God's means. His word is to be read and preached and his people are to listen. In church when we come together, we are to listen. God is in heaven and we are on the earth and so our words are to be few. We are to listen to what he has to say to us. It's far more important what he has to say than what we have to say to him and that's what James is saying here. "Be eager, be quick, be ready to listen." Yes, you may have many good books at home written by men who say much better things than I do and probably say it in a better way than I do, but this is God's chosen method that God's people should come into church and they should listen and listen to what God has to say.

Are you like that? Do you think like that? Are you quick to listen? Are you eager to listen? Does being in church under the sound of God's word, is that a big priority in your life? Do you make sure that that's highlighted on your calendar each week, "I'm going to be there so that I can listen, to hear what God has to say"? And when you do come and perhaps you've got trials and troubles in your life and maybe you can feel an angry response welling up within you, when you come in do you take time to quiet yourself and to say, "Slow down, cowboy. Easy, easy, tiger. Cool your boots. You need to listen, listen to what God has to say."

That's what James is talking about here. That's the restraint that we need to exercise, but secondly, there's a removal that we must insure. Verse 21, "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word." Now that word "filthiness" there, it's also used in chapter 2 as well, it's used there as an adjective when he speaks about the poor man coming into the meeting and he's wearing filthy or shabby clothing. And here we have the same word being used as much as to say

that the Christian, the one who's been brought to new life, he's been brought to new birth by the word, then what he or she is to do is to take off the filthy clothing. That's the kind of language that the Bible uses when it speaks about new birth and conversion. Paul in Ephesians 4 says, "Put off, put off concerning the former manner of life, the old man, corrupt according to his deceitful lust. Be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man." Or Colossians 8, "Put off all these: anger, malice, wrath, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not to one another seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds."

So that's what we are to do then with these things, we are to put them off, the filthy garments, the remnants, the hangover one commentator put it, the hangover of the old life. We put it off like a snake shedding its skin. Put it off and leave it off. All that remains and pertains to the old way of life, you have a new nature now. You have a new heart now. You're to keep that clean. You're to keep yourself unspotted by the world, James is going to go on to say. If you don't, if you allow these things, these unclean things from your former way of life, if you allow these things to stay they're going to hinder your progress. They will, they will hinder your growth. They will actually become a hindrance to you receiving the word.

In fact, it's interesting that word "filthiness," it comes from the root word "rhupos" and rhupos is a word, it's not very pleasant this, but rhupos is a word which actually refers to earwax that you have in your ear. And so what James is saying is get rid of the wax in your ear. Boys and girls, maybe you've heard that perhaps on a Monday morning before you're going to school and now mum comes toward you brandishing the box of Q-Tips and says, "Get that wax out of your ear." Very important thing to do. In fact, I was speaking to my mum and dad just recently, they were telling me about a friend of theirs in England, he's quite an old man, and quite recently he started to lose his hearing in one ear and everybody thought it was just old age, but then he went to the doctor for an examination and it turned out he had a big lump of wax lodged down there and the doctor syringed it and, ah, as it came he could hear as clear as a bell after that. And that's what James is talking about here. Clear away the blockage, literally the wax, the rhupos of moral filth and filthiness. Clear it away. It will hinder your hearing. It will impair your ability to receive, to rightly receive the word of God.

That's the context here. That's what he's been talking about, the life-giving power of the word, he mentions that beforehand, and now after this he's gonna go and talk about the growth-producing power of the word as well, and so if the word of God is going to do that in you, if it's going to strengthen you and cause you to grow, then what you need to do is make sure you clear away, you remove everything that might be a hindrance to that. That's what he's saying. The dirty clothing, take it off. The wax of moral filthiness, clean it out. Get rid of anything that would hinder your reception of the word.

I think I may have told you about a friend of mine in England, he's a deacon in a church, and before he was converted, he was very much into heavy metal music and he used, even after he was converted he would still listen to it but he kind of had this conviction that maybe it wasn't good and perhaps it wasn't really helping him when he was reading

the Bible, it certainly wasn't helping him when he came to church, you know, some of the lyrics and the lifestyle of these drug-crazed singers, and so in the end he decided what he would do, he just got his cassettes and gathered them all up and went out to his rubbish bin and he just took his Motor Head and his Iron Maiden and his Black Sabbath and just unspooled the whole lot and he smashed up the cassettes. He didn't want anyone else to get them either. He just unspooled the whole lot and dumped it into the trash and that was the old life. That's the dirty clothes, as it were. He got rid of them. He cleaned out his ears. The thing that was causing the blockage, he got rid of it.

That's what James is talking about here. Peter says the same thing, 1 Peter 2, "Wherefore putting aside," same verb, taking off, "putting aside all evil, all deceit, all hypocrisy, all envy, all evil-speaking as newborn babes desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow." Get rid of it. Get rid of those things. You want to grow, don't you? So get rid of anything that will hinder the reception of the word. You need to clear it away. How about you? Is there anything in your life that you need to get rid of right now? Is James coming to you with a box of Q-Tips tonight saying you need to clean that out? You need to take that dirty clothing off? Is there something that the Lord is putting his finger on in your life tonight? If that's the case, then you need to receive it. You need to act upon it. You need to receive this word.

That's going to bring us on to our next thought which is the receptivity that we must develop. Building on from that thought James then goes on to say, "lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." This is the receptivity that we must develop, to receive the word with meekness and with humility. That's actually a fruit of the new birth. While we are still in our sin, while we remain hardened and unreceptive to his word, while we are in our sin, we stiffen our neck against his word. That's the mark of the unregenerate soul and Paul talks about that in 2 Timothy 3. Remember how he describes the position there, the stance of the ungodly? He says they resist the truth. That means they stand against the truth. It's they are, literally it's they are anti-truth. And then Paul goes on and gives an example of that in that same letter. He talks about Alexander the coppersmith, it's in chapter 4, "He did me much evil. The Lord reward him for his works for he has greatly stood against our words." And that's what we're talking about. That's the mark of the unregenerate mind and heart, it resists the truth. But the believer on the other hand, the believer is meek and teachable under the truth. Homer Kent in his commentary, he says this, "In contrast to the arrogance that the wrathful spirit denotes, the only proper attitude is humble submission to God's revealed truth."

So that's the way we're to come, we're to come humbly and submissively and readily, ready to receive, to receive the word. You have to receive it, don't you? It's no good just being here, you've got to actually receive it. You imagine you go to a feast and you can have all of that beautiful food spread out before you but you've actually got to eat it for it to do you any good. Or you could go to a doctor, some people go to see a physician and they will pay vast amounts of money to see a physician and he diagnoses them and he figures out what the problem is and he then gives them a prescription and they get medicine, and they go home and then you say to them, "Well, did you take the

medicine?" And they say, "No, I thought the doctor was wrong." And so you wonder why, why did they go in the first place and they wonder why they're not getting any better. It's not enough just to go and sit in the doctor's office, it's not enough to have the medicine in the cabinet, you need to take it, don't you? It's not enough just to come and sit in a church and be in the pew, you've actually got to receive. You've got to come here and say, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening. Speak, Lord, speak to me. Lead me. Direct me. I am listening, Lord, for thee. What hast thou to say to me?"

That's the way that we are to come, with the intention of hearing and receiving the word. Not sitting in judgment on it. Not making a critical analysis of it or the one who is preaching it, you know, filtering everything that comes to you through the grid of your own prejudices and grievances against the preacher. You've got to get rid of all of that. We must come with meekness to receive and to be led. We come in submission saying, "Lord, help me! Lord, direct me. Lord, I'm wrong right at the very center of my being. Lord, set me straight. Lord, I'm on a wrong path, put me on a right path. Lord, my mind is filled with all kinds of sin and confusion, give me clarity. Lord, help me. Lord, help me to think aright."

That's the way we are to come and when we come to him in that way, then amazing things can happen. Lives that are broken and bent out of shape can be made straight, and sinners who are on their way to eternal ruin can be brought into paths of safety and peace, and sick patients can start to get well again. You think about the man who hasn't been taking his medicine and then maybe his wife starts to get on his case and then tells him, "You need to take the medicine. You need to do what the doctor says. Don't be so proud thinking you know better than the doctor. Do what he says." And so he does and then surprisingly, amazingly the burning sensation in his chest starts to go away and the pains that were shooting down his arm start to clear up, or whatever else it is. You see my point. When we come to the Lord, we must come and receive it. We must come and be meek and teachable under that word. We must come with a readiness to receive.

Now you say, "Okay, yeah, yeah, that's good, that's fine. You know, I think I understand this, when we come to the word we've gotta be meek and teachable and we must receive it. Yeah, I heard this. You know, you don't need to tell me this. I've heard 100 sermons on this kind of thing. I've got it. You know, you don't need to labor it. I understand what you're saying." But you see, that's exactly the point, that's exactly why we do need to hear this again and again and again, it's because we are coming back to the word week after week after week, and it's because of that that we need to be so careful that we don't become dull, that we don't become hardened and indifferent and insensitive to the word, that the word doesn't become just like some very pleasant background music, the kind of thing you hear in the elevator in Marriott, just a very pleasant sound in the background. That's what can happen even to believers, even to conservative Reformed believers, especially to conservative Reformed believers.

Some of you, you've been in Reformed churches for 20, 30, maybe 40 years. You must have heard hours and hours, hundreds, thousands of hours of sermons and that's a great privilege, that is wonderful blessing, but there's a danger that comes with that as well and

that is that the ground, the ground of our own hearts can become dull, it can become hardened and compacted just by virtue of the footfall of various preachers and ministers that have gone over it over the years, casting the seed into the ground. Yeah, Jesus said that, didn't he, when he gave the parable of the soils. There was a certain type of soil, he said, where as seed was cast into it but that seed didn't go down into the soil, it just lay there on the surface, eventually it was picked off. Now why did that happen? Well, basically it was because of the footfall of the farmer himself walking over those same pieces of land year after year. It was his own feet. Now some of the ground was plowed up and tender and brought forth a harvest but others was rock hard, it was baked like concrete.

And that's one of the heartbreaking things about ministry, isn't it, it's the fact that there are people who will sit under it, they will sit under good ministry for years and years and instead of becoming tender and sensitive and fruitful under that word, they actually become hard and indifferent and complacent under the word. So that's why we need to cry, don't we, when we come into God's house, we need to cry continually, "Lord, break up the fallow ground of my heart. Lord, help me to receive Your word tonight. Keep me from becoming hard ground. Lord, help me to hunger for Your word. Help me to receive Your word into my heart tonight. Lord, help me."

That's the way we're to come. That's the way we're to approach the word. Do you come to church in that way? Do you approach the sermon in that way? Do you come in that spiritually frame like Cornelius in Acts 10, he said to Peter, "I sent for you immediately and it was good for you to come. Now here we all are in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say. We're all here, our hearts are prepared, we're ready to receive the word." Or the Bereans in Acts 17, they received the word with all readiness of mind. Or Mary, think about Mary. Yes, there was a lot of work to be done in the kitchen, she could have spent her time doing that but she knew she had a soul that needed to be fed and so she went and it says in Luke 10 she sat at Jesus' feet and she heard his word.

Do you have that kind of mindset? Do you have that attitude towards God's word on a Sunday afternoon as 5:30 is drawing around and you start to think to yourself, "Oh, I'm tired. The ballgame's on tv. I think I'll give it a miss tonight." Oh, be careful. That's dangerous ground. That's hard ground. That's not good receptive soil. That's soil that's getting hard under the traffic. You need to take measures to break that up. You need to break up that fallow ground.

Listen to what the Westminster divines say on this and they're very helpful. Those men knew an awful lot about preaching the word and they knew an awful lot about listening to the word as well. This is Question 160 of the Larger Catechism. What is required of those that hear the word preached? Answer: it is required of those that hear the word preached that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation and prayer, and that they examine what they hear by the Scriptures, receive the truth with faith, love, meekness and readiness of mind as the word of God. They meditate and confer on it, hide it in their

hearts and bring forth the fruits of it in their lives. That's what we're talking about here, attending upon the word with diligence, preparation and prayer.

Basically, you know, just to sum that up it means three things. It means when you come to the sermon, there are three things to remember. There's a before, a during, and an after. Before the sermon, you pray. You pray for yourself. You pray for the preacher. You pray for others that they may receive the word into their hearts. During the sermon, you listen very very carefully. Maybe you have a pen in your hand and you take down notes. It's a proven fact that you will retain more if you write down what you hear than if you don't. And then after, after the sermon you go away and you discuss it. Boys and girls, maybe you talk with mum and dad in the car on the way home. You ask questions about things that you didn't understand. And around the dinner table you talk about what the preacher said. And then during the week think about it. In your devotional times maybe bring out those notes and read them again. And then most of all you practice it. You apply it. That's the best way to remember all that was taught. You seek to live it out in your life and in that way we rightly receive the word of God. We receive the implanted word, the word that can save your souls.

Let's just think about those words as we close here, the word that can save your souls. In fact, let me just address a word here to anyone not Christians this evening. Most of what we've said so far has been for Christians because that's who James is talking to. He says there in verse 19, "my beloved brethren." It's Christians that he's thinking about primarily here but if you're not a Christian, if you're not a believer here tonight, just think about that. Look what he says, "receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." So James is telling us here that you and I, we have a soul. It's the most valuable thing that you possess, that faculty that God gave to man when he breathed into him life and made him to be a living being, the capacity to know God and to walk with God and to fellowship with God. That's the highest gift you have. He didn't give that to the animals. He didn't give that to the birds. Only man has a soul. It's the most valuable thing you possess, Jesus said. "What should it profit if you gain the whole world and yet lose your own soul?" And yet that's the danger that we're in because of our sin. As long as we remain outside of Jesus Christ and strangers to him and to his blood, then we are in danger, very real danger of losing our souls, of being shut out from the presence of God, from the light of God and all the blessings of God, that even as an unconverted person you enjoy. The love and kindness of your friends and family. The goodness of his provision and his creation.

All of these things ultimately come from him and yet there's a very real danger that you may be shut out from that forever in a place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And deep down we know that, don't we? Deep down we have that hardwired into our souls and deep down there is this insatiable hunger that we have to have relationship with God. The Bible tells us that only comes through Jesus Christ, through owning our sin before him and resting the weight of our souls upon him, and embracing him and all that he did at Calvary, his sufferings and his death and his resurrection, embracing that, embracing him for ourselves.

That's the way to know peace with God and where do we find that? Where is it that Jesus is presented to us? It's here in the Scriptures. He said, "These are they which testify of Me." It's the Scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation, or as James says here, the Scriptures which can save your souls. And the verb form that James uses here, it means it's ongoing. It's an ongoing power. You know, we sometimes say that, don't we, as Christians we say, "Well, I've been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved." There's a past, a present, and a future tense. Now how does that come about? What's the means that God will use to sustain us through that whole process? It's the word. It's the word of God. It's the word that brings us forth to life and it's the word then that sustains and maintains that life and will carry us through safe to glory.

So do you see how important it is, then, that we receive the word? That we rightly receive the word? Not being haughty. Not being arrogant and proud. You will never grow, you'll never make any progress like that but you need to come in meekness with the ground broken up, ready for that word, and when we do that, then we will profit, then we will grow, then we will become the full-orbed, mature, steadfast Christian people that God would have us to be and it's all through the word, the word that brings us forth to life and the word that will carry us through to ultimate glory and salvation. It's the word that is able to save your souls.

I was reading an article about the great American screen actor, Steve McQueen, and towards the end of his life he became a born again Christian. It was through a friendship that he made with his flying instructor who was a Christian and he took Steve McQueen along to his church and he didn't like it at first, he didn't like the preacher, didn't like listening to the preaching either, but eventually he went enough times and he was converted through listening to the word and he then developed a very voracious appetite for the Bible himself. And especially towards the end of his days when he was diagnosed with cancer, he would be reading the Bible continually and when he was on his hospital bed dying, Billy Graham came to visit him and he read the Bible to him, and eventually he died and the family came into the room and they found him lying there, he had the Bible open on his chest and it was his favorite passage, it was John 3, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It's that same word, you see. It was the word that brought him forth to life, and it was the word that carried him through life and safe to glory.

"The noblest wonders here we view,
In souls renewed and sins forgiven.
Lord, cleanse my sins and soul renew,
And make thy word my guide to heaven."

Let's pray.

Father, we pray that You would grant us meekness to receive the implanted word which is able to save our souls. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.