

JAMES 1:19-25

HOW TO SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF GOD ON YOUR WORK

Introduction:

This is a passage with serious implications for those of us involved in ministry. Whatever else we are, we are a people of the Book. We obviously have been entrusted with the Word of the living God. But there is more involved in a successful ministry than possessing the Word. Possessing the word creates the responsibility for ministry and the possibility of success, but not a guarantee of success.

James provides us with two special insights into the power of the Word in our text. First, he indicates that this word has the power to save our souls. “Soul” in this context probably refers to our lives and especially to save our lives from uselessness and fruitlessness. James has already written on the saving power of the word in the letter—“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (v. 18) This statement points to the role the Gospel message played in the initial experience of salvation in our lives. This second reference is to continuing role the word plays in the working out of our

salvation—the preservation of lives for usefulness and fruitfulness in the work of the Lord.

The second reference is the last line of this section—“This one will be blessed in what he does.” This sounds a lot like Psalm 1 where David declared of the person who makes a proper place for the word in his life, “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings its fruit in its season, whose leaf shall not wither: and whatsoever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:3)

When I put these two texts side by side, it stirs up something in me. Maybe this is a key that we have been looking for. The Lord tells us through His trusted servants David and James that the key to a prosperous work is tied up in what we do with the Word of God. Surely this is something worthy of our explanation.

While these texts are not directed to just ministers, they are surely applicable to those of us involved in ministry. These insights are valid regardless of what you may do vocationally. Make a proper place in your life for the word of God and success will come your way. The favor of the Almighty will be upon the work of your hands.

I. MAKE A PLACE IN YOUR HEART FOR THE IMPLANTED WORD.

We need to do a little exegetical exploration before we go any further into this text. Is it possible that James is setting forth two different forms the word may take in the life of the believer? I believe that he is. He speaks first of the “implanted word.” This points to the word of the Lord as having been implanted in our hearts by the great Planter Himself, the Holy Spirit. This is an implantation that took place at the moment that you became a Christian. James is using the figure of a “seed” to help us understand the implanted word. It has been implanted in our hearts like a seed is planted in the ground. In the remainder of his discussion he refers to the word as something that is exterior to us like a mirror. It a word that we can hold in our hands like a mirror. So there is an inward word and an outward word that is under consideration. If we are to be blessed and fruitful, we must make a proper response in both cases.

Consider the inward word.

1. Prepare by cleansing.

“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness.” This is the necessary preparation for the proper response to the inward word the Lord

has planted in our hearts. We must remove from our hearts everything that is contrary to the word the Lord has planted in our hearts. Every contrary attitude and habit of life must be removed from the life like you would remove an old, soiled garment, or like you would pull weeds from garden. The word God has implanted in you will call for change. Those who benefit most from the implanted word heed the call for change that comes from the implanted word.

2. Receive with meekness.

“Receive” means to gladly welcome! When you begin to discover that God has implanted His word in your heart, how do you respond? Do rejoice that God has planted His word in your heart? Or do you resist the Word? Do you respond with “meekness?” Meekness involves humility and teachableness. Are you ready to allow the word to fill you with the truth of God? Are you ready to learn the ways of the Lord? Are you ready to be transformed from within by this word? As you allow this word to do its work in your life, it saves you life from fruitlessness and uselessness. It saves from you life from ruin and destruction.

This implanted word is included in the New Covenant. God promised that He would write the word on the heart like He wrote it on the tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. To receive this implanted word that God has written on

your heart is to make the most of it. It is to maximize the opportunity that the indwelling word creates in your life!

II. MAKE PROPER USE OF THE WRITTEN WORD.

In the second part of the passage, James changes the figure. He stops talking about the word as a seed and begins to write of the word as a mirror. In this second figure the word is in our hands and not in our hearts. He is admonishing us to make good use of the word, the written word. What a treasure, what a gift, we hold in our hands. It is so strategic when it comes to finding a fruitful and effective ministry. How we use the mirror will determine how much blessedness we enjoy in our ministry.

All of us are familiar with mirrors. We use them every day. There is a proper use of the mirror and an improper use.

1. Use it to gain an understanding of our need.

An apparent use of a mirror is to receive an understanding of just how you appear. James refers to this when he writes, “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.”

Our mirrors that we use today are very effective at giving us a good view of what we may look like to others. I learn something about myself every morning, or whenever I look in the mirror. The good thing about the word of the Lord as a mirror, it enables you to look a whole lot deeper. It will allow you to see into your heart as clearly as you see your face in a mirror of glass. It is able to expose the very motives and intents of your heart to your understanding. It will enable you to see the character flaws that you may have. O it is painfully revealing!

A proper use of a mirror is to use it to gain understanding. You want to gain more than understanding of the word, you want to gain the understanding of yourself that the word provides. You need to spend enough time in front of the mirror that you gain a thorough understanding of your need before God.

2. Use it to gain guidance for our behavior.

The mirror can take you a step beyond understanding—it can guide you in changing your behavior. When I look in the mirror and see that my face needs a shave, that is helpful. But it is even more helpful when I use the mirror to give my face a proper shave.

Can you imagine what the face of your wife might look like if she applied all of the makeup without a mirror?

It is this use of the mirror that James refers to when he writes, “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 shall be blessed in what he does.”

These words are very significant. “Looks” means to do more than take a glance. It means to look intently, to look studiously, to look with a view of receiving instruction and guidance. It is the same word use of the disciples looking into the empty tomb on Sunday morning. They were gazing into the empty tomb in an attempt to understanding what it meant. They could see the burying clothes, but the tomb was empty. Jesus was gone. What did it mean? It is this kind of look that we give to the word.

“Perfect law of liberty” is encouraging. There are no deficiencies in this mirror. It reflects the character of the one who gave it. It is like Him—perfect. It will surely show you everything you need to know for the living of your life today.

“Continues in it” is the key! The proper use of the mirror is to not lay it down until you have done what it reveals that needs to be done. You have washed the dirt from your face. You have shaved away the day’s growth of beard. You have trimmed your eye brows. You have combed your hair.

When you pick up the mirror of the word, it will give you a promise that needs to be claimed, a command that needs to be obeyed, a view of the Lord

that needs to be acknowledged, a hope that needs to be embraced. It will guide you into all that needs to be done. It will show you a work that needs to be done, a duty that needs to be fulfilled.

3. Use it to gain strength for our change.

This brings us back to the descriptive word that James uses of the word—it is the “perfect law of liberty.” I understand that to mean that it is the law that liberates. This is a power that only the mirror of the word has. No human mirror has the power to enable you to what it shows you that needs to be done, but this mirror of that word has this power. It is the word of the living and almighty God. It has the power to release in you an energy that will enable you to do what it has shown you that needs to be done. It will produce in you the faith that you need to perform.

Let me change the figure to illustrate this point. I remember a sermon I heard in chapel during my seminary days on the word being sweeter than honey and better than gold from the words of David in Psalm 19. I cannot remember the speaker’s name, but I can remember the analogy that he used. He referred to that experience of Jonathan when he was pursuing the Philistines in battle. The battle took him through the forests, and he was becoming weary when he came upon a bee hive. He stuck his sword into the

hive, and covered it with honey, brought it to his mouth and ate the honey as he pursued the enemy. It brought to him a renewal of strength that allowed him to accomplish his mission. This is what the word does in our lives. We dip into it, we relish it, we enjoy it, and it gives to us the strength we need to do what it has shown us we need to do.

So it seems rather clear. If we want our work of ministry to be blessed, we must do more than proclaim and teach the word. We must live the word. We must allow the word that has been implanted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit to become a controlling force in our lives. We must properly use the word we hold in our hands to determine our attitudes, words, and deeds. As we learn to “continue” in the word, then we will prosper in the work the Lord has given us to do.