

March 5, 2023

2-Faith That Works Lives It Out

Today I want to begin with a story. In stories like the one I'm about to tell you, it is customary to say, the story you are about to hear is a true story, the names have been changed to protect the innocent. But in this story, which is more like a parable, I say instead, the story you are about to hear is a parable and the only name you will hear is my own because I'm not as innocent as I'd like to be.

A business owner goes overseas to set up a branch of his business in a foreign country. To do so he left his business stateside in the hands of his trusted employee Jim for quite a few months.

The business owner wrote many letters filled with detailed instructions about how to run his business effectively while he was away. (As you can see, this was before email or the internet).

After many months and after the manufacturing plant overseas was established, the business owner returned to the home office.

The business owner was stunned when he arrived. Grass and weeds had grown up high. A few windows were broken. The receptionist was doing her nails, chewing a big wad of bubblegum, popping bubbles and listening to loud music. The waste baskets were overflowing and nobody seemed concerned that the owner had returned. Furthermore, the product distribution area seemed to be altogether too quiet.

He asked the receptionist "Where's Jim"?

"I think he's in the break room." She answered.

The owner found him playing chess with the sales manager.

The businessman said, "Hello Jim, sorry to surprise you like this but I'm back and we need to talk. Come with me to my office now."

"Sure" Jim said, with sudden discomfort.

The businessman was shocked to see that his own office had been turned into another break room. A TV was blaring, and workers were on couches watching and laughing.

"What is the meaning of this! Everyone out. Out! This is my office. Go, get to work!" People quickly and awkwardly left.

The businessman shut the door and turned to Jim and asked, "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"What do ya' mean?" Jim responded.

"Well, look at this place! It's a mess!

"Your office wasn't being used sir, and we..."

"I'm not talking about my office, Jim, the whole business is in a mess! Didn't you get any of my letters?"

"Letters? Why yes sir. We sure did. As a matter of fact ... we started having letter studies each week. Those were great letters boss! Some of us have committed to memorizing some of your best sentences."

"You what!? You got them and studied them, but what did you do with them?"

"We have them all sir... and ... Uh,..like I said sir, we learned them."

"That's not what I mean. What did you do? If you learned them then what did you do with what you learned?"

“We learned sir that employee morale is very high when we are all focused sir.”

“Listen very carefully Jim, exactly how high will employee morale be when they cannot be paid? Production and sales have dropped by 33 percent! Perhaps your focus was misplaced along the way.”

Jim lamely replied. I’m sorry sir, maybe we did get off track a bit.

“Maybe?”

“Yes sir. We are off track sir.”

In a business, this is a professionally absurd situation, and yet in a church, it is too commonplace. We forget the mission of the King and his kingdom.

James 1:22 (NIV) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

It is far more easy to deceive ourselves than we realize.

At VVCC we believe in the life changing power of the gospel (good news) of Jesus. We are more about transformation than about information transfer. We need to ask ourselves this question: Am I living more like Jesus or not? And if not, why not?

This series is all about Faith that Works! Before we can see how Faith works, James tells us what does NOT work.

*James 1:14–15 (NIV) but each person is tempted when they are dragged away **by their own evil desire** and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, **gives birth to death.***

James describes the slippery downward progression from **deception** to **conception** to **“the birth of sin”** when **SIN is full grown**, sin gives **“birth to death.”** Sin does not happen to us; sin starts with us. Self is the problem. Where the problem is self, how much help is Self-help? Spiritually dead people can’t self-help themselves into becoming spiritually alive people.

James moves quickly from the problem to the solution.

FAITH THAT WORKS...

I. Works because it RECEIVED God’s GIFT .

*James 1:17–18 (NIV) Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose **to give us birth** [a new spiritual life] **through the word of truth...***

God willingly gave us the perfect gift to save us!

Where self gave us birth to DEATH, (1:15) God gave us birth to LIFE (1:18) “*through the word of truth*”...(James 1:18). **James is talking about a resurrection to new life available through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

James gets this from the teaching of Jesus. Jesus taught us about being “**born again**” or “**born from above**” (John 3)

James 1:21 (NIV) 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.

Here is the Gospel, good news: We can humbly accept this good and perfect gift which can save us.

FAITH THAT WORKS...

II. Is QUICK to LISTEN

In the middle of this thought James gives us a ZINGER that at first seems like an abrupt change of topic.

James 1:19–20 (NIV) My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

This wise saying pierces me. Does it pierce you?

- Like me, are you quick to answer before listening all the way through?
- Like me, are you quick with your prickly remark because of someone else’s prickly remark?
- Like me, are you quick to jump to wrong conclusions?
- Like me, are you quick to judge and interpret people’s motives?
- Like me, are you quick to offer your “quick fix” before really listening?

As a stand alone proverb there this is piercing. But there is another level the proverb applies: This hasn’t been placed in this context randomly. We read next...

James 1:21-22 (NIV) 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. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

Listen to the word that is being planted in you. Jesus said this about his parable of the farmer planting seeds.

Jesus said, “*He who has ears, let him hear.*” **James never forgot that, because at first he was not listening, he was arguing, and he was angry.**

FURTHERMORE, the WORD planted in us, isn’t just the WORDS of a message by itself. Jesus is **the WORD** (Read John 1:1). Jesus is the way, **the truth**, and the

life (Read John 14:6). **The word of truth** is the Gospel, and the **WORD of truth** is also Jesus himself.

So let's probe a little deeper than the surface words of a general proverb:

- Have you received the gift of *“birth through the word of truth”*? (James 1:18)
- Have you been *quick to listen* to the word of truth? (James 1:19)
- Have you *humbly accepted the word planted in you that can save you*? (James 1:21)
- Have you been listening *and living it out*? (James 1:22)

FAITH THAT WORKS...

III. **LOOKS** intently

James 1:23-25 (NIV) ²³ *Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

TIME OUT!! What is *the perfect law that gives freedom*?

When you think of LAWS do you think of FREEDOM? Our modern minds don't generally think this way. We see restrictions in laws more than freedom. Hello... SPEED LIMITS... Right? We get hung up on the LIMITS. **So what is the perfect law that gives freedom?**

The Old Testament predicted the coming of a new and better covenant when God's law would be “put in the minds” and “written in the hearts” (see Jeremiah 31:31-33). Jesus gave us this “New Covenant” (see Luke 22:20).

James used many phrases to refer to the same thing.

- *“birth through the word of truth”* (James 1:18)
- *“the word planted in you that can save you”* (James 1:21)
- the *“perfect law that gives freedom”* (James 1:25).

The “perfect law that gives freedom” gives freedom from the power of sin and freedom to serve God and live life beautifully. This freedom functions more like a compass than an electric fence. How? Through Christ in you!

When you **listen** to the word today there are two generalized responses described: **1) A passing glance that is quickly forgotten, or 2) Looking intently.**

But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom... will be blessed...

Can I just add “blessed forever” because this law of the Gospel, and Christ in you because of his victory sets you FREEDOM from DEATH! If you are not experiencing this freedom, James has a ZINGER of a prescription for you.

James 1:21 (NIV) 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.

- Those who look intently into Jesus say “yes” to Jesus.
- Saying “yes” to Jesus means saying “no” to whatever blocks you from listening to Jesus, and His Holy Spirit who explains God’s Word.
- The prayer team would be happy to pray with you about what is getting in your way. Talk to you about Jesus, or pray about any other prayer need you might have today.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear”.

Faith that Works

(Week 2) Group Study: James 2:1-13

“Keeps the Royal Law”

SMALL TALK

1. **To what event (or kind of event) would you love to have “the best seat in the house”? Why that event?**

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ James 2:1-13.** James is writing to an economically depressed community. Why might favoritism be a problem in this setting? Can you think of a scenario where the temptation toward favoritism would be strong?
3. For what reasons does James oppose favoritism? (2:4-13) How much does the way we treat everyone really matter?
4. What is the “royal law”? (2:8) How does the law give “freedom”? (2:12-13, see 1:25, and Matthew 22:34-40; 7:12)

GETTING PERSONAL

5. What is the person like who is easy for you to be welcoming and friendly toward? What does this say about you?
6. Is it easy or hard for you to be kind and caring to broken, hurting, marginalized, disenfranchised people? Why? What if they are prickly or angry? Why?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

1. How can you take steps this week from wherever you are to where “mercy triumphs over judgment”?