

## ***Going Beyond the Rim***

### **James 1:19-25**

One of the highlights I fondly remember about our last family vacation was entering Grand Canyon National Park just as the sun was rising. I drove up to a scenic overlook and hurried everyone out of the car to the edge of the overlook and watched the incredible beauty as the sun began to rise and cast shadows all throughout the canyon below. Then we quick jumped into the car and drove ahead about 10 minutes and were able to get out of the car once again, rush to the edge and watch the sun rise all over again. We did this whole routine half a dozen times – running quickly out to the edge of the canyon rim in order to watch the sun rise. However, I now look at the whole experience through a different set of lenses thanks to a video we’re about to watch by our former youth minister, Jon Albert, who is now the director of Canyon Ministries, which gives tours down into the depths of the Grand Canyon. It also provides a great introduction to our passage in James this morning.

#### **Watch video: “Go Beyond the Rim”**

Using Jon’s analogy you and I are right now on the seated on the edge of the rim of the Grand Canyon. This morning when you entered the church doors you entered Grand Canyon National Park and during worship you were brought right up the edge of the rim as you focused on the grandeur and majesty of God and His glory. Many people every week get this close. But as Jon challenged us – the key is what’s your next step. Do you turn and walk away and get back in your cars and leave or do you take the next step and go deeper in your relationship with God. Do you say like Isaiah the prophet, “Here I am send me?” Are you ready to do whatever it takes to advance God’s kingdom in and through your life through your actions – or are you content to just walk away and come to the edge of the rim of God’s greatness week after week. Because in reality, many are content to get close to God, be awed by Him and then go back to life as usual. But what if God had greater plans for your life than just merely getting back in your car and going back to life as usual. What if He wanted and invited you to go deeper – to take what you’ve experienced and what you know to a life fully lived for God and impacting the people around you.

Last Sunday we began our study of the book of James and in the opening passage he challenges us to look at how we respond to temptations and tests in our life, and today he’s going to challenge us to look at how we respond to a third “T”, the text of God’s Word. He begins with this statement.

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 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. (James 1:19-21 (NIV))*

This opening principle of being “*quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*” is such an important principle to remember in interactions with others. Because when we have a disagreement with someone else we are just the opposite. We get angry with someone and we set out to prove our point. We rarely take time to genuinely listen to what the other person has to say. Oh, we might physically ‘hear’ them, but there’s a big difference between hearing and listening – as any parent of a young child can tell you, or the spouse of a football fanatic while watching a football game who can respond, “Yes, honey – Yes, honey” to anything you say – because they are focused on the game rather than on what you have to say. This is most often equally true in the midst of a disagreement. We don’t take time to listen – we jump to conclusions and then began to quickly make our point to justify our anger, and if we just stopped to genuinely listen most disagreements would be quickly resolved.

However, while this is an important relationship principle to remember, James isn’t primarily talking about this principle in relationship to disagreements with others. He’s really using this principle to address how we react to the difficulties in life. How we respond to the temptations and trials that God allows or brings into our lives. When in the midst of these deep challenges in life, we don’t want to hear what God’s Word has to say about it – we just angry at the situation or God and we want God to fix it by taking it away or by snatching us out of it. And James says, a much better way to deal with it is to focus

on the text of God's Word and let it soak deeply into your life, informing you of God's ways and plans for your life. And to make this work effectively he gives us two important steps to take.

*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*

*"get rid of all moral filth"* = take off your dirty clothes. Strip down to your underwear, become fully exposed to what God wants to teach you through your time in his Word. But if you approach God's Word full of filth or deep seated anger or resentment or unresolved hurt, then you'll either be thinking about those things rather than God's Word.

*"and the evil"* = the word for evil here is a word that used elsewhere to describe the waxy build up that a moral filth and resentment and anger have on our ability to go beyond the rim in response to God's Word. God's Word is intended to transform our minds and hearts and motivate our actions – but none of those things will or can happen if we're not humble and fully exposed before God's Word and willfully allowing it to speak to us.

Next we come to what is one of the key verses in all of the book of James. It's a verse designed to get us beyond the rim and into the exciting life God has planned for you and me.

*"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."* (James 1:22-23 (NIV))

The word James uses to describe a mere listener to the word and not a doer is a word that's also used to describe someone who merely audits a class. In seminary I audited several classes – why? Because I could still get all of the information and knowledge without any of the responsibility. I didn't have to do any assignments, I didn't have to take any of the tests – I was just there to merely fill my head with some more knowledge. And that's typical of people who are rim sitters. They like to get smarter about God but not necessarily do anything with or for God. They don't necessarily want to allow God's Word to impact the way they live their lives – they are merely content to fill their heads with more knowledge. Does that describe you? When you leave worship this morning what's going to be your response? Are you going to critique my sermon or the worship or are you going to let the worship and your exposure to God's Word critique your life. The first is a mere auditor of God's Word, the latter is a true disciple of Jesus Christ and a real student of God's Word.

Jesus often stressed the importance of our obedience to His teachings.

As the introduction to one of his parables Jesus said: *"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"* He said that those two things are irreconcilable. You can't call Jesus Lord of your life if you're not willing to do what he says.

Can anyone tell me what parable this statement is a lead in to?

It's the parable of the wise and foolish builders. It continues with these words.

*As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."* (Luke 6:47-49 (NIV))

Merely hearing and learning Jesus' words doesn't prepare you for the storms of life. It's only through acting on what you're learning that prepares you for those inevitable storms, the trials and temptations.

- Jesus also declared that anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. (John 14:23)
- And in the Upper Room with his disciples he told us that if you're really a friend of Jesus, you'll obey his teaching and not merely know his teaching (John 15:14). True friends of Jesus go beyond the rim.

Next James gives us this wonderful analogy of a person who isn't changed by their exposure to God's Word.

*“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.” James 1:23-24 (NIV)*

I love this analogy. He’s describing a person who sees himself in the mirror, and maybe his hair is disheveled or they have a piece of food stuck between their two front teeth or there’s smudges of dirt on their face, but then they walk away and forget what they just saw and thus they don’t do anything about it. It’s like a person who opens up their Bible in the morning to do their daily Bible reading and read through it as quickly as possible to be able to check it off their spiritual “to do” list but then slam the Bible shut, put it back on the night stand and rush off to work without ever spending time to reflect on the impact this passage should have on their life. As I’ve often preached and taught – if your time in God’s Word doesn’t somehow impact your life or transform you into the likeness of Christ, then why bother. From the earlier Scriptures, Jesus wasn’t too impressed with those individuals who could win Bible Bowl competition or Bible Trivia contests but God’s Word hasn’t transformed their lives.

In contrast, James describes what our approach to God’s Word should be.

*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. James 1:25-26 (NIV)*

One Bible commentator describes this act of “*looking intently*” as looking with “*penetrating absorption.*” That’s a great description.

This term “*looking intently*” conveys the idea of bending over to get a closer look. It’s also used to describe the actions of **Peter, John** and **Mary** as they came into Christ’s empty tomb. They bent over at the entrance to get a closer look. Connected with the idea of stooping over is the idea of humbling yourself before God’s Word. You are putting your will and agenda aside and allowing God’s Word to give direction for your daily life.

And James adds that it’s just not enough to “*look intently*” into God’s Word but also to “*continue in it*”. You allow God’s Word throughout the day to continue to soak into your life. That’s why I encourage you to memorize God’s Word so that those verses can continue to marinate in your life (soaking into the deepest crevices of your mind and heart).

Here he has an interesting term he uses for God’s Word. He calls it the “perfect law that gives freedom.” Now, most people think of God’s Law as restricting my behavior not giving me freedom. However Jesus declared that he came to break people’s chains and set them free.

**John 8:31-32 (NIV)** *“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

There is a sense in which the Old Testament laws with all its rules and regulations and then add onto that man’s additional teachings that were trying to help clarify the law’s intent, that those systems really did put chains of restriction on people’s lives.

But Jesus greatly simplified the Laws when he boiled them down to really “love” First loving God and then loving your neighbor, and defined your neighbor as anyone in need. Jesus said it’s our love for one another that should be the criteria by which the world can identify who his disciples are. It’s this love for one another and those outside of the church which so confounded the early nonbelievers. The early Christians were really the original welfare system in the ways that they lovingly took care of one another. And so following Jesus’ teachings doesn’t restrict us but rather it frees us up to live an exciting and extravagant life of love. Always looking for ways that God can use me to advance his kingdom. To step beyond the rim and my comfort zone by responding to God’s promptings to show His love to others. I was talking to Kim last night and she was sharing with me how her and Bill recently noticed a homeless man across the street from her apartment, so Kim went in and made some sandwiches and then Bill went out and gave them to the man. That’s a great example of going beyond the rim and letting God work in and through you. And Kim commented that in the past she would be too shy and protective to do something like that but God’s love got a hold of her and now gives her a new confidence to reach out to others with His love. Good job Kim – going beyond the rim.

Next James mentions three concrete ways to live a life of freedom through obedience to the perfect law of liberty:

1. **By controlling the use of one's tongue.** He goes so far as to say that if exposure to God's Word is not controlling the use of your tongue then your religion is worthless, because it's not doing what it was intended to do – it's not transforming your life.
2. Another God honoring way to go beyond the rim is to **take care of widows and orphans** in their distress.
3. **To keep yourself from being polluted by the world.** Romans 12:2 cautions us against being transformed by the world but rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds and I would add 'hearts' and actions.

Let's be honest, typically by tomorrow most of what I said today will be forgotten – unless you work to remember it. It will be remembered much better if you make an attempt to act on it, to respond to it by intentionally committing to go beyond the rim this week and actually not just listen to James' words but put them into practice. God is looking for more and more individuals who take His Word seriously and put it into practice in their lives and begin to transform the way that God is using them to impact the world around them with His love through their actions.

I want to close with a quote from a book entitled, ***Back to Jerusalem*** where some Chinese House Leaders describing the difference between those who claim to be Christians and those who actually are fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

***Back to Jerusalem* written by Chinese house church leaders:**

"True disciples are people that few people understand. They are viewed as unstable fanatics. The same governments who will tolerate mere believers will do anything they can to eradicate radical disciples within their borders. Believers try to pray and follow the will of God but are clouded by indecisiveness. If they hear the call of God to go somewhere and tell others they feel they need extra encouragement before they can safely step out. They say, *"let me first check with my spouse, my boss, my pastor and my mother-in-law to see if this is okay with them.."* Believers always need assurances that nothing will go wrong if I step out for Jesus. Only when they are completely convinced that no harm will befall them are they willing to take their first step.

In China believers beg God to give them a dose of his dynamite power to step out in faith. *"Oh, God, if you'll just give me a little bit of dynamite I promise that I will take your Word to the darkest places of China if you'll just send a bolt from heaven to cause it to explode."*

This is how the Gospel has spread with breathtaking speed throughout China.

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According to vs. 19 we are to be quick to \_\_\_\_\_, slow to \_\_\_\_\_ and slow to become \_\_\_\_\_.

Which three of these are the greatest challenge for you?  
How could you improve on this?

*“get rid of all moral filth”* literally means to take off \_\_\_\_\_.

*“and the evil”* is used to describe what \_\_\_\_\_?

What’s to be our attitude towards God’s Word? \_\_\_\_\_?

*“a mere listener”* to God’s Word is like what type of student? \_\_\_\_\_  
Is that a good description of your approach to God’s Word?  
What steps can you take to change that?

Jesus said that the proper response to loving him is what?

True friends of Jesus go \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_.

How has study of God’s Word changed the way you live?

*“Looking intently”* implies what?  
What is the *“perfect law that gives freedom”*?

**Ways to Live a Life of Freedom:**

1. Control one’s \_\_\_\_\_
2. Take care of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
3. Keep yourself \_\_\_\_\_ from the world.

What changes do you need to make to live *“beyond the rim”*.

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