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James

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?"

Most of us know the famous line from the fairytale *Snow White*. The Evil Queen stands before her magic mirror, looking for an answer about her beauty. The mirror reflects back what is before it, but the Queen's problem is that she isn't really interested in what the mirror reveals—she wants the mirror to confirm what she already believes about herself.

A mirror is useful because it shows us something about ourselves that we cannot see without looking. But imagine looking into a mirror, seeing that your hair is messy or your face is dirty, and then walking away without doing anything about it. You saw the truth, but you didn't respond to it.

Daniel and Marcus were both Christians. They went to the same church, listened to the same sermons, sang the same worship songs, and both spoke openly about their faith. If you asked either of them about Jesus, they could tell you exactly what they believed. But there was one important difference between them: Daniel lived what he talked about. Marcus mostly talked about what

he believed.

One afternoon, a new employee named Ethan started working with them. Ethan wasn't a Christian. He had never really understood why people followed Jesus, and he wasn't particularly interested in church. To him, Christians seemed no different from anyone else. At first, Marcus tried to convince Ethan. "Jesus changes your life," Marcus told him. "Christians are supposed to love people, forgive others, and live differently." Ethan nodded politely. But over the next few weeks, he began noticing something. Marcus was quick to talk about patience, but he became angry whenever something went wrong at work. He talked about loving others, but he constantly complained about his coworkers. He spoke about forgiveness, but he held grudges against anyone who offended him. One day, Ethan watched Marcus criticize a coworker who had made a mistake. "You should know better than that," Marcus snapped. Later that same day, Marcus told Ethan, "You know, the Bible teaches us to treat people with grace." Ethan thought to himself, *But you didn't.*

Then there was Daniel. Daniel didn't talk about his faith nearly as much as Marcus did. But Ethan began noticing the way Daniel lived. When someone interrupted him, Daniel listened instead of becoming angry. When a coworker made a mistake, Daniel helped fix it rather than humiliating them. When someone treated him

unfairly, Daniel didn't immediately seek revenge. One morning, Daniel noticed that another employee, Sarah, was struggling financially and had been skipping lunch to save money. Without making a big deal about it, Daniel began bringing an extra lunch to work for her. Ethan asked him one day, "Why do you do things like that?" Daniel smiled. "Because Jesus has been generous with me. I want to be generous with others." Ethan was quiet. A few days later, Ethan asked Daniel, "Can I ask you something?" "Sure." "Why are you different from some of the other Christians I've met?" Daniel paused. "I'm not always different," he said. "I mess up too. But I believe following Jesus means actually doing what He teaches—not just saying that I believe it." That conversation stayed with Ethan.

Eventually, Ethan began reading the Bible for himself. He started asking questions about Jesus. Daniel's life didn't make the gospel true. The gospel was already true. But Daniel's life gave Ethan a visible picture of what the gospel does in a person. Ethan realized that if Jesus really had changed Daniel, then perhaps Jesus could change him too.

****We don't make the gospel credible by being perfect. We bear witness to the gospel when its transforming power is visible in us.****

James writes in James 1:22 "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."

The passage of James read this morning from James 1:19–27 teaches that genuine faith is visible. It affects how we speak, how we respond when we're angry, how we treat vulnerable people, and how we live when nobody is watching. Both Daniel and Marcus called themselves Christians. But when Ethan wanted to know what following Jesus actually looked like, he looked at their lives. As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words, and isn't this usually the case? We may hear Christians speak about loving one another, yet sometimes their actions tell a very different story. They may be quick to criticize, condemn, or even persecute others, while still claiming to follow Christ. And when that happens, it can shape how people like Ethan see Christianity. They may not judge Christianity simply by what Christians say they believe, but by what they see Christians actually doing. Our lives can either give credibility to the gospel we proclaim or become a stumbling block to those who are trying to understand what it means to follow Jesus.

And that raises an important question for every Christian: If someone who didn't know Jesus watched the way we lived, would our life make them want to know Jesus?

I want to make it very clear. We are not saved by our actions. As Mackenzie likes to tell the joke, why is Jesus such a good goalie? Because Jesus saves. Jesus is the

only way we are saved. As we hear in Ephesians 2:8–9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” God’s grace, the gift of God. It is through our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, that we are saved. Nothing we “do” saves us. And this is where sometimes people will pin James and Paul against each other.

Paul will write in his letters about the righteousness of Christ. Romans 3:21–22 “But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,” Or 2 Corinthians 5:21 “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” It is through Christ that we are covered in His righteousness. We do nothing to earn it or produce it, but it is a free gift from our loving God. James isn't describing a righteousness that we manufacture in order to become acceptable to God. He's describing the righteousness that becomes visible in the life of someone who has already received God's grace. We don't obey in order to become God's children; we obey because, through Christ, God has made us His children. Our works don't create salvation. They reveal that God's transforming grace is at work in us.

James is not saying we need to do these things for our salvation. James knows the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, that we are saved through Christ. But he knows, that if we have received this gift it affects us, it affects the whole person. It's not about rules, do this, don't do this, but a change deep with us, and this change leads to a difference in us. It transforms us. We hear from Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17 "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" God makes someone new through Christ or in Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." God transforms us from the inside out.

Jesus also spoke on how hearing the word of God should impact us. As Jesus spoke in Matthew 7:24–27 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

When we believe in Jesus Christ we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, which guides, empowers and equips us through spiritual gifts, while producing spiritual fruit in our lives. The Holy Spirit works within us as the seal and guarantee of our salvation, providing comfort and transforming our lives according to God's will, becoming more like Christ. As it says in 2 Corinthians 3:18 "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit." This speaks to becoming more like Christ through the Holy Spirit.

And if you notice between this passage from 2 Corinthians written by Paul in comparison to the passage from James this morning, they both mention a mirror. James knows that God's Word reveals who we are and what needs to change, simply hearing it is not enough. And Paul takes the image of seeing even further. He describes believers as being transformed into the image of Christ as they behold Him. Looking in the mirror of God's Word is not just to see our flaws, but it is to allow God to transform us, so that we reflect Jesus more and more. Can you imagine walking by a mirror and noticing something in your teeth and just walking away saying, oh well. No, usually we'll spend some time at the mirror fixing what needs to be fixed. Knowledge wasn't enough, we had to do something

about it. And that is what James is saying. The Word of God is like a mirror that shows us our flaws. The longer we spend in God's Word, the more honestly we begin to see ourselves—not only our strengths, but our weaknesses, our sins, our attitudes, and the places where God is calling us to grow. For the Word of God to reveal things about us that we need to work on, we need to spend time with it - reading it, thinking about it, memorizing it, understanding it, and of course, applying it, or as James mentions, doing it. Look honestly into God's Word, see what God reveals, and yield yourself to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. As James ends this passage with James 1:27 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." Our actions should be showing this care.

And let's not forget what James mentions at the beginning of this passage. James 1:19 "You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." Sometimes we can tend to jump on things quickly, instead of slowing things down. Often a direct result of the culture we live in that's so fast paced, we feel like decisions need to be made on the spot or to get a word in whenever we can. But James reminds us, we need to listen, more than anything. Listen to those around us. As one of my Bibles mentioned for this passage, "When we talk too

much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are more important than theirs. James wisely advises us to reverse this process. Put a mental stopwatch on your conversations, and keep track of how much you talk and how much you listen. When people talk with you, do they feel that their viewpoints and ideas have value? "

And not only do we need to stop and listen to those around us, but we need to stop and listen more to God. Yes, God wants you to talk to Him, but he also wants you to listen to Him. What is God trying to reveal to you? What is God asking you to put down or to pick up? Where is He asking you for more patience? Where is He asking you for more love? Are there certain people in your life that you struggle with that God is reminding you that they are a child of God, made in His image? You see, we're often quick to defend our own actions, but what do we often think about the actions of those around us that we don't understand?

Sometimes the mirror shows us something we don't want to see. And spiritually, God's Word can do the same. Maybe it reveals anger we've justified. Maybe pride we've disguised. Maybe resentment we've held onto. Maybe words we've spoken that have wounded someone. Maybe a lack of compassion toward someone we would rather avoid. The temptation is to turn away from the mirror. But James says don't walk

away. Do something with what God has shown you.

Something we can all try: as we hear or see things that we don't understand, or maybe don't agree with, stop to listen and not speak...truly listen. What do you hear from them? Not just their words, but what are they "saying"? What is God asking you to hear? Sometimes when we change the perspective we see things in a whole new light.

If we're honest, there are moments when each of us has been Marcus from the story at the beginning. We've talked about patience and then lost our temper. We've talked about forgiveness while holding onto resentment. We've spoken about grace while treating someone harshly. The point isn't that Christians never fail. The point is what happens when God's Word shows us that failure. Do we walk away from the mirror, or do we let God change us?

We began with a mirror. A mirror doesn't change us. It reveals us. God's Word does the same. The Word of God is a mirror: it reveals who we are, but God's Spirit doesn't leave us there — He transforms us so that we increasingly reflect Christ. It shows us our anger, our pride, our impatience, our selfishness, our lack of love. But God doesn't show us these things so that we can walk away discouraged. He shows us so that we can bring them to Him. And through the Holy Spirit, God doesn't simply show us what needs to change. He

changes us.

So the question isn't simply, "Have I heard God's Word?" The question is, "What am I doing with what God has shown me?" Am I quicker to listen? Slower to speak? Slower to anger? More compassionate toward those who are vulnerable? More generous? More forgiving? More like Jesus?

This isn't a message telling us, 'Try harder to be a better Christian.' The gospel is not that we save ourselves by becoming better people. The gospel is that Jesus saves us by grace, and the Holy Spirit begins the work of making us like Christ. Our response is not to earn God's love, but to surrender ourselves to the God who has already loved us.

Because when the world looks at the church, they should see more than people who know the right things to say. They should see people who have been changed by the One they proclaim. Mirror, mirror on the wall—who should we be reflecting to those around us?

Jesus.