SERMON TOPIC: FAITH THAT WORKS

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Humans have been reading as early as 3200 BC. Reading is how we pass on and share information in the hopes to better ourselves and advance Humanity. We read to get degrees and build our careers; we read novels to find a sense of happiness and thrill and yet what I find interesting is how we will read all these books but avoid reading the most important book that can secure our eternal futures. That Book is called the Bible.

my teaching is based on **James 1:19-27 (NIV)**

[19] My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,
[20] for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.
[21] 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.
[23] Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man 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 the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.
[26] If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.
[27] Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

In this passage James mentions reading/engaging the word four times. James is telling us to read the word of God.

Even though the bible was created to be read many do not read it. There are many excuses we use to validate why we do not read but I only want to mention two.

1.The Bible is out of date that's why I do not read it!

Here are a few questions to consider before agreeing to this statement.

- Is church still relevant?
- Is morality and law and justice still relevant?
- Are human rights still relevant?

If your answer is yes, then I believe the Bible is not out of date because these things that we still see as important in society find their roots in the Bible. we are using wisdom and knowledge written hundreds of years ago to form society today.

The Bible is ahead of its time. It speaks of things that have happened, that are happening and that will happen. To say that the Bible is out of date is to say that the all-knowing God is out of date.

2."Why should I read if there are preachers to teach me? Or "why should I read that is the Pastors Job!'

Ezra the scribe

Back in ancient times (Old Testament era) there were no preachers. It was an expectation for every Jewish child to know and recite the Torah commonly known as the first five books of the Bible off by heart.

Preachers came into being because Israel faced a time of rebellion and one of the consequences was the neglect of the word of God thus creating a generation that did not know the Torah off by heart. So, as a time of repentance approached even though the people of Israel came back to God, they did not understand the word of God. It was out of this need that the first Preacher called Ezra the scribe was asked to step up and teach the lost generation the word so they could understand it and apply it. Ezra taught and preached out of necessity.

Preachers still exist and teach out of necessity but now that the word of God is accessible to everyone there is no need for Christians to rely completely on preachers to read and know the word of God for them.

We need to read it for ourselves because the bible is the primary way God communicates with us. The bible contains answers written thousands of years ago for questions God knew we would ask today. God has always intended for each one of us to read the Bible privately/ individually so that we get to know him personally.

This may be the truth, but the reality remains that most of us only hear or read the word on a Sunday because of the Preacher. This reality leads us to the first truth about the modern Christian's relationship toward the Bible and that is:

"We are in love with the spoken word of man more than we are in love with the written word of God!"

We post about how powerful the sermon was more than we post about how the Holy Spirit powerfully revealed the word to us.

Even Jesus read scripture.

Luke 4:17-19 (NIV)
17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:
18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus often said it is written and quoted scripture when speaking, this indicates that he would have had to read scripture to quote the scripture.

Was Jesus/ God incarnate born knowing scripture?

Luke 2:52 (NIV)
52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

This scripture indicates that scripture did not just come to Jesus supernaturally. Jesus had to read and memorise scripture just like all other Jewish boys that is in part how He grew in wisdom.

If Jesus is our example and He read and memorised the word of God than I think we need to do the same.

James 1:21 (NIV)
21 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.

The second reason we need to read scripture is because it saves us from the consequences that occur from not reading it.

Consequences

Reading the word saves us from being led astray by preachers who teach unbiblical doctrines that are self-serving to their own benefit i.e. "pay R5000 rand for God to give you a wife."

Acts 17:11 (NIV)
11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Do not just believe what you hear on pulpit read for yourselves!

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)
15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

Knowing the word saves you from experiencing situations where your faith is questioned and you are unable to provide reasons for your belief. Being ready to give an account could bring people to know the God you serve.

Attitude towards the Bible

Many view reading the Bible reading as a chore, something they must do instead of something they want to do. That attitude or approach towards reading scripture will render it ineffective in our lives. James aware of this, points out several key attitudes to have to allow the word of God to be effective in our lives.

- vs. 21, "Accept the word planted in you." This word in Greek is a hospitality term which literally means "to welcome". We need to welcome the whole word of God into our lives. We must accept everything found in the word the easy and the hard even the things that make you uncomfortable. if you have a selective attitude than you will surely not grow.

- 4. Be humble, willing to be changed. James says "humbly accept the word of God planted in you..." Don't act like you know it all. If you know it all, God's word can't get through to you. So remain humble and willing to learn.

Application

Reading is important but is it enough?

James 1:22-24 (NIV)
22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror
24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

A mirror is a tool with the primary function of showing us our reflection. It shows you what you look like as opposed to what you want to look like. Of what good is a mirror if you merely look at it and do not use it to make the physical adjustments needed based on the reflection you see? In other words, for what good use is reading Gods word and not applying the changes you learn from it to your life?

There's a story of a queen who ordered that all the mirrors in her Palace to be removed because she could not stand the sight of seeing how she looked in her old age compared to how she looked when she was young. Many of us do not even read our bibles because we cannot stand what it reflects about us when we read it.

Only a fool would look at a mirror, see things that need changing and doesn't change them. Therefore, it would be foolish to read the word, see what's needs changing in our lives and hearts and not apply those changes.

Many have fallen in love with memorising and knowing scripture but have forgotten that the reason for reading scripture is so that we apply it to our lives. We walk into church take notes, take pictures, mark our bibles with highlighters and are inspired in the moment, but remain unchanged for years.

The Fact is:

"We mark our bibles but it's time to let the bible leave a mark on us"

To go deeper I would say this:

"Instead of reading through the whole bible in a year let the bible reflect in your life in a year."

Stop believing the lie that reading the bible weekly automatically means that you are in Gods good books and you will mature. That is a lie! The only thing gained by reading is theoretical understanding. I cannot remember any un-applied theory in any field ever changing the world so why would you think that your un-applied knowledge of the Bible will bring a change in your own life!?

What Jesus says

Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

[24] "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
[25] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.
[26] But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
[27] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Just as faith without works is not faith, reading the word without applying the word is useless. We only experience the true power of God's word in our lives when we read and apply it.

There are many ways to apply the word of God in our lives. Today I would like to share a basic formula comprised of three questions that can effectively assist us in applying the word of God in our lives when reading the word.

When reading ask yourselves these three questions:

1. What does this story tell me about God
2. What does this story tell me about People
3. What changes do I have to make based of what I have read.

Answering these three simple questions can assist in applying the word practically to our lives.

James 1:25 (NIV)
[25] But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

James expresses that he who reads and applies the word will be blessed.

For clarity on this statement, this does not mean that God will bless you because you read your bible as if He (God) is compensating you for a chore you have fulfilled just as a parent would compensate a child for doing a chore. The blessing materialises if you apply the wisdom and knowledge granted to you by God's word.

The truth is:

'We spend our lives thinking God will bless us if we read the bible without realising that the bible is the blessing"

James has made it very clear that reading the word, applying the word and experiencing God's blessing through it should be every believer's priority. And I believe this is important because:

Without knowing and applying the word of God – your Christianity has no backbone. After all we know this:

"He who stands for nothing will fall for anything"

Luke 8:5-15 (NIV)
[5] "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up.
[6] Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture.

[7] Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.
[8] Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."
[11] "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God.
[12] Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.
[13] Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.
[14] The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.
[15] But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

This parable calls for refection and decisions. Today you decide what type of Christian you will be. Will you be the one who reads and applies the word but rejects it when faced with tough times, will you be the one who rejects the word of God in exchange for the pleasures of the world, or will you be the one who loves and lives their life according to the word of God.

Remember this while you decide:

To love God’s word is to Love God Himself and to reject God’s word is to reject God Himself.

Make the right choice

Amen.