

1 The Most Amazing Mirror . . . of them All!

James 1:17-27

2 Scripture

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (James 1:17)

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. (James 1:18)

My dear brothers, take note of this:

Everyone should be quick to listen,

slow to speak and

slow to become angry,

for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (James 1:19–20)

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 1:21)

3 Scripture

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. (James 1:22a)

Do what it says. (James 1:22b)

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 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. (James 1:23–24)

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 1:25)

4 Scripture

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue,
he deceives himself and
his religion is worthless. (James 1:26)

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. (James 1:27)

5 Introduction

Studies show that people check the mirror upwards of 40 times a day.
For some, looking in a mirror is simply a matter of gathering data; for others, it's to confirm the worst.
To this end, we can always find a mirror, and perhaps that's why we take mirrors for granted.

6 Introduction

We use mirrors for practical purposes and for décor.
When driving, good drivers check their side mirrors and rearview mirrors for safety reasons.
We use mirrors to reflect light.
And we use mirrors hopefully before going to a Celebration Banquet to see how we look.

7 Introduction

Our mirrors might be full-frame, wall-mounted, self-supported or full-length.

They might be square, rectangular, oval, circular or trapezoid.

We don't think much about the technology of mirrors, no more than we think about how plastic wrap, toothpaste or floss is made.

8 Introduction

But what about the mirror that the apostle James used 2,000 years ago?

His mirror was probably a piece of polished bronze or copper.

Whatever it was, there's no doubt that his readers knew what a mirror was.

9 Introduction

We need to go no further than the Bible to understand the use and history of mirrors.

In the book of Job, perhaps the earliest of the biblical texts, we read, "Can you, like him, spread out the skies, unyielding as a cast mirror?" (Job 37:18).

The women of the Exodus had mirrors, and on one occasion donated them for the making of a bronze bowl for tabernacle worship (see Exodus 38:8).

The prophet Isaiah, writing in the sixth century B.C., refers to "mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls" (Isaiah 3:23).

And the apostle Paul refers to a mirror in his famous essay on love in 1 Corinthians 13: "For now we see in a mirror dimly ..." (v. 12).

10 Introduction

The largest natural mirror is Salar de Uyuni, in Bolivia.

At 4,000 square miles, it is the world's largest salt flat, about 100 times bigger than the Bonneville Salt Flats of Utah.

And when water from the mountains floods this plain, the sky seems to join the earth in an impression of infinity.

It's one of the most remarkable scenes in the world.

However, there is a mirror that is more amazing than any of these mirrors.

11

12 The Perfect Law

According to the 20th-century Scottish theologian, William Barclay, God's law is perfect in at least three ways:

It is God's word and since God is perfect and there is no darkness in him, we know what it says is for our own good and is without bias.

Its purpose is to give us freedom from guilt and shame so that we can serve God with a clear conscience.

If we can serve God without fear, we know it will bring comfort to our spirit and the ultimate satisfaction for our soul.

But if you look into this amazing mirror and walk away, then the promises of God's word might not happen—especially if we don't through the obedience that comes through faith, do what it says?

13 The Mirror that Talks

Have you noticed this?

We also tend to talk to mirrors, or to ourselves in the mirror.

It happens all the time, doesn't it.

It seems that mirrors talk as they get us to talk to ourselves.

14 The Mirror that Talks

For instances, you get up in the morning.

You have sleep lines etched in your face like you slept all night on a waffle iron.

Your hair looks like it has been supercharged with 500 volts of electricity.

And those bags under your eyes look like they've just come off the baggage claim at the airport.

You stand in front of the mirror and take a look. "Oh, my goodness! That can't be right!"

Unfortunately, mirrors don't lie.

15 The Mirror that Talks

Yes, we talk to mirrors and mirrors talk back.

The wicked witch says, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"

And the mirror is, like: "Have you seen yourself this morning?"

16 Lean into . . . to see better

Have you noticed this?

When we want to get a better look at things, we tend to "lean in."

The same thing is true about mirrors.

17 Lean into . . . to see better.

As the late, great Yogi Berra, catcher and then manager of the New York Yankees, used to say: "You can see a lot by looking."

That's why we often lean toward the mirror to get a better look at ourselves.

The meaning of the Greek work, *parakupto* ("having looked intently," v. 25) is similar.

The word doesn't refer to a casual glance.

Instead, it implies bending over, or stooping, to get a better, perhaps the best look.

18 Lean into . . . to see better.

Here are a couple of verses where the same word is used:

"But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in (*parakupto*), he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened" (Luke 24:12).

"He bent down to look in (*parakupto*) and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in" (John 20:5).

It has been said, true practitioners of God's word are those who humble themselves and search for knowledge, understanding, and wisdom as if it was fine gold and costly silver.

19 Two-way Mirror

God knows the thoughts and intents (motives) of the heart.

The Lord said to Samuel,

Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, ... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance,

but the Lord looks on the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7).

Or as it says in Psalms, [God] knows the secrets of the heart (Psalm 44:21).

20 Two-way Mirror

And then there is this telling passage in Jeremiah: "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse — who can understand it?"

The answer comes quickly: "I the Lord test the mind and search the heart, to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings" (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

The word of God is perfect because when we stand before the "perfect law" of God, we're really standing before God himself, who sees us as through a two-way mirror, and God sees all.

21 Act on what you see!

To look in the mirror is a good thing, but only if we then take action according to the data the mirror has furnished.

Otherwise, looking in the mirror is a waste of time.

And, as in real life, it's pretty obvious to others when you go out into the world without taking care of personal hygiene.

It's not pretty.

22 Act on what you see!

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A Christian who avoids the mirror of God's word is not a pretty sight, either.

In fact, it's rather ugly.

23 Do what it says!

We become better versions of ourselves and the world becomes a better place when we look into God's mirror — the perfect law — and act on what we see.

James alludes to looking in the mirror when he applauds those who are able to bridle the tongue.

He refers to acting on what we see when he argues that a Christian who takes care of orphans and widows in distress is a practitioner of "true religion."

24 Act on what you see!

This is our call to action:

let us look into the mirror, and

let us act on what we see.

When we do, we will be better for it, and so will our church, our communities and our part of the world.

25 Conclusion

When Jesus gave his conclusion to his Sermon on the Mount, he told the parable of the Two Builders.

One builder built his house on the rock, while the other built his house on sand.

Many Christians when they hear this story will think that the man who built his house on the rock was someone who puts his faith in Jesus.

However, while this is true it's not the point.

26 Conclusion

The point is this and is consistent with tonight's lesson from James.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24)

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. (Matthew 7:25)

27 Conclusion

According to the Apostle James, when we listen to God's word and put it in practice, we will be blessed in what we do.

According to Jesus, when we listen to His Word and put it in practice, we will survive the storms of life.

Let us not be the person who listened and goes on his way.

For when the storms of life come on his house, it will not be able to withstand them because his house was built on sand and not on the rock.

28 Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall?

According to God's Word (Old Testament),

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? (Micah 6:8a)

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8b)

According to God's Son, Jesus Christ, (New Testament)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. (Matthew 22:37–38)

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Matthew 22:39)

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:40)