

Doers of the Word

Walk the Walk: James Pt. 2

I was on Twitter this week and had the misfortune of seeing two of my favorite pastors absolute dragged. They were both “trending”. Now that’s not that unusual – if you say anything worth saying, you’re going to make enemies in these contentions times. But I was struck by the fact that they were both talking about the same thing – the Bible – and were brutally attacked for it by two different camps of people. Let me show you.

First of all, New York pastor – recently retired – Tim Keller said, “Nothing more important for a Christian to do than to read right through the whole Bible over and over and over, at the very least once a year. You have to keep checking and refining your beliefs by immersion in the Scripture.” Ok, regularly reading the Bible is like Christian discipline 101.

But then a lady quoted his Tweet and said, “People who brag about reading the Bible every year are some of the most evil people I’ve ever met.” And everybody was off to the races about how dare Tim say that people should make reading the Bible a priority. What about making the communion table of the Lord a priority. What about the dyslexics? I’m not kidding. So these were people who reject a more traditional approach to the Bible.

Ok, then Atlanta pastor, Andy Stanley, tweeted – actually that’s not true. He didn’t tweet anything. But somebody went back and took a screen capture of a sermon he had preached *8 years ago* – I swear when the devil is in a bad mood he scrolls social media and reads the comments – but here’s what Andy – who again is one of my heroes and had a great impact on the philosophy of my ministry and this church – here’s what he said. “‘The Bible says...’ is not an adequate starting or returning point for many adults.”

Now if you came to faith – or came back to faith – at SWFF through our “belong before you believe” philosophy, you know that we take the Bible seriously, but we don’t beat you over the head with it. We understand that in a post-modern, secular context, you have to establish some relationship before the authority of the Bible becomes a priority for you. And that’s all Andy was saying.

But immediately there was outrage – OUTRAGE I tell you! – that “Andy Stanley hates the Bible!” “He’s not even a Christian so what would you expect.” And of course, this was a complete different group than was dragging Tim Keller. These were Christians who take a *very* traditional approach for the Bible.

So anyway, it made me realize just how controversial and divisive the Bible can be – always has been and certainly still is. And that’s good timing, because we’re going to talk about the Bible today. We’ve just started a new series looking at the book of James. And the book of James is a very, very *practical* book. It asks this question, “If you have had an encounter with God through belief in Christ, what will your life look like on the ground? What, *practically* speaking, will you look like? How does belief in Christ make a *difference* in real life?”

That’s what the book of James is about. And the passage I’m going to read you this morning addresses that practical, “how shall we live”, lens on the Scriptures – the Word of God, as it calls itself. Let me read you **James 1:18–27**, and then I’ll explain. *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. 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.

Now this particular text tells us something very important, that if you have a new, living relationship with God, you will have a new and living relationship with God’s Word, with the Scriptures. And that new, living relationship with God’s Word is marked by three things. You’ll be *humbled* by the Word, you’ll be *shaped* by the Word, and you’ll be *liberated* by the Word. Let’s take a look at that.

First of all, You’ll be *humbled* by the Word. See in **v. 18** it says, “*He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...*” which means the new birth actually happens through the Holy Spirit taking the Word of Truth - what the Bible says about God and Christ and you - and brings it home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So the Bible is actually the *way* we're initiated into the new life, but when the Word of God comes into our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit, we're told that makes us "*a kind of firstfruits.*" Now in agrarian society the firstfruits was the beginning of the harvest. When you went out to harvest, the firstfruits, which was the *initial* take of your harvest, was an offering to God. You gave it to God. You didn't use it yourself. You didn't eat it yourself. You didn't sell it and use the money for yourself. It was *God's*; it wasn't yours.

So you see what James is saying in verse 18; A Christian is someone - if the Holy Spirit has come into your life - who looks at the Word of God and says, "I no longer can live the way I want to live. I don't live any way I wish. I'm no longer my own. I give up the right to determine how I should live. I now put myself under the authority of God's Word."

One of the ways in which James pushes that - hard - is in verse 25, when he uses a term...Up until now, he has been talking about the Word of Truth, the Word planted in you, the Word of God. And then suddenly, in v. 25, he says, "*But the man who looks intently into the perfect law...*" That's a loaded statement. Why would James talk about the *whole* Bible and call it "the perfect law"?

We know there are *parts* of the Bible that are the law, like the Ten Commandments, but there are other parts of the Bible that are narrative, history, poetry, story; there are all kinds of things that aren't law. And James isn't the only one who calls the whole Bible law; Jesus does. There's a place in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, "As it is written in your law..." And then he quotes the Psalms. The Psalms are poetry. Why would Jesus call it "the law"?

And the answer is - what James and Jesus are saying by calling the whole Bible the law - is they're saying every part of the Bible is normative for us - as in to establish norms. Not just the commands, but the examples, the promises, even the imaginary landscape, the metaphors. *Everything* in the Bible is normative and shapes every part of us.

See, the Bible isn't just good advice. It's not just filled with best practices. It's not just things you can leaf through and say, "I'd like to have this; but I'll pass on that. I believe this; I don't believe that." See, we're not supposed to be up here looking down at the Bible saying, "I like that; I don't like that. I like that; I don't like that."

Actually, it's supposed to be the other way around. The Bible should be up here looking down at *you* - paging through you - saying, "I like that; I don't like that. I like that; I don't like that." We might say that the mark of a God-changed heart is you *like* to have God tell you how to live. Or even when you don't *like* it, you respect it.

Now you realize, at this point, we're on a head-on collision with our culture, because our culture says, "Oh, you can find nice things in the Bible, *but...* the *authority* - the one who calls the shots as to how I live my life - that should be *me*. I am the captain of my ship..." the culture says. "Only you as an individual have the right to decide what is right or wrong for you."

And here we have the Bible called the *perfect* law. What does perfect law mean? Not only it's all normative, but it's perfect, that is, there aren't parts of the Bible we can just throw out; there aren't parts of the Bible we say, "Oh, that's primitive, and that doesn't work anymore." I know here in Austin, very often, people will say, "I like parts of the Bible, but there are some parts that offend me." All right. I have two things to say.

The first thing is you always have to be a little bit careful about the interpretation. When I have people saying, "The Bible offends me," I say, "Well, what offends you?" "Well, the Bible teaches polygamy." "Oh, really?" I say. "Where does it teach polygamy?" "Well, Abraham had two wives." And I say, "Well, yeah, but what if that's a *bad* example? Just because Abraham..."

"Well, Abraham was a great guy." "Yes, he was a great guy. And he did lots of not-great things. He lied. He cheated. He stole. That didn't mean the Bible is teaching lying and cheating and stealing. He had two wives. That doesn't mean the Bible is teaching two wives is normative." "Oh." See, sometimes people get offended because they think the Bible is teaching things the Bible is not teaching. You have to do a little bit of thinking. It's called hermeneutics. It's called interpretation.

But having said that, even after you've interpreted the Bible properly, there are definitely things the Bible teaches that we modern people don't like. What are we supposed to do? Here's what I suggest you do. Would you please keep in mind that if you lived in a time and a place in which the only way people were able to survive was through family solidarity, if you lived in a century and a culture where people did not think as individuals but as family groups.

They didn't say, "Well, what's important is I get individually satisfied." Everybody said, "What's important is the honor of the family, the solidarity of the family." If you lived in a culture like that, and you read what the Bible says about no sex outside marriage - that's what the Bible says, "No sex outside marriage." If you lived in a culture like that, you'd read that, and you'd say, "Well that makes perfect sense."

But if you lived in a time and a place in which you'd seen members of your own family murdered brutally before your eyes, and you come to what the Bible says about forgiveness - how we must *always* forgive - do you know what you'd say? You would say, "That part of the Bible is *crazy!*" Now I know this; that when I put the Bible in front of typical people in Austin, they *like* what it says about forgiveness; they don't think it's crazy. And they *don't* like what it says about sex; they think it's prudish and regressive. Why?

Now do you see why, O Austinite, you find some parts of the Bible to be wonderful and some parts to be awful? Is it because of your brilliance? Is it because you occupy a perfect perspective that's universal, and it's not prejudiced in any way? No. You think certain things are great and certain things are terrible because of your social and cultural

location. We can't escape it. It's because of where you are, because of your experience. That's the reason you like this and you don't like that.

And I want you to keep in mind, a hundred years from now, many of the things you believe right now, that you think of as enlightened and up-to-date, everybody is going to think are regressive and outrageous and horrible. Don't leave any emails around for your great-grandchildren to read, because they're going to laugh at you.

And yet here I have people saying, "Oh, the reason I can't accept the *full* authority of the Bible is because some things the Bible says offend me." Well, think about this. If God really spoke in the Bible, if the Bible is not the product of this culture or that culture, but it comes down from above, then it would offend *every* culture at some point, wouldn't it? It would *have* to critique every culture at some point, and therefore, if it's the fully authoritative Word of God, *of course* it would offend you at some point.

If somebody says to me, "Well, I can't accept the Bible because there are some parts of it that just offend me..." So what are you saying? If this was really the Word of God, you and God absolutely agree on everything? There's no way God would ever say anything you'd find difficult or offensive?

Of course not. If it really is the Word of God, *somewhere* it would probably offend you. It only stands to reason. So how in the world can you say, “Because it offends me, I can’t accept the full authority”? That’s not how you reason. *Here’s* how you reason. Is Jesus the Son of God? Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? Then, you have to submit to the full authority of Word of God, because even *he* did, and there’s no way out from under it.

But if Jesus isn’t who he said he is, if you think he’s a liar or a lunatic, or something like that, then there’s not much use talking about the authority of the Bible anyway, is there? But one thing I *don’t* want you to do is to say, “Well, here are the parts of the Bible I like. Here are the parts I don’t like.” If Jesus Christ submitted to it fully, you have to submit to it fully. If it’s the Word of God, we *have* to submit to it fully. We have to humble ourselves under the full authority of the Word of God.

Secondly – how do you know if you have humbled yourself under the Word? - **You’ll be *shaped* by the Word.** In verse 27, we have a little synopsis of what a Word-shaped life and church look like. We won’t spend much time on this because many commentators have pointed out that verse 27 is a kind of summary of the rest of the book.

It’s a little synopsis, or summary, but here let me show you what a *fascinating* balance it is, and why it’s a sign of whether or not you or your community is Word-shaped. **V. 27** says, “*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.*” Two things. Did you see what they are? “...*to look after orphans and widows in their distress*” and “*to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*”

Boy, James is just channeling all the prophets. The first one says this. Over and over again in the Old Testament, God says, “Here’s how you know whether or not your religion is a sham. Here’s how you know whether you’re just a nominal believer who is going through the religious motions because you just want eternal fire insurance,” so God doesn’t condemn you. If you really are a person who *believes*, if you really have real faith, if you experience the grace of God, you will - all the prophets say - care about the poor.

So in chapter 1 of **Isaiah**, God says, (**Isaiah 1:13, 15-17**) “*Stop bringing meaningless offerings!...When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen...Stop doing wrong. Learn to do right; seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*” What is God saying?

Here is one of the signs of true religion. Here is one of the ways you know that you *really* have had an encounter with God. You care about the poor. You visit the widows and the orphans. You do justice for them. That word “look after” in verse 27 means “to advocate”. It says, “...to *look after* orphans and widows...” It means to advocate; it means to do justice for them. It doesn’t just mean to give them a handout.

But look at the second thing. Not only is the mark of being Word-shaped that you care about justice and the poor, but secondly, you keep yourself from being polluted by the world. That’s talking about inner purity. And here is another place in the Old Testament that says the same thing. James is channeling much of what the prophets say.

This is one verse in Amos. Here is where God is condemning a group of people. See what he says is wrong with them. This is **Amos 2:7**. He says, “*They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name.*” In other words, what God says is, “Here’s what’s wrong with you.” This group of people. “You don’t care about the poor, and you engage in sexual immorality.” And the book of Amos keeps them together, and the Bible keeps them together.

Now here’s why this is such a sign that you’re shaped by the Word of God, not by the world’s thought systems and ideologies. You see our current society is deeply divided along the polarities of “liberal” and “conservative”. Which is a little silly because when you actually study history you know that neither of those approaches is *always* right in *every* circumstance. Of course there’s more nuance to a wisely lived life than that. But a wisely lived life is – unfortunately - not high on our societal priorities at the moment.

We just want to *win*. And so picking sides is the most important thing. And so when I read the op-ed pages, the editorial pages, of the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* - a liberal and a conservative bent - it’s like two completely different takes on the world. Which is, by the way, one of the reasons I read both of them - to try and keep myself honest.

Well, you’re always going to have divides in politics and civil society, but tragically these divides have spilled over into the American church. So you have churches divided along these conservative/liberal lines. For instance, I can give you four major categories of “sin” – these are all well defined in the Bible, I could preach you a whole series on each of them. There are sexual sins. There are sins against life. There are economic sins – against the poor and the stewardship of the earth. And there are sins against “the other” – other races, other classes, immigrants, widows, orphans, etc.

Again, all very overtly addressed in the Word of God. And yet, basically every church in America is *focusing* on two of them and *ignoring* two of them. And which side of the social divide you are on is what sets the agenda. Liberal churches tend to talk about justice for the oppressed, but they get quiet about sexual lifestyles. Conservative churches tend to talk about traditional family values and be against immorality, but they don't speak up for the oppressed.

What are *we*, you ask? Well, we try to be a church that pisses *everybody* off. Because that's what the Bible does. The Bible steps on all of our toes. Because the Bible pulls these things together. And that's one of the ways you know our church, or you or I, are being influenced by the Word of God. The Word of God holds these things together, but the systems of the world, the ideologies of the world, separate them. Are we a church that sees *both* of these as the fruit of sin, the fruit of pride, the fruit of self-centeredness? Do we see that or not?

So that's one of the ways in which you understand that you're being shaped by the Word; you can test whether you're being shaped by the *Word*, rather than by the *world*. Now we're not going to go into anymore detail on that, because there's a whole lot more in the rest of the book of James about how these two things play out. Personal purity and social

responsibility. They go together, whereas, the world tends to break them apart and separate them.

Now lastly, number three, You'll be *liberated* by the Word. How, actually, practically, does the Word of God move you into a Word-shaped kind of person? How does it *actually* operate? We said we have to humble ourselves under the full authority of God's Word, then that shapes us, but *how* does it shape us? How do we let it shape us? And this middle paragraph in the text gives us four ways in which the Word of God can operate in your life day-to-day and change you.

And it's so rich and so full that I feel bad about how very brief I'm going to have to be, but here are four things. Let me read you the verses and then break into these four ways God's Word changes you.

Starting in **verse 23-25**, "*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. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this...he will be blessed...*" What are the four things? Here they are.

The first thing is you must look **intently** into the perfect law. This word is the same Greek word that describes Peter looking intently into the tomb on Easter Sunday morning. Do you see what that tells us? On Easter Sunday morning, Peter went to the tomb. He saw the stone rolled away, and the tomb empty, and the graveclothes lying there. And we're told Peter "looked intently" into the tomb.

Now what does that mean? Do you think Peter was looking at that tomb the way you and I tend to look at the Bible? Does Peter say, "Oh, I see. An empty tomb. Interesting. Let's see. What's next on my agenda"? No. His mind was going *crazy*. His rational faculties were working in triple overdrive.

He was saying, "The tomb is empty. What does that mean? What do those clothes mean? What else is going on?" He was observing. He was interpreting. He was applying. He was thinking out the implications. He was "looking intently". And that's the word that's supposed to describe how you study the Bible every day.

How much time do you give it? How disciplined are you? How systematic are you? How intently do you break a verse down and look at its parts and look at the paragraph and try to discern the outline of it and try to discern the basic point of it? How intently do you look into the Word of God? This is the rational. If you want the Word of God to change your life, that's the first thing.

But the second things, after the rational, comes the personal - you must look **personally** into the perfect law - because we're told here that to listen to the Word of God is to look into a mirror and to see who you really are. Boy, this is important. The Word of God ultimately is not a book of just abstract principles that you're trying to memorize, or you're trying to learn, the way you study a physics textbook.

We're told here the Word of God *shows* you who you are. It's a personal *power*. When you've moved into this phase of relationship with the Word of God, you sense a personal intelligence. You feel like the Word of God is really *talking* to you. You're supposed to be listening to it; it's talking to you. Why? Because the Holy Spirit - because God Himself - it's *His* Word. And He comes, and He *speaks* to you. And He shows you who you are. And He exposes you. And He convicts you. And He counsels you.

Because **Hebrews 4:12** says, "*The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, judging the very thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*" Jesus works much the same way – he *was* an historical person subject to the societal expectations of his times. And yet he *is* alive and wants to be with you through every dynamic of your present life.

Was Jesus man-made or God-made? He was both of course. Is the Bible a historical book or is it divinely inspired and “living and active”. Well it too is *both*. And you can access it with your rational mind. But you also have to let it deal with your existential spirit - with your soul.

Have you moved beyond the rational? I don't mean you stop the rational. You read. You study. You learn. Absolutely you wrestle with the hard parts. And then suddenly, it gets personal. And it's like the Holy Spirit is speaking directly to you through it. Does that happen to you? Do you know what that's talking about, to look into the Word of God like a mirror, and it shows you who you are, and it counsels you more profoundly than any counselor possibly could? Have you gotten to *that* stage? So the rational and the personal...

And then **thirdly**, the volitional - you must bend your will to the perfect law. Because the third thing it says is if you look intently into the law and you see yourself, and then you *do* what you see. See, that's in **v. 25**, “...and continues to do this...” And that means you keep at it. You keep at the rational, you keep at the personal, and you keep on trying to practice and do what you've learned.

You keep at it day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. You push and you press. You never give up, even when it's incredibly hard. There's a perseverance. There's a sustained commitment to bring the Word of God into your life in every way. That's the third thing you have to do. So there's the rational, there's the personal, there's the volitional...and finally...

What's the result? If you do all these things, it says you will be blessed, but it's more specific than that; that's pretty general. “Blessing”, what does that mean? It tells you it will give you *freedom*. You will find freedom in the perfect law. If you look intently into the law and see what it tells you about yourself and continue to do what it shows you, you will be *free*.

Now, right off the bat, we go, “Wait a minute. Wait a minute. How can a *law* bring freedom?” Now the reason we don't understand this is that you and I are modern people. We are products of the Enlightenment, that is to say, Western philosophy. And the Enlightenment defines freedom in totally negative terms. Freedom is the *absence* of restrictions.

Deanna and I went to the downtown library Thursday night for date night – sat up on the roof and read for a couple hours in the beautiful city skyline. And we love the library because it's beautiful...and because it's free! But the reality is it's only partially free. Because we had to pay to park. And try as I might I can no longer find free parking options anywhere around there. So if I could park anywhere I want, the library would be truly free. But as it is it's only partially free.

See, if you define freedom as a completely negative thing - the absence of all restrictions - then law, by definition takes away freedom; it can't give freedom. So how does this work? Well the answer is that maybe our definition is wrong. Here's how the ancients saw it, and here's how the Bible sees it. There's another way to look at freedom. You can look at freedom as a *positive* thing.

The positive definition of freedom is you are free when you have been released to be *truly* what you were built to be. You are free when you can *fully* realize your true self and your real nature. And the perfect example of this is the fish. Here's a fish. Okay, a fish has gills. And what gills do is they extract oxygen - not from the air, like *our* lungs do - but from water. And the fish has fins. The fins do not propel it over the land, but propel it within the water.

So here's the fish. The fish has water, and it has land. Where should the fish go? If you define freedom as the absence of restrictions, then you could say, "Well, if this fish is really free, you have to let the fish be on the land as well as the water." "Okay. Let's try. Come on fish. Exercise your freedom. Let's just flop you out here onto this hot pavement. Let's give you an hour there and see how free you feel at the end of an hour."

Of course, the answer is, unless the fish is *restricted* to the water, it loses its freedom. Because you see, freedom, if you define it positively is the ability to fulfill what you're built to do, fulfill your true nature. On the hot pavement, the gills don't work, the fins don't work, and the fish is *dying*.

But if you "restrict" the fish to the water, then it swims like lightning. It's got speed. It's got vitality. It's got strength. In real life, you see, freedom is not the absence of restrictions; it's finding the *right* restrictions. It's finding the restrictions that comport with your nature, comport with who you are.

Now when you look at the Bible, what does that mean? The Bible is the owner's manual. When you buy a car, you get the owner's manual. You open it up, "It says here I have to put oil in every so often. Oh my gosh, this restricts my freedom! I don't like that. I want to save money. Nobody can make me change the oil. This is my car after all. I am the owner!"

And that is very true. You own the car. You are free to do with it as you like. But you did not *design* the car. And so if you don't put oil in it, eventually the engine is going to blow up. That's just the nature of the car. So if you want to be free to drive, if you want to be free to explore the wide open spaces - obviously you're not driving in Austin - that freedom comes from restricting yourself to what the owner's manual says, because freedom is the right restrictions that comport with who you are. The Bible is your owner's manual.

For example, the Bible says you must forgive. Why? God made you in His image, and God forgives. If you hold onto your grudge, it might feel good in the short run, but you are violating your owner's manual, and therefore, you are violating your own nature. And if you refuse to submit to the restriction that the Bible says - "you *must* forgive, as you have been forgiven" - you're like a fish who insists, in your freedom, to be out there on that hot pavement. And of course, your exercise of freedom is actually the *loss* of all freedom.

And therefore, what this is telling you is this; if you use the rational, experience the personal, apply the volitional, and submit yourself to the Word of God, knowing the Word of God is not a bunch of abstract principles, but the owner's manual of your heart, the owner's manual of your soul - the only way you'll

ever be free, eventually, not in the short run - even forgiveness takes a long time. It's very hard, but in the long run, you'll be *free*.

Now we can't quite end there. No we can't, because I'd like to show you something. Martin Luther - the great Reformer - discovered that if you looked really intently into the law, the perfect law - the more intently he looked and the more it dealt with him personally and showed him who he was - the *less* free he felt. He felt condemned actually. Because the more he looked into the law, the more he saw how far short he fell.

You know, Paul talked about that. He said that the law said "though shall not covet". It's the tenth commandment. But the more he thought about not coveting, the more he wanted to covet. He says, **(Romans 7:10)**, "*I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.*" That doesn't sound like freedom.

You see "Thou shalt not covet" means that you should love God so much - so much more than money, so much more than friendship, so much more than human acclaim, so much more than success - that if you lost all those things, you wouldn't covet them; you'd be totally content.

Do you love God *so* much that, no matter *what* happens to you, you are content? No. You see, the more Paul, the more Martin Luther, the more they *looked* into the law, the *less* free they felt. They felt condemned. Does this not work then? What's going on here? Yes, it works. And here's why.

I hope you see that every single week I try to do these very same things to you. Have you not noticed that? First of all, I make you rationally look at the Word of God, and I show you all kinds of stuff. I make you look, look, look. "Look at this word. Look at this historical context. Look..." And you come out saying, "Gee, I hadn't seen all that." No. Of course, that's my job, to help you rationally look intently into the Bible, so you see all this stuff.

The second thing is I'm trying to get you to feel convicted. Just like it's made *me* feel convicted all week! I don't want you to just see stuff; I want you to see *yourself*. I want you to start to say, "Hey, this is pointing its finger at me." So I want to show you the rational, and I want to show you the personal, and yet there's something else you have to do. It's not enough just to look with your mind and it's not enough just to see yourself in the Word of God. There's something else you have to see. Do you know what that is?

It says, "Don't be a hearer only, but a *doer*, of the Word of God." Do you realize there was only one person who ever really *did* the whole Word of God? Do you realize there was only one person? Hebrews chapter 10 is all about when Jesus Christ came into the world and he said, "I delight to do thy will, O Lord; your law is in my heart."

Jesus Christ was the only person who never forgot what the Word of God said but **always did it**. We have 1,800 verses of Jesus Christ talking - 1,800 verses of Jesus Christ's words. And do you know that 10 percent of them are quotations from the Old Testament? Jesus Christ could never saying anything without quoting the Bible. He was *saturated* in the Bible. He looked intently into the Bible.

When the Devil tempted him, he used the Bible. When the religious leaders questioned him, he used the Bible. When he was facing the cross, he used the Bible. When he was dying... Two of the last things he ever said were, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and those were both quotes from the Bible; they're from the Psalms.

Here's the *only* man who ever *did* the entire Word of God. He did everything. In fact, in the garden of Gethsemane, when he was about to be thrown into the abyss, what does he say? "I'd like this cup to pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will, be done." Do you know what that means? "Thy Word be done." He was completely submitted to the Word of God, even though it cost him everything.

When you look into the Word of God, don't just see yourself; you must see the only man who ever completely fulfilled the law. In fact, Jesus says on the road to Emmaus – after his resurrection – he runs into some disciples and they are dejected and he says, "Hey, lighten up, this was the plan from the beginning. Don't you know?" **Luke 24:27**, "*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*" The Bible is all about Jesus.

And therefore, Martin Luther found out that when he looked into the Word of God, it wasn't enough just to see himself; he had to look into the Word of God and see the only man who ever fulfilled the law, Jesus Christ. And Paul found it too, which is why he could write in **Romans 8:1**, "*Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

Why? Because Jesus fulfilled the Word of God, he fulfilled the law of God, by going to the cross and taking the penalty we deserve for our law-breaking. See, there are two ways to fill the law. You either keep it, or you pay the penalty for breaking it. Either way, the law is satisfied. Right? Jesus Christ came and lived a *perfect* life and fulfilled the law once. Then, he went to the cross and *died* - and paid the penalty - and fulfilled the law *again*. He took the curse our law-breaking deserves so that we could get the blessing his law-keeping deserves.

"God made him sin, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." And only when you look into the perfect law and see the only One who perfectly *kept* the law, only when you look into the Word of God and see the only One who ever really truly *did* the Word of God, will the Word of God now not be an everlasting despair, because now you know there's no condemnation for you.

And now you have a whole new motivation for keeping the law. Martin Luther discovered it. Once he looked into the law and saw not just himself, but the only One who ever fulfilled the law. Now he saw, "Oh, I now want to keep the law to *delight* the One who did this for me, to *resemble* the One who did this for me, to *please* the One who did this for me, to *know* the One who did this for me."

His *motivation* for keeping the law changed, and therefore, the *effectiveness* of his law-keeping changed. He began to feel the Word of God being a medicine that shrunk his tumors. The Word of God was a light for his feet when the darkness engulfed. It was no longer a terror. It was no longer a burden. It was life itself, and it brought him freedom.

And so that's what I do every week. I make you *think* about the text, I make you *feel convicted* about the text, and somehow, I always get to Jesus. As I like to say, I'm a one-trick pony...but it's a *really* good trick! So yes, we always come back to Jesus.

I'm no motivational speaker. I'm not here to hype you into better living. I have one goal, Sunday after Sunday, after Sunday. To get you to look into the Word of God, until you see Jesus in it, and know that he sees you and he loves you and he has accomplished *everything* on your behalf and for God's glory. I want you to learn to see the gospel...and live the gospel...until you truly understand how free – in Christ – you really are.

Let's pray...