

## Left on Read: wk1 Do What it Says

Feb. 16, 2019

The ways we communicate have changed and continue to change at a remarkable pace. It really was not that long ago when very few people had a cell phone and if you wanted to talk to someone you had to call a landline and sometimes you had to leave a message on an answering machine and hope they got that message.

When I was a teenager the primary method of communication between boys and girls at school was done through passing notes-which honestly I hated because there was an expectation that you would eventually send a note back. It wasn't that I didn't want to communicate it was just such a hassle and my handwriting is terrible-plus there was always this threat from some of our teachers to read them in front of the class if they caught you passing them.

While kids today can't relate to the passing of notes or hoping that someone would actually answer a phone call...they totally get the pressure about responding to a message or sometimes how frustrating it is not to get a response from a message that you sent.

It just happens instantly now. Most of our phones have what we call "Read Receipts" in the text messaging which was supposed to help us not worry about whether someone actually got a message we were trying to send. It would say "Delivered" when it got to their phone and then when they open the message, as long as it isn't turned off-we know that they read the message. Some email programs do the same thing.

Then some apps began to do it, and the most prominent one that our teens use is an app called snapchat. There are lots of reasons for its popularity-including the disappearing messages so people supposedly won't know what you sent/said- it's part of what makes that app dangerous as well – but that's another story for another time....

Another reason Snapchat is so popular is that you can't disable the read receipts, and the app will also let you know when the person you were messaging was last active on the app. When a kid sees that the person they sent a snap to hasn't opened it but has been active on the app, some anxiety begins to kick-in. Feeling's

get hurt. Sometimes it's opened but not responded to-both of these things are often seen as insults.

There are some terms for it – “Left on Delivered,” or “Left on Opened.” This concept is what inspired the title for the sermon series we are kicking off today- **“Left on Read.”** Which is what it's called when someone sees your text message and reads it, then doesn't respond.

When someone doesn't respond to our messages it hurts and frustrates us. Part of the reason that it frustrates us is that the response, to us at least in some ways, validates our relationship.

When someone ignores our messages – we see it as a rejection of relationship.

We have a letter in our New Testament that carries that idea at its heart. The way this author sees it, God has given us his message through Jesus and that message demands a response; not just by saying that you believe it, but by demonstrating that belief by what you do.

We call it the book of James. The fact that we have this letter is really remarkable when you understand who wrote it. It was written by James, the brother of Jesus. Now James was not a follower of Jesus prior to Jesus death, burial and resurrection. It is likely that James was with Mary on an occasion in Matthew 12 when we are told that Mary and his brothers came and wanted to speak to Jesus. Mark's Gospel says they came to take charge of Jesus...

He is listed as one of Jesus' brothers in Matthew 13, as part of the reason the crowd didn't believe in Jesus-because they knew where he was from and who was in his family. Not that there was anything wrong with his family-simply that they were like everybody else.

But not long after the resurrection of Jesus we learn that James becomes a leader in the church in Jerusalem. You may have heard me say this before, but it's one of the most compelling reasons to me for believing in the resurrection of Jesus- what would your brother have to do to convince you that he was the Son of God? That's James – he goes from unbeliever to believer not because his beliefs changed –but because he saw his brother who was crucified live again.

Paul doesn't give us the details but he mentions in 1 Corinthians 15 that Jesus appeared to James before he had appeared to him. In Galatians 1:19, Paul tells of his traveling to Jerusalem a few years after his conversion to get acquainted with Peter and that the only other apostle he met was James, the Lord's brother.

James factors prominently in Acts 15 during the first church council to decide what they should do in regards to teaching the Gentiles who were turning to the Lord.

His letter, known as the book of James, is often a favorite book for people to study. One of the reasons for that is that it is really practical and there is not a lot of deep theology in it. That's not a knock or saying it's not important. There are some difficult things written in the book-but it's primary purpose is this core idea that I've been introducing this morning – that it's not enough to just know or believe things about Jesus; faith will look like obedience to what Jesus said.

So we will start in the middle of James 1 – then go back a bit next week to the earlier verses- but during this entire series we need to understand that this verse and this premise is what holds this letter together.

**James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

For those that don't think that's a terribly deep idea, keep in mind that it probably didn't originate with him either. Jesus says very similar things a few times.

On one occasion in Luke 11 Jesus had healed a man and some were accusing him of being an agent of Satan, driving out Satan – on the heels of his teaching and response this woman cries out about how blessed is Jesus mother for giving birth to and nursing him. His response was probably a little surprising – **Luke 11:28 "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."**

At the end of the sermon on the Mount – a passage that I talk about frequently- Jesus wrapped it all up in Matthew 7 by saying "if you hear these words of mine and put them into practice..."

What made someone wise-was whether they put Jesus' words into practice not if they could recite them, or nod and say amen...

I had a good laugh a couple of weeks ago with the volleyball coach because he said a Dad thing that I've said, and wanted to say many times. The girls had made a silly mistake multiple times and he was reminding them – and more than one nodded their head and said "I know." He said, **"Quit telling me you know and do it."**

James is essentially telling them the same thing. Then he gives a bit of a metaphor to understand how it works.

**James 1:23-25 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. 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.**

What is the point of a mirror? To let you know what the rest of the world sees when they see you. You want to look at a mirror before you go out in public to make sure what you are putting out there is what you want to put out there right?

I mean for some of us there is a point where we might say – "that's just gonna have to do." And there are some that are confident enough that they look at themselves and say "that's what we're going for!" But for the rest of us the point of a mirror is to look at it and see what areas might require a little attention.

If you're serious enough about it – they have specialty mirrors – something I wasn't aware of until I was married-that you can actually get some up close and personal looks of your face.

James says that's the point of the law – and pay attention here that's he's talking not about what we call the Old Testament-this perfect Law is the way of Jesus-his brother's instructions. In the next chapter he will call it the Royal law, and then quote Jesus, "love your neighbor as yourself."

He says, much like Jesus did at the end of the Sermon on the Mount – if you let this word shape you, you put it into practice you will be blessed.

That blessed word can get a little tricky these days. This isn't a promise of wealth and success. This is about being in tune and in step with what God wants to do in your life.

If you are to read James from beginning to end, you are going to notice that he has some pretty rapid subject changes – but most of them are going to come back and tether to this point he's making. So right after he does this he drops a line about keeping a tight rein on your tongue; what pure religion looks like-which is an action again... then he's going to spend a few verses talking about a common problem in the church at that time – which we will get to in a couple of weeks...and then BAM he goes back to this faith and deeds stuff again.

**James 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

This verse 14 is the one that gives the theologians a hard time and people love to debate what James is getting at when he says, "Can such faith save them?"

It is clear throughout scripture that you can't be good enough, do enough to earn God's favor. He talks about faith being dead if it isn't accompanied by action. The saving is done by God alone through Christ.

James is saying that faith should cause us to be obedient to the commands of Christ and those commands are not simply to believe something but to act on that belief.

To prove it he gives a couple of Old Testament examples. Writing to Jewish people who revere Abraham he makes the point that Abraham was considered righteous when he acted upon God's instruction to sacrifice his son Isaac. While

God stopped him from following through, it was Abraham's actions that proved his faith.

He then makes another point with a more scandalous story – **Rahab**. If you aren't familiar with her story-she was a prostitute in the city of Jericho that hid spies from Israel as they were scouting out the best way to invade her city. She believed God had given the city to Israel, but what made her righteous-what proved her faith was that she hid the spies and protected them.

It seems like such a small story, but she is mentioned 3 times in the New Testament. Here and in Hebrews 11 in what is sometimes called the Hall of Fame of Faith; and then in Matthew where he reveals 4 women in the genealogy of Jesus...and Rahab is one of them.

It's fascinating to me that James uses these 2 examples. The one every Jew would be proud of, the one they see as their founding father Abraham. And then he uses the one they really would rather not be part of the story. (The reason some people might be afraid of using one of those ancestry DNA things-instead of turning up to be related to someone who did amazing things-maybe someone repulsive- reporter recently found out his grandfather was bad news...) But this woman who had a shady past was commended for her faith.

In both of the stories it is their actions that proved their faith.

During this series we are going to look at a variety of things that James will mention and for these weeks we want to have some type of application – because according to James here-that's the point.

The tricky part for me here is week 1. What is an action to live out what we talk about? It varies depending on what stage of faith you are in or what maybe God is calling you to...

Could it be baptism – a public declaration of your faith

Could it be that there is a relationship that has been damaged and you need to take that first step in healing things – it might not go great, but do you take Jesus'

words about loving and forgiving seriously enough to write that text or make that call?

Where I landed for this week – is that we need to know what the word says so we can do it. This week, here's your homework- there are 5 chapters of James. This week-Monday through Friday, read 1 chapter of James per day.

As you read-take a little notecard and if there is something that you are prompted to do-write it down and make it your mission to do that during this series.

PRAY