

Beyond the Surface

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the importance of genuine faith that manifests in actions and the dangers of surface-level Christianity.

Duration: 37:02

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, James 1:26-27, James 2:14, James 3:6, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 1:8

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living out one's faith and the impact it should have on a person's life. He warns against the deception that can come from religious routines and urges listeners to wake up and truly experience salvation. The preacher highlights the corrupt values of the world and encourages believers not to conform to them, but to live according to God's values. He also emphasizes the need to care for the vulnerable, such as orphans and widows, as a demonstration of true religion that God accepts.

Transcript

Of all the apostles who knew Jesus, and all the apostles who wrote in the New Testament were inspired, probably the most famous two are the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter. Although John is right there with Peter. But you know, Jesus had three that he kept closer to him than others, Peter, James, and John.

James and John being brothers, sons of Zebedee. Paul was the apostle who came later, was converted miraculously, and wrote a good part of the New Testament, more than any other writer. But did you know that of all the people who wrote in the Bible, one knew Jesus better than anybody else, and that is James.

Because James, along with Jude, were brothers of Jesus. So Peter met Jesus when Jesus was 30. Paul never met Jesus physically, he had a revelation of who Jesus was.

But James grew up with Jesus. James was in the house every day with Jesus. He knew Jesus at 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, we know nothing about it, James was watching the whole thing unfold.

James saw Jesus talk, he ate more meals with Jesus than anyone. He watched Jesus relate to his mother, he watched Jesus be insulted and be shoved, or whatever. Now James was not a believer in Jesus, initially.

Isn't that amazing, you grew up in the house with Jesus and not believed. But sometimes familiarity makes it hard. That's why people come to church all the time, all their whole life, and never have a true experience with Jesus.

It's very hard for them to really find their way often, because they're so familiar with church and the things of God, that they don't realize what they're missing. Well, James did not believe, and the Bible tells us that when Jesus rose from the dead, he made a private appearance just to James, his half-brother, same mother, different father. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

He had a private meeting, we don't know what happened, but he said something, and restored, or ministered to James. James later became a leader, possibly the pastor, senior elder of the church in Jerusalem. He was called James the Just, or James the Righteous.

Tradition tells us that when he died, he was such a prayer warrior, that when he died, there were calluses on his knees, like camel skin, because of the time he spent praying. Paul tells us that when he was converted, Paul was, that when he went to Jerusalem to check in with these people who had been in the Lord before him, he had a private meeting with James, the brother of the Lord. Now James, it seems, his book is unusual in the New Testament, James, because of the way he grew up with Jesus, he had an angle that was uniquely his own, and it seems as if he picked up a problem that was happening in the church.

He saw a problem developing among believers, and he addresses it in many ways in the book of James. And the problem that he saw was, as Christianity multiplied and more and more people joined the church, James realized that form was overcoming reality. Tradition was getting more important than lifestyle.

Forms of worship were getting stronger than Christlikeness. Since James grew up with Jesus, he knew Jesus like no one else, as I said. So his book is very practical, because James says in his book, among other things, you know this one, faith without works is, well, why would he say that? Because he saw a lot of people saying they believe, but they had no changed lifestyle, they had no works to prove their faith.

So James wasn't preaching salvation through works, because the just shall live by what? By faith, but how do you know what's real faith? You know real faith because there's a change in the life, there's work, so James says in the book, you show me your faith without your works, I'll show you my faith by my works. He said, do you believe in God? Do you believe there's one God? That's very good, the demons believe that, and they tremble, but they're not converted. So he's the one who really divides the nominal surface stuff, the name of this message is beyond the surface, beyond the surface.

James was picking up this trend where people were talking about I believe, I believe, but there was no change in their life, and he was saying, whatever you believe, it can't be the way we started, because when you believe, there's certain things that happen in your life when you truly believe. How many say amen? So James talks about things like that. He's also the one who says this, don't be hearers of the word only, but be what? Doers of the word.

So what was he spotting? He was spotting the problem that people were listening to preaching, they were listening to the word, but they didn't do it, because brothers and sisters, even this day, there'll be a thrill when we hear God's word, when the choir sings, when carol exhorts, when Onage says something, there's a warmth that hits your heart just hearing the word of God, amen? But James says it can't stop there, otherwise you're just a hearer, you gotta be a doer of the word, otherwise you keep being stirred,

but you're never changed, as a friend of mine wrote a long time ago in a song. I'm so tired of being stirred, but never changed. So James, it seems, is angling at what's real Christianity? He says we can't lose what real Christianity is.

Remember in the Old Testament, there was the problem where they would go to the temple, they would sacrifice everything, but the people's hearts were far from God. With your mouth you honor me, but your hearts are far from me. So James is picking this up now with Christianity, that you can go to church, you can sing, you can lift your hands, you can open your Bible, you can say a prayer, but if it stops there and doesn't go further, James says, whoa, you've lost what this is all about, because I lived with him.

And how Jesus sang, and how he lifted his hands, and how he studied the Bible, and how he prayed, is hardly ever mentioned in the Bible how he did those things, those things are very important. What is known most about Jesus, how he lived. Christianity is not about going to church, it's about living, it's a life.

And going to church is supposed to affect the life, and if my sermons and the music and our meetings here don't have an effect in people's lives, then this church is in vain. So now, James is gonna cut to the chase now, and he's gonna tell us about some deceptions, because religion can become deceptive because you grow up as a Baptist, you grow up as an evangelical, you grow up as a charismatic, you grow up as whatever, and you get into this rhythm of going to church and hearing the word, and the next thing you know, you can deceive yourself. Here, he doesn't even say the devil deceives you, he says you can deceive yourself.

So James is very practical, James is not gonna give you a lot of flowery stuff, he's gonna go right to the chase, but it's inspired. So let's look at it, what it says to us today. If anyone considers himself religious, and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself, and his religion is worthless.

Now wait a minute, let me read that again. If anyone considers himself religious, now that word religious there is having the trappings and the forms of religion, and for us it would be go to church on Sunday, sing the hymns, sing the praise choruses, lift our hands, say a prayer, give an offering, study the Bible, those are the trappings of Christianity. James says if you consider yourself religious, not someone else considers you, if you consider yourself religious, but that person does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, that person is deceived even though he's the pastor of the church.

I told you James is brutal. James just comes at you, right? And James says, so you preached, so you wrote a book, but if you don't put a bridle on your tongue, the whole thing is a joke. No, that can't be, it is.

He deceives himself, his religion is what? Worthless. Religion that God the Father accepts, all right, now that was a negative in verse 26, here's the positive. 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.

That's the bottom line James said. That's revolutionary, isn't it? Religion that God our Father accepts as, God 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. You see the emphasis here with James is because he grew up with Jesus is that Christianity is about living what you do Monday through Saturday, not what happens Sunday in the church.

And the only way you can judge how good the meetings are on Sunday or how good your devotion time is or how good your prayer time is is the change that it makes in the way we live because without a change in the way we live, what are we doing this for? James says, no, I grew up with him. I grew up with him. You're falling into the trap of surface religion but where's the beef? Because I grew up with him.

I watched the way he talked. I watched when he turned away and wouldn't say a word. I watched when others gossiped and slandered and he would not enter in.

I watched when he saw someone who was vulnerable and hurting. I saw the way he reacted. I saw that with all the stuff going on in Nazareth where we grew up, I saw how he stayed somehow above the whole thing.

That's what Christianity is. I grew up with him. I know him better than any of you, he's saying.

Now a lot of us have so grown up with the forms of church, the forms of religion that we can't hardly break free to talk about what Christianity is really about because to us, it's like church. You say to most people, how are you doing in the Lord? Oh, we had church on Sunday. We had church.

Well, those things are very important. Otherwise, why am I doing this now? Preaching the word, worshiping God. These are things that the Bible talks about.

Praising God, calling out to God in prayer. But James is saying, if you just stop that, now you're into formalism, emotionalism, fanaticism, call it what you will, religiosity, traditional forms, but you're not breaking through and there's no changed life. So what'd you do it for? Because Jesus changed lives.

Come on, how many put your hands together? Jesus changes lives. And he's progressively always changing lives. He just doesn't change you once and you get saved.

He does do that. But then he's always working on me in all the areas that I'm not the man, the husband, the father, the grandfather that I'm supposed to be. So now he says this.

He says, if any choir member, any soprano, right? Any soprano thinks herself religious because she sings in the choir and has a Bible and reads it during the week and goes to church and goes to practice even on cold nights and practices and sings and does all of that and waits on God and all of that, that is beautiful. But if she does that and doesn't have a rain on her tongue, the whole thing is worthless. The whole thing is worthless.

I never grew up hearing that. I never grew up hearing that emphasis. No, no.

Some of the worst talkers were right in the church. I had friends in the playground that I played basketball who talked less than people who were in the church. I remember my little mind coming back from Queens when I traveled with my mother and a sister of hers and a brother-in-law and my dad and we're all piled in and we went out to visit some other relatives and who lived in Queens then and I remember my little heart, you know, virgin heart, just young, naive and they had visited there and everything was beautiful and everything was, oh, the food is so nice, so great to see you.

This is talking to their own siblings. And then getting in the car and coming back home, they tore their siblings and the family we had just visited and those were my cousin's families who I loved, tore them apart. That food was horrible.

How could they put out stuff like that? She looks horrible, but I just heard her say, you look so great. Come on, is that not commonplace? And I remember my little mind trying to put all those pieces together. I couldn't, I was naive, I was a kid because kids say what they mean and mean what they say.

You have to get older to become a hypocrite. Come on, am I right? Let's put our heads together. So James says, and he says more about the tongue than in any other writer in the New Testament.

You all know that in the book of James. He says it's a deadly evil. It sets a big forest fire going just to one little tongue.

He said you can tame every kind of animal. Nobody can tame the tongue. It's a great evil among all the members of the body.

And the thing about the tongue James is hinting at is you can sin with your tongue 24-7, but that's not so with other sins. You can't rob a bank anytime. There's a lot of sins you can't do just all the time, but the tongue, it's like, you can just sin with your tongue early in the morning.

You can sin at lunch. You can sin at dinner. And right before you go to bed, you can just make one little phone call or get on and send a little text to somebody and sin with those words.

You can just sin all the time with your tongue. And James is saying, I lived with him. Trust me, if you are quote Christian and you have no governance of your tongue, it's a joke because I lived with him.

His tongue was spotless, never said a word. He never said a word. Never said one negative word about anyone who wasn't present.

And when he had to correct someone as when he became a rabbi, a teacher, he would talk right to the people, never. See, the tongue can, you can get angry like we all have and say harsh words that hurt people. We've all done that.

I've done that. I regret so many words I've said. How about you? How many regret some words you've said in your life? Wave your hand at me.

It'll be good confession for your soul. They wound more than a punch. Religious debates can get like that.

Theological arguments can get like that. Now you're not trying to show somebody a better way, truth. You're trying to murder them with the Bible.

Have you ever met anyone like that? They use the Bible like a hatchet. Oh yeah? How about this? Jeremiah 23, two. How about that? Bam.

Yeah, and 1 John 1, eight, boom. All with the tongue. Not only that, you can slander and you can gossip.

Here, love covers a multitude of sin. Jesus was full of mercy and he's so full of mercy with us, right? How many would like Jesus to voice abroad in the earth now everything he knows you ever did? Come on, just stand up and say, I want Jesus to tell everybody everything I've ever done because I know he knows. How many would like that? Anyone like that here? No.

But we're quick to tell other people about other folks' sins when they're not present. You know, it's like that Michael Jr. who was here and made us laugh so hard and then turned the corner and made such a

powerful invitation for people to come to Christ. He was saying sometimes even in prayer, he noticed when he became a believer, people even in prayer could gossip and slander.

And Lord, as we're joining our hands together, we remember Sister Williams. She hasn't been in church in a long time, Sister Williams hasn't been. So we can hurt people.

We can talk about people behind their back. And then within five minutes, say hallelujah. This is what James was totally getting off on.

He was just, he couldn't understand that. You could talk nasty about someone and then in another minute, you know, you hear a song, you go, oh, thank you, Jesus. But that same tongue just destroyed someone five minutes earlier and James was going, oh no, the whole thing's a joke then.

And you can also curse with your tongue. You can not only slash someone when you're angry, use your tongue to wound them. You can gossip and slander.

And it's hardly ever dealt with by any church that I've ever heard of or been around. If someone does crack cocaine and is keeping doing it, we wouldn't serve in communion. The deacons would say, no, pastor, this person, I know they were, no, I just saw them shooting up outside.

Now they're coming in and they're not repentant. We would deal with that, right? Somebody was living an unbiblical lifestyle. No, I'm talking about unrepentant.

We would stop them and say, no, no, no. Here's what a Christian is, all that. But someone who talks, oh, that's just Sister Jones.

You know the way she is. She just talks. What are most churches ruined by? Crack cocaine or talking? Adultery and fornication or talking? And that's where James was saying like, whatever you've developed here, it's not the Jesus I grew up with because he never said a word, never said a word.

And we've all sinned with our tongue. How many lift both hands and say, my tongue has hurt me and hurt God and I need God to help me with my tongue? Just lift up both of your hands. So, this is James talking practically to us.

So he's saying, don't compromise your religion. Don't compromise Christianity. Don't give people a wrong thought about who Jesus is by going to church on Sunday and making a big thing about the Holy Ghost moved and this and that, and then you go and talk.

And then they go, that's a joke. Listen, the biggest, to me, the biggest hindrance to the spread of Christianity in our country are not evil spirits, it's Christians. Because we don't practice what we preach.

Come on, do I get an amen from anybody? That's the biggest hindrance in my judgment. It's not evil spirits and pulling down strongholds. There's that too.

But it's like, we don't make Christianity attractive because we act and talk too much like people in the world. So, James says, if anyone seems religious or thinks themselves religious and they don't bridle their tongue. Notice, the tongue needs a bridle.

You can't cast the thing out because you won't be able to talk to anybody. You gotta get, the little sucker needs a bridle. You gotta just, by the grace of God, let me just say this in closing on this part.

Notice that God is the only one who can help you with your tongue, but you and I have to give attention to it. Well, who's doing this, me or God? No, God's just gotta do it. No, God'll never do it unless you are purposeful about it, and I'm purposeful and say, God, sanctify that little thing in my mouth.

How many are with me? Say amen. Sanctify that, separate that, let me be quiet. But don't let me sin with my tongue.

In fact, James says this. You know you can tell the perfect person in the church? Not by Bible verses, not by the gifts of the Spirit. Gifts being moving, gifts of the Spirit is not a sign of spirituality.

We know that from Corinth. They had the gifts of the Spirit in operation, and we need them, but he says, you're carnal because you're fussing and you're fighting with one another. But James says, here's the perfect person.

Anyone who doesn't sin with their mouth, now that's a perfect person. He goes, that's mature. Someone who doesn't sin with their mouth, that's somebody mature.

Because you can grow in grace in so many areas, but that little tongue just keeps going. You wanna beat that thing down, don't you, sometimes? Come on, do I get a witness here? Am I preaching in another world, or are you understanding that? If you're understanding it, let's say amen to it. Wait a minute.

How many have ever had a moment like I've had at times in my life where you're involved in a group discussion or people are talking, and you feel tempted to say something, and the Holy Spirit warns you, do not say that, and you still say it. Come on, how many have ever had that happen? I just said to my mouth, shut up, and what in the world? I just said that. You've never done that, Sopranos? These are sanctified people.

I don't know about the Altos, but the Sopranos are sanctified. So, what is it look like, as I close? What does Christianity, real Christianity, not going to church, this is the proof that the church is doing something for you. He says, and here's the way God looks at pure religion.

Someone who visits or cares for orphans and widows in their distress and keeps himself unspotted from the world. James says, I lived with him. I'm telling you what pure religion is.

Now, it literally says there visit widows and orphans in their distress. But we can generalize that, of course, to say this, to reach out to people who are hurting and vulnerable and are going through stuff, and go out of your way to talk to them, give to them, pray for them, encourage them, visit them, I don't know, whatever. That is the religion that God says, now, that's Christianity.

Christianity, when it's really working in you, makes you suddenly like a magnet toward people who are hurting. And other people can't understand it because they're just into themselves, how they feel, what they're going through, and all of that, and we're all like that. We're all like that, starting with me.

But when God really begins to work in you, you are suddenly drawn to people who are hurting, people who can't make it, people who are struggling, people whose hearts are wounded. He's the friend of a wounded heart, they say. Okay, I know He is, but how will people see that in human form unless Christians are doing it, bringing encouragement? And there are a lot of people who just want the forms of religion.

They want a service, they want a sermon, they want to sing, they want to feel the presence of the Lord. But when the meeting ends, hey, it's back to me, myself, and I. My family, my problems. But James says pure religion and undefiled is to break out from your little circle and start looking at people, what were widows and orphans? They were very vulnerable.

Widows, of course, were gonna be hit upon, hit on. They were gonna be abused, taken advantage of. Orphans could be sold into slavery.

We're going back now a couple thousand years. And God always has had a heart, if you look in the Old Testament, for three kinds of people. Most people think the Jews were the only chosen people of God in the Old Testament.

But God warns the Jews, be careful how you take care of aliens, orphans, and widows. Because if you take advantage of them and they cry out to me, I don't care that I'm in covenant with you, I will come for you. I will visit you, not in a good way, if you take advantage of people who are hurting.

Aren't there hurting people? Aren't there hurting people? Do you have to go on the mission field to do this? You could do it today. You're not gonna run into someone in New York who's hurting, who's lonely, who's going through misery. But most of us see people only what they can do for us.

And if they can't do anything for us, then we just, come on, let me get on to the next thing. Because you don't know what I'm going through. I have no time for that person.

But James says, here's pure religion and undefiled, is when you start looking in to people's lives by the grace of God, and you start to minister to them in their suffering. You know, people are suffering mentally, people are suffering physically. And you'll not only run into them, but the Holy Spirit will prompt you.

Today, he will. If you'll make yourself open to this, if you'll say, God, use me, God will lead you to people who you can minister to. Just vulnerable, you can be wealthy and be vulnerable and miserable and empty, you can minister to that person.

That's pure religion. Now, to God, God says, what? You're reaching out to help that person, pray, love them, encourage them. Let me just tell you two things that happened to me just this week.

First of all, I just wanna say, whenever God prompts you, obey that prompting. I have failed in that. I lost a good friend this week, and on Tuesday, two days before he died, I was in Anaheim, California, speaking at a convention, and I was in the bathroom and I was washing my hands, and suddenly, I felt this strong impression.

Get on your cell phone, you have his cell phone number, and call Brother Dave and see how he's doing and tell him that you love him. And then as I dried my hands and I walked out, I thought, no, I don't wanna bother him. I thought he was in Colorado.

He wasn't, he was in Texas. No, I don't wanna bother him. He's got enough, and it was the Lord, I missed it.

I could've told him at least that I loved him. I could've told him he was an encouragement to me. Did you know that that man, he's never mentioned it here, and I've never said it, did you know that he's given something like 300, \$400,000 to this church privately? Would just meet me and hand me a check and say,

Jim, this is for the church, I know you need it.

And we did. I missed the prompting. Do you ever get prompting? Come on, anybody ever here get prompting? To call someone, to say something, to encourage someone? Maybe that was more for me than for him.

Maybe I'm being selfish. But whenever you get a prompting to say something to somebody, say it, do it, love them, hug them. Because pure religion and undefiled in the sight of God is to care for people who are hurting, that's all.

You don't have to be Mother Teresa and open an institution in India. All you have to do is every day just be open. And then God looks down and says, that's better than the song you sang Sunday.

That's better than lifting of hands. That's better than speaking in tongues. The world's not gonna be changed by speaking in tongues or by music, it's gonna be changed by love.

And all those other good things that I just mentioned, those are in the Bible. They're to bring us to the point of maturity where we bridle our tongue and we love people. So in the night that I was ministering in Anaheim, I was suddenly, I haven't told my mother this, I was suddenly burdened by a nephew who I've been praying for, my oldest nephew.

And I was like, to die. And I'm not close to him and we don't see each other, but nobody could help me pray like that except God. So I began to pray and pray and pray and pray, cried out for him.

So then I get home and I'm going through all of this emotional turmoil with the loss of my friend. And my mother's on the phone with me. Yesterday, and out of nowhere, she starts to cry.

And she says, do you know about such and such person, your nephew? And I went, the minute she said his name, I said, what? And then she tells me these physical problems and his wife's been sick, a lot of stuff, just had cancer surgery this week, I didn't know that. The minute she said it, I said, mom, do you have his number? No, I said, okay, I'm gonna call my sister. It's my sister's son.

I got a call on the phone there, got the number. I called him. We're talking to each other within 10 minutes yesterday.

And he, out of nowhere, just opens up. Not serving God as far as I know, but he begins to tell me stuff I didn't know what he's going through. And he says, you know, I'm looking to God, but I don't seem to get any answers.

So I had a bit of ability to minister to him. And I prayed for him 100 times, but now God gave me the open door to minister to him, to talk to him. And he's gonna come here next Sunday with his wife, or the Sunday after, and I'm gonna be able to help him.

But it just reminded me that if you're open, God will use you to help somebody today. Can we clap real loud and say hallelujah? Say hallelujah while you're clapping. And lastly, and lastly, pure religion and undefiled is to not only keep a bridle on your tongue and break out of me, myself, and I, and my culture, and my family, and all that stuff, and just start seeing people the way God sees them, and loving them in some way, helping them minister, encourage, pray, do whatever.

But he says, here's the other balance to that, is keep unpolluted by the world. Now a lot of people who are into holiness and not being polluted by the world have very little time for other people. And there are a lot of people who see the value of ministering to others, but they're very sloppy about how they live.

But here's what Paul says, and here's what James says. I grew up with him. I grew up with him.

Here's pure religion. Bridle your tongue, do good to others, and don't let the world stain you. Now to some of us, like what are you talking about? Well, the world is a very polluted place.

Satan is called the God of this world. The Bible calls this an evil world that we live in. That's a symbol, I don't see any evil in it.

Then you need to wake up. You need to get saved or get awake somehow. How many know this is an evil world we live in? Just look at the advertising, just talk to people.

The values are against God. Everything is sensuality, profanity, cursing. So James says you can't let the world squeeze you into its mold, as Paul says in Romans 12, and you can't be stained by it.

Otherwise, you'll know the next thing you'll be talking Jesus, but your values will be the world's values. You'll be worshiping Jesus, but your conversation will be like people in the world. You won't be separate.

You won't stand out. Listen, we're a chosen people. Holy, the word holy means separated.

When something became holy, when this became holy, it was said, all right, nobody can use it now. It's God's, it's holy, it's on the altar. That's holy now.

Can't use that for anything else but God's purposes. That's what the word saint means. They're trying to make one of the past popes a saint now.

All Christians are saints. All Christians in the New Testament are addressed as saints, and that means holy ones or separated ones. I used to be controlled by the devil.

I used to be just living for Jim Cimbala. Now God saved me, and now I belong to Christ. I'm holy.

I'm separated to him, and Paul and James is saying now, pure religion is to not only do good, but stay clean. Stay clean in your mouth, stay clean in your mind, stay clean in your body. Don't, don't, listen, when you walk through this world, you gotta come back and read the Bible and pray just to get the junk off you by taking a subway ride.

How many know what I'm talking about? You feel soiled by just even being at work sometimes. You go out to lunch with some friends, you wish you could scream, and you have to say, Jesus, keep me clean. Pastor Cimbala, come on, are you like old-fashioned, like be separated, exactly.

It's not old-fashioned, it's God. I don't want old-fashioned, I don't want modern. I don't want contemporary, I am not interested in anything contemporary, and I do not worship anything that's old.

Old is old, and new is new. But as my friend Warren Wiersbe said, if it's new, it's not true, and if it's true, it's not new. God's word is what we wanna go by.

I wanna be contemporary and use every method we can, but I don't wanna be so contemporary that I throw the Bible under the bus. I wanna hold to pure religion and undefiled. Let's close our eyes.

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