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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH
ELKHORN, NEBRASKA
MAY 1, 2005
PASTOR MARK FRY

1 PASTOR MARK FRY: To someone who works on
2 commission, imagine for a moment somebody who doesn't get
3 paid unless they sell, somebody who works on commission, and
4 there are some of those fine folks sitting here.

5 There are few more disheartening words from a
6 browsing customer than when in response to a polite, "May I
7 help you?", you hear, "No, thanks, I'm just looking."

8 Just looking. What it mostly means is go away, I
9 have no intention of buying anything.

10 Sometimes we go just looking because we are bored.
11 We cruise the mall looking in one shop after another,
12 simultaneously overwhelmed by the quantity of choices before
13 us. We are just looking.

14 Sometimes we go just looking to sneak a peak at all
15 those things that are beyond our reach.

16 Have you ever pretended to be studying the photos
17 of yachts that are for sale down at the marina, or the homes
18 that you'll never own?

19 Have you ever walked through the showplace of a
20 Porsche dealership checking out the latest models that you
21 won't be buying?

22 Maybe you prefer trying on diamonds or rubies, just
23 to see how they look on you.

24 If you are a Berkshire Hathaway person, I just saw
25 the other day several displays at Borsheims that are over a

1 million dollars each and if I was in there trying that stuff
2 on it would be, "I'm just looking."

3 Some people spend all their lives just looking,
4 Never willing to invest their energies or emotions or
5 economic security in anything because of the risks involved.

6 People who are permanently just looking drift in
7 and out of jobs without ever finding a vocation.

8 They drift in and out of relationships without ever
9 daring to love.

10 They also drift in and out of communities without
11 ever casting a vote or dropping an anchor.

12 They drift in and out of churches without ever
13 opening their hearts to the spirit of God or feeling the
14 pulse of Christ's living body. They're merely just looking.

15 Theologically one would say they are just
16 listening.

17 They are just listening, and unfortunately a lot of
18 us have been taught that's what going to church is; is you
19 just listen.

20 The text from James today challenges that, and
21 that's what I want you to think about.

22 I mentioned earlier today the Drake Relays. James
23 is like a coach who is frustrated that there are so many
24 spectators out there just looking and just listening.

25 He wants them to get into the game. He wants them

1 to get off the bench, get out of the bleachers, and stop
2 being bystanders and start being participants in the life of
3 Christ.

4 And so the writer reminds us that just hearing the
5 word, just looking, just listening, is not enough.

6 Verse 22 of James 1, "We are called to be doers of
7 the word; not just hearers of the word."

8 Faithful Christians must not just be looking or
9 just listening.

10 A life of faith demands hard work, that we work
11 hard knowing that God is in charge.

12 So I want to explore that a little bit with you
13 today, the whole concept of surrendering.

14 If you have your Bible, the key verse from the text
15 for this week, there are several actually, but Verse 21.

16 "Rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth
17 or wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word
18 that has the power to save your souls."

19 That's what I want to look at. How do you welcome
20 with meekness something that is like a word?

21 We are going to look at that a little bit and I
22 think the key word of that is meekness.

23 Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are
24 the meek, they will inherit the world."

25 And what he means by that is you have to get out of

1 management.

2 So we are going to explore that a little bit today
3 and my premise is it starts with surrendering.

4 We are human beings before we are human doings, but
5 it's both.

6 And James, he's frustrated, he's writing probably
7 in the first century and he's seeing a lot of Christians
8 that are pretty good Bible studiers.

9 They are pretty good at reading and listening, but
10 they are lagging a little bit in doing.

11 And so he's calling that and he's challenging that
12 and I think the same is true of us today, so that is where I
13 want to go today.

14 I learn so much from my friends that are in twelve
15 step programs.

16 The first three steps of a twelve step program are
17 like a three step waltz.

18 They are: I can't, but God can, and I'm going to
19 let him.

20 It's this three step waltz that I think is the
21 essence of surrender.

22 I can't do this, but God can, and I'm going to let
23 him.

24 That's surrendering to this imparted word, but the
25 challenge I think a lot of people have is they have done

1 that maybe once, or maybe even twice in their lives, but
2 they don't understand it's a constant continual process
3 again and again.

4 It starts with surrendering and it goes on and on
5 and on.

6 I can't, God can, and I'm going to let him. It's
7 this three step waltz and it starts with surrendering,
8 surrendering is all over the middle of it, and surrendering
9 is then at the end of it as well.

10 But some people think, well, I became a Christian
11 at a particular moment in my life, that was when I
12 surrendered.

13 And if that's the concept, then they are missing
14 out on so much, because surrendering really ought to be
15 something we are doing every time we eat food, every time we
16 draw a breath, because the breath of life is in us.

17 I can't, but God can, and I am going to let him,
18 and there is this waltz that goes all through life, and it's
19 a circle really.

20 It's this beautiful dance that God does with us and
21 there is a quote from John Ortberg, he's the guy who wrote
22 "If You Want To Walk On Water You've Got To Get Out Of The
23 Boat", but he wrote another book equally as excellent, by
24 the way, "The Life You've Always Wanted".

25 I would encourage you, if you want to have a summer

1 book to read, that would be the one I would grab.

2 I have several books I'm taking with me on my
3 sabbatical study and this is one that I go back to
4 oftentimes, because he has a refreshing way.

5 He says, "When Jesus came in the form of a servant,
6 he was not disguising who God is; he was revealing who God
7 is. He did not come as a servant, in spite of the fact that
8 he is God; he came precisely because of the fact that he is
9 God."

10 What that says to me is servants know that there is
11 a master.

12 But we forget that and there's something about
13 surrendering I think that is against the American cultural
14 ideal.

15 To surrender is not to be an American; it's to be a
16 French person. I give up.

17 We don't want to surrender anything, and some of
18 us, we have this triumphant kind of notion of Jesus.

19 But notice Jesus, he's the servant and he knows
20 there is a master.

21 There is that I can't, you can, and I'm going to
22 let you servant willingly surrendering to the master's will,
23 and they get out of the management.

24 Jesus is doing that all the time. "Father, I
25 really don't know what to do. If it be your will take this

1 cup away from me." That's surrender.

2 "So when Jesus is a servant, he's showing exactly
3 what God looks like."

4 I like that quote. When Jesus took the little
5 child in his arms, it wasn't for the benefit of the child;
6 it was for the benefit of the disciples.

7 When he says, "Bring the little children to me,
8 don't stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom
9 of heaven belongs," it's not for the child's benefit; it's
10 for the disciples to realize that's what the essence of
11 being a disciple is about.

12 It's being held. It's being held accountable by
13 God.

14 It's being lovingly embraced and being held and
15 then to go and hold others.

16 It's a circle, and it's about surrendering. I
17 can't do this, I need to let God embrace me, and he can, and
18 I'm going to let him.

19 That's the rhythm of this, being held and going and
20 holding and all that.

21 So this kind of gets us a little closer to where I
22 want to be to start the whole business of James 1.

23 There's a great quote from George Carlin. He has
24 kind of gone off the deep end, but he's pretty sharp.

25 I like him a lot, because he tells it like he sees

1 it.

2 He says, "Life is not measured by the number of
3 breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath
4 away."

5 And I put that into surrender language of the
6 number of times that we breathe deep, but also exhale.

7 Life is not measured by the number of breaths we
8 take, it's by the number of times that you realize I'm out
9 of management on this thing, and God did this remarkable
10 wonderful thing in the world without me, and how could he do
11 it without asking me first kind of a thing, but that's where
12 it's going.

13 And I have a song I want to reference it by called
14 "Surrender" by Ashley Simpson.

15 A lot of us don't even know who Ashley Simpson is.
16 She has been ripped a lot in the media.

17 She is the gal who kind of flamed a little bit
18 during the national championship football game.

19 But believe it or not she even has some good things
20 to say.

21 "Open up your eyes

22 Dont you know you're only wasting time

23 Oh, you drive me crazy

24 Oh, you just bring me down

25 Look out your window

1 My sunshine is all around
2 All you have to do us just surrender
3 Just surrender"

4
5 That is what God is saying through James. You
6 guys, open up your eyes, you're only wasting your time.

7 Open up your eyes. You're driving me nuts. You're
8 just bringing me down.

9 Look out your window. My sunshine is all around,
10 but you have to surrender. Get out of management.

11 That's James. He is frustrated that people are
12 just looking and just listening and so he has some advice
13 for us as our hope, so that is setting the stage.

14 James 1, page 219, I think, if you have a different
15 page, then God bless you, you have a different Bible than I
16 am, and I hope you brought your own.

17 There was a neat email from somebody last week
18 about bringing Bibles, she's really being blessed by
19 bringing her own Bible. I encourage you to do that.

20 I'm going to walk through these verses with you for
21 a few moments and try to shine a little light on this about
22 getting out of the management.

23 Notice James's philosophy right away in Verse 17.
24 "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is
25 from above."

1 What he's saying is when you give something, it
2 isn't you; it's God doing it.

3 And, again, we get into this notion that this is my
4 stuff and I can allocate it and give it out to the people I
5 want.

6 That's totally contradictory to the Bible's
7 understanding of what stuff is. It's God's stuff.

8 We are stewards of it and when we move it around
9 it's God moving it through us.

10 And so he's urging these people to not just be
11 hearers, but also givers.

12 Try to look like God and give things, because when
13 you do, it's God working through you.

14 "Coming down from the Father of lights, with whom
15 there is no variation or shadow due to change."

16 In other words, your giving isn't going to change
17 God; it's going to change you, and it's going to open your
18 eyes a little bit.

19 Verse 18. "In fulfillment of his own purpose he
20 gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become
21 a kind of first fruits of his creatures."

22 Again, stewardship talk, that the first things that
23 God gives us we should be giving back and we should be
24 giving away.

25 I have some friends that are really good givers.

1 I have friends that try to out do one another in giving.

2 And they're the ones that will battle you for the
3 check every time you have lunch with them.

4 And then there is almost a sense of great joy in
5 those people.

6 Those are people who are imitating God. They are
7 giving, without expectation of being rewarded for it.

8 My best example of that was a guy, if you didn't
9 have the privilege of meeting Dr. Paul Bender.

10 He had it down like a science. He was the most
11 generous guy. He died a few years ago of a brain tumor.

12 And Paul just gave and he surprised my son and I
13 one time when we were with him in the car and we went to the
14 drive-up window and he just handed all the money back to my
15 son Adrian, who was a little kid at a time, he goes, "Here,
16 Adrian."

17 And Paul just looks at me and said, "Isn't that
18 fun?"

19 Yes, Paul. Thank you for teaching me. But that's
20 God, you see, when we do that.

21 And so Verse 19, "You must understand this, my
22 beloved. Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak,
23 and slow to anger."

24 This should be Grandma Fry in quotes on this. She
25 had this great quote:

1 "God has given you two ears and one mouth. You
2 should listen twice as much as you talk," and that's what
3 that should be.

4 And notice that's surrendering also because we are
5 tempted to put words in there and fill up the silence.

6 So we are supposed to listen, be quick to listen,
7 slow to speak, slow to anger.

8 If you look up slow to anger in a concordance,
9 that's one of God's main attributes.

10 "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger,
11 and abounding in steadfast love." Psalm 108, Verse 8.

12 Psalm 145, Verse 8, "The Lord is gracious, slow to
13 anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

14 Slow to anger. If you have some anger issues I
15 would encourage you to listen more, slow down, instead of
16 we're in this competitive respond right away.

17 That doesn't work. It's just the opposite. In
18 fact, notice what James says.

19 "For your anger does not produce God's
20 righteousness."

21 In fact the opposite. It produces God's wrath,
22 when we are mad, when we are going off half-cocked.

23 That's what he's saying. This is what it's all
24 about, guys.

25 "Therefore, rid yourselves of all sordidness and

1 rank growth or wickedness, welcome with meekness," key word,
2 meekness, "meditate on it day and night."

3 It's estimated that the average rabbinical student
4 in the time of Jesus had the whole first five books of the
5 Bible, the Psalms, and the prophets memorized.

6 That's amazing to me. They didn't have books and
7 so how they would meditate on the law of the Lord is they
8 would sing it to one another.

9 "Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the
10 Lord."

11 They would do stuff like that, so they would have
12 that imparted and implanted in their heart and soul, and lo
13 and behold then they are slower to anger, slower to speak,
14 quicker to listen, all that kind of stuff starts happening.

15 Verse 22, "Be doers of the word, not merely hearers
16 who deceive themselves."

17 This is kind of a cool verse. "If any are hearers
18 of the word and not doers they are like those who look at
19 themselves in the mirror."

20 My example of this is last Monday, my wife was out
21 of town, she was in Montana visiting her sister whom she
22 hasn't seen in four years, our little nieces, one of them is
23 driving now, I'm glad I wasn't there, I would have been
24 absolutely white-knuckled, but Kirsten now is a driver and
25 Wenda was out there with our two nieces and their mom and

1 her new husband and they were in the mountains.

2 I went in on Monday. I don't call ahead for
3 haircuts. I just don't do it. I'm not organized enough.

4 So on my day off I go into the mall, I walk right
5 up and I sign in. I need a haircut.

6 The gal is great, I don't remember what her name
7 was, but she gave me a good haircut I thought.

8 And I was done and she said, "All right, check it
9 out," and puts the mirror in the back of my head and I
10 could see my bald spot and all that kind of stuff.

11 Then she spins me around, "Do you put anything in
12 your hair?"

13 I said, "No."

14 "You should."

15 (Laughter)

16 And she is kind of giving me the sales pitch. "Why
17 is that?"

18 She said, "You really should. You are getting to
19 the age you should put something in your hair."

20 (Laughter)

21 I said, "What is it I should put in my hair?"

22 She hands me this bottle of this stuff, twelve
23 bucks.

24 It's called Crew, and it's texture cream, and I
25 don't like looking in the mirror for one thing, which is one

1 of my problems, but when I look in the mirror now I have
2 something different, because now I have this fancy stuff in
3 my hair.

4 She said, "When you are out, I don't know what you
5 do for a living, but probably you don't want to go in
6 somewhere and have your hair all messed up."

7 And I say, "That's why I keep it short. I just dry
8 it off and go."

9 She said, "Put some of this in. It's for control
10 and shine."

11 Notice the concept of that. Control. We are
12 control freaks. And shine.

13 And here is my little metaphor of that. We spend
14 too much time looking in the mirror.

15 We have to get out of control. And we are supposed
16 to shine.

17 And that's where James is getting real prophetic
18 there.

19 He says, "They are like those people who look at
20 themselves in the mirror. They look at themselves and on
21 going away they immediately forget what they were like."

22 They didn't have mirrors in the time this was
23 written.

24 So mirrors were a very precious commodity. They
25 weren't invented I think until the 8th century.

1 So if they ever saw themselves in a reflection it
2 was a very fleeting moment.

3 It would be like in a calm piece of water or off a
4 chalice or something, and most people didn't have that kind
5 of equipment that shined.

6 They didn't have glass, and so in those days when
7 you looked in the mirror you were like whoa, and you walked
8 away and you forgot what you looked like, you were so
9 impressed.

10 Now we have almost been enticed into looking in the
11 mirror so much we fall in love with ourselves in some ways.

12 In a lot of homes the first thing right behind the
13 door where you take your coat off and put your coat on
14 there's a mirror.

15 We want to look good and we buy stuff to make us
16 look good.

17 But notice the texture, that's what James is asking
18 for, he says for control, surrender, get out of control, and
19 shine a little bit.

20 So I like that metaphor. I thought that was cool,
21 and God doesn't make junk, but God forgives junk, so when we
22 look in the mirror we can say I'm not Tom Cruise, but God
23 loves me, it's an undying love, and he can help me.

24 I can't be Tom Cruise, but God doesn't want me to
25 be Tom Cruise, and I'm going to let him.

1 I love Verse 25, "They Look into the perfect law."
2 If you have your own Bible I would circle perfect law and
3 put it right up there by perfect gift in Verse 17, because
4 the perfect law is the law when Jesus is in it.

5 In other words, the Bible only comes true when
6 interpreted through the lens of Jesus, and that's what James
7 is teaching us.

8 "But those who look into the perfect law," that is
9 the law of liberty, the law of freedom, not captivity,
10 that's the Bible, when it's understood through the lens of
11 Jesus, that's what he's saying, "and they persevere, being
12 not hearers who forget, but doers who act, they will be
13 blessed in their doing."

14 It's a process. They are going to be blessed in
15 the three step waltz. That's what is going on.

16 And then it gets real practical over in 26. "If
17 any think they are religious," I love that when they call
18 people religious, it's not exactly a term of endearment,
19 "and they don't bridle their tongues but deceive their
20 hearts, their religion is worthless."

21 In other words, what God is teaching us is that
22 what comes out of our mouths is very important and if you've
23 got all kinds of blue smoke coming out whenever you talk,
24 then that's not being religious in the good sense of the
25 word.

1 It's being like loose lips sink ships, so we are
2 called to talk-the-talk as well as walk-the-walk.

3 "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the
4 Father is this: To care for orphans and widows in their
5 distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

6 I love that. Unsustained by the world. How do we
7 do that, because this world is into appearance, and it's
8 into hair care products, it's into all this other stuff.

9 How do we do that? We do that by surrendering.
10 That's the way we do it.

11 And I love the care for orphans and widows. If you
12 don't know where any orphans or widows are you are not
13 looking very hard, because there are orphans all around.

14 There was an article in the paper about this family
15 who had sixty different foster children in the last several
16 years, the O'Dell family from right around here, they just
17 had a terrible tragedy, pray for them.

18 A kid was killed in a car accident and the other
19 boy is in jail.

20 But we need to reach out to orphans and widows.
21 That's part of what the Bolivian Street Children project is,
22 too.

23 There is a kid named Juan Carlos. He's writing to
24 Christina now, they're pen pals now, and she is going to
25 meet him when she goes over there.

1 PASTOR FRY: Now is the time. Thanks, Mrs. M. I
2 conclude with a quote, "The earth is not a collection of
3 objects, but a communion of subjects."

4 And if you are an English-minded person you know
5 objects are passive, they aren't action.

6 The subjects are those that are in activity.
7 Being doers of the word.

8 What I want you to know is now is the time. The
9 kids sang the great little song, and just to return to my
10 metaphor of this texture cream stuff, it's called Crew.

11 Did you know God has you on his crew? You're in
12 his crew, his posse. You are supposed to hang with him and
13 you're supposed to have some texture.

14 You are not supposed to be sitting in the bleachers
15 and cheering other people on; you are supposed to be doers
16 of the word, not just hearers.

17 You are not supposed to be just looking or just
18 listening.

19 You are supposed to be running the race of faith
20 and getting out of control and shining.

21 So let's pray together and then we will sing and
22 then we'll go do.

23 Lord, it's easier said than done when we are called
24 to surrender, because we are Americans, we don't give up
25 easily.

1 But yet, Lord, that's the way you've created us.
2 You know we don't give up easily, but you know we need to
3 give up completely.

4 We need to turn our car keys, our wallets, our
5 families, our lives, everything over to you, because we are
6 in your crew.

7 Thank you, Lord, for these family and friends. We
8 ask, Lord, that we might surrender today and say we're
9 sorry; that we might say thank you, Lord.

10 Now please send us from this place to shine. Thank
11 you, Lord, for this new day, this new beginning, the
12 awareness that we are called to be doers, not just hearers,
13 and we should be quicker to listen, slower to talk, slower
14 to get angry.

15 So send us from this place to be light in a dark
16 world. For we pray this in the name of Christ our Lord.
17 Amen.

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