

James 1:21-25. Preached at Memphis Annual Conference - June 2, 2019

It's ok to talk to yourself; it's even ok to answer yourself..But when you ask yourself to repeat what you just said, you have a problem!

How many of you forgot something as you prepared to come to the Memphis Conference? How many of you walk around proudly with your membership to the CRS (Can't remember stuff)Club? Have you ever gone through a drive-thru restaurant, placed your order, paid at the first window and drove off without picking up your order? How many of you have never ever forgotten anything? I hate getting flashbacks from the things I don't want to remember. But I would like to share such a memory with you. Many years ago when I was a rather young mother, I was on my way to church, and I was so excited because my children and our youth were leading worship on that particular Sunday. We had sung our gospel songs, prayed and reviewed what each one was going to say. As I parked my car directly in front of the church I had one final review with each one as they recited their Bible verses and scripted lines they had prepared to say, while my 3 and half year old was asleep on the back seat. But then I realized that it was later than what I thought so we began picking up our script, bible and books to make a quick exit from the car. As we were walking quickly to the door, I stopped and said "wait" I think we're forgetting something. My girls looked perplexed and confused, but then I realized that in all our busyness and preparation, I had

forgotten my son asleep in the backseat. As I turned to run back to the car, my son was awake, looking out the window, wild-eyed with tears running down his face. I opened the door and grabbed him and hugged him, kissed him, and told him I was so sorry. And, my son said, Mommy you left me. Tears started flowing from my eyes because to hear that hurt me worse than anyone could imagine. I held him close and assured him of my love and how sorry I was. He kissed and hugged me and I could only do the same. But in that moment, I felt so very guilty, ashamed, hurt, angry, and frustrated because I realized that this could have been avoided if I had just paid attention. Because of all of the business of the church and the need for perfect recitation of Scripture that I had on my mind, I became distracted, lost focus, and forgot how to really embody **the word**. **And**, as I thought about my actions, I reflected on my son's tears. I wonder how many times has the Lord wept because we forgot the power of the word and failed to be doers of word—failed to practice faithful discipleship, failed to show love and compassion. It is that forgetfulness which is the great trap James is trying to warn us about, often we don't act or move into action on scriptures, revelations or insights because we get busy or distracted or enamored by the next revelation, insight, prophecy, interpretation or what group do we align ourselves with, or whatever else gets our attention. When we read James 1:23 we take for granted the word "mirror." For the people, James was originally writing about a mirror which was not a common

household item. They didn't have a bathroom with one; they didn't have one in their purse or on their smart phone where we can flip the camera. No, to them, a mirror was something rare, and in that culture it would have not been a clear glass mirror but a slab of polished bronze. No matter how much it was polished it would always give a distorted view of the subject, so it is easy to see how someone could forget what they looked like. Even though we have high quality mirrors today, in our minds we are still prone to looking at ourselves through warped reflections. I am reminded of a time when my sister and I decided it was time for us to create a new hairstyle for ourselves. My sister was having a difficult time in trying to get the front part of her hair to lie down and stay in place, so becoming so exasperated my sister grabbed the scissors and cut the front part of her hair to her scalp while the other remained long. She turned and looked at me and said, "Now, I look better." I was horrified. She actually looked awful, but she thought, or so she said, she looked better. But that's what we do, isn't it? We justify something that looks odd by saying that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." But, do we forget that Jesus is also a beholder of our reflection? But, let us remember not only our reflection but our true image. What does the Lord see when he does indeed gaze upon us? Does the Lord see us doing anything about all the rage, and hate that is so prevalent today? All of the tears, screams? Both of these feelings are often grounded in evil, destructive, and paralyzing words and actions. In fact, rage is

witnessed each and everyday. On this past Friday, we witnessed again how rage can and does manifest itself in the worst case scenario as we learned that 12 had been killed and four others had been wounded by a disgruntled employee at a municipal center in Virgin Beach. Did we pause and pray or did a spirit of indifference consume us as we moved to the next thing? Hate is no different from rage and it seems to be gaining strength as reported hate crimes increased 17 percent (7100) last year, 2018, for the third consecutive year motivated by race and ethnicity. So, given these acts of violence, what do our reflections reveal? Does our reflection reveal that we do indeed love our neighbors through both our actions and deeds or are we still prone to forgetfulness, we lose sight of who we are in God's eyes and we disconnect our hands from our heart. Jesus has an expectation for us to follow His words and put them to work in our lives and world. Our actions confirm our beliefs, what we say and do are rooted in our heart and in what we really believe about God, ourselves and the world at large. If we claim to love, honor and serve Jesus then our lives must be a testimony about that. A bird does not have to show off its feathers to prove it can fly; it simply leaps from the tree and soars in the air. This should be how we live. We don't have to brag about our relationship with God or the breadth and depth of our knowledge and wisdom in our hearts; instead, we should simply walk as Jesus walked and act as Jesus act-and be doers of the word. The folk song asks, "How will they know we are Christian?"

By the badge of your baptism? How will they see the water? By your confirmation? Will you wear your certificate on your sleeve or tattoo it on your back? Your church membership? The song gives the answer: "They will know we are Christians by our love." We must not forget. We must remember that the word is action, and the action is love. In an effort to never forget will we remember the printed word or the living word and the action it must have.