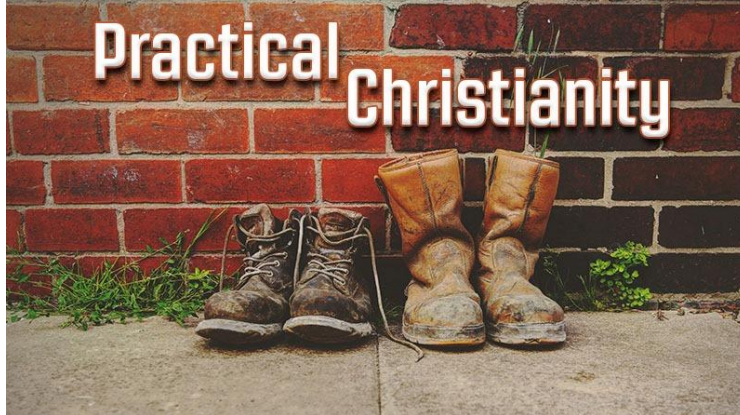


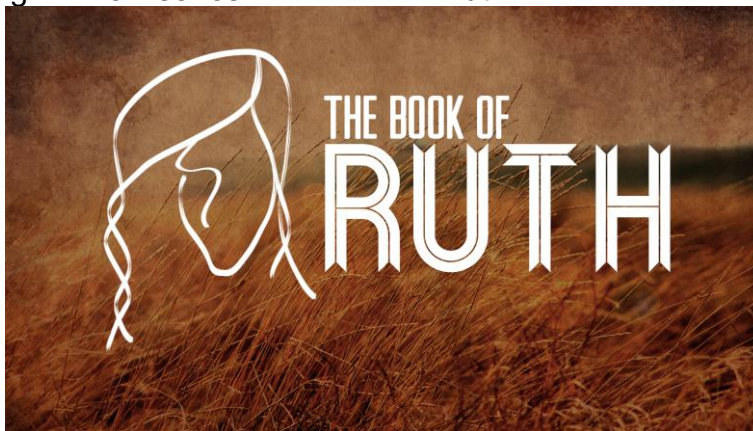
“Saving Souls from Death,” James 5:19-20

10.7.20

Church family, we’ve come to the end of this wonderful little series we’ve called: “Practical Christianity.”



Indeed, it’s been a “boots on the ground,” practical study of how to live the Christian life, but next week we’re going to begin a new series...a series on Ruth.



This is going to be a journey we’ll take with a lady who was foreigner and a pagan, who was led to a knowledge of God by her mother-in-law. We’ll see a journey of faith by Ruth after her life had tail-spun down to a point that she was left without a husband and at the end of her rope. This journey will take her to a new country and to a man who would rescue her. It’s a story of faith, hope and love.

But, for tonight, we conclude our study in the book of James. You’ve made your way to chapter 5.

James 5:19-20

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

I’ve titled the message tonight: “Saving Souls from Death.” These two verses are a fitting conclusion to this wonderful letter to Christians who have been enduring great persecution and struggle. Dispersed and scattered...harassed and haggard...and yet, the truth of the Gospel must continue to spread forth. And the truth of the Gospel must continue to be offered within the household of God, because there are times when there are people in a fellowship of believers who are truly NOT born again.

Now, I'll tell you up front, there are those who will disagree with my premise on how to interpret these two verses. I read various commentaries on these verses. Warren Wiersbe, for instance, says these two verses represent Christians who have backslidden in the church. I love Warren Wiersbe and I agree with him 99.5% of the time. He's one of the best Bible scholars ever. Yet, I'm like Matthew Henry, John Gill, John MacArthur and J. Vernon McGee, to name a few...I believe, as they do...that the person being spoken of in these two verses is a person who doesn't truly know Jesus. See the verses again...

James 5:19-20

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

The term "my brothers" is speaking of "Christians." But, the phrase "anyone among you" speaks of the person in verse 20 who is called a "sinner," a "sinner" in this context is a lost person. A sinner in this context is not a believer and a believer doesn't need to be saved from "death," which means "spiritual death," because once you're saved, you can't be lost again. A believer who is genuinely born again, can't lose their salvation. They are saved for all eternity.

Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee^[d] of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,^[e] to the praise of his glory.

So, while I know there are some scholars who want to describe the person in James 5:19-20 as a believer who has backslidden, I simply don't see that being accurate in the construct of the verses in the original Greek. The syntax doesn't work. What is syntax? Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create a well-formed sentence. The word order in the Greek doesn't lend itself to speaking of backslidden state for a believer...but rather, a state of a person who has never truly been born again.

Turn in your Bibles to 1 John, chapter 1. As you are turning, I'll tell you this: the word, "backslide" is not in Scripture. It's a term that we've thought up...and I believe we overuse to give many people a "pass" or an "out," who quite honestly, have probably never been born again and their actions give indication of that. Now does this mean we'll never sin. Of course not...but, as the Apostle John describes in 1 John, we, as believers/followers of Christ, will not continue to walk in darkness.

1 John 1:6

⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

1 John 2:3-6

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 John 3:6-10

⁶ No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸ Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's^[b] seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

You see, James is like his brother, Jesus... Remember when Jesus taught how the weeds are mixed in with the wheat...meaning the false are sown in the same field with the true. James is saying the same thing here. There are people who go to church who are not necessarily saved/born again. In other words, there are “professors” who are not “possessors;” there are “hearers” who are not “doers.” That’s 1 John 2:18-19. **Look at 1 John 2.**

1 John 2:18-19

¹⁸ Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

So, here in James 5, as James closes this letter, he’s making one last attempt to make certain that all are saved. AND CHURCH FAMILY...this is not OUT THERE...but, in here. This is a call to the believers to do evangelism within the church – do you get that? I mean the assumption of the epistle is that there are people who are in the church who are associated with the church and identified with the church, but they’re not genuine.

You may ask, “Are you talking about people who are here tonight?” Well, it’s possible, but I really believe what James is driving at are those who use to be part of the church who are no longer here. They don’t come anymore. Do you know people who used to go to church who are now living in overt sin? Oh, they will still tell you they’re a Christian, but they are walking in darkness. Do you know people like that? Sure you do. We all do. It’s these kinds of people that James is concerned about.

Now, go back with me to verse 19.

James 5:19

¹⁹ My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,

The word “wanders” is planao, (pla-nah-oh), and it’s means to “roam or stray from the path.” The term is used in Scripture many, many times to refer to physical wandering or drifting. The unsaved are said to be wandering or astray. Jesus used this same word to describe the Sadducees in Matthew 22:29. I want you to notice the word: WRONG. It’s the same Greek word: planao.

Matthew 22:29

²⁹ But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Jesus said, “You are wrong!” ...and He’s speaking of the condition of the unsaved.

Turn to Titus chapter 3. The Apostle Paul had left Titus on the isle of Crete to appoint elders in each town and in chapter 3, as he coming to the end of the letter, he reminds Titus of where he (Paul) and the lost had come from. See if you can find where the word “planao” is used.

Titus 3:3-7

³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Again, Church, the point is...I'm showing you why I believe that the person being described in James' epistle is a lost person who needs to be saved. You see, they have STRAYED from the Truth. They have strayed from the path. They may have looked like Christians, but they aren't...yes, they are considered "among you," in that they may still be in the community, or perhaps even still attend the church from time to time, but their lifestyle shows they've strayed from the truth. And James says: WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. You and I are the instrument!!

James 5:19-20

¹⁹My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Did you catch the word: SAVE? It's the Greek word "sōzō;" it's the word that's used most often in the NT to indicate salvation. It's the basic New Testament word for salvation. SALVATION is the goal! There's one goal, to save. And when a person comes to know Jesus, they have their sins covered. The word cover is KALYPTO in the Greek. It means to hide behind a veil. A veil...yes...the curtain that separated us from God in the Holy of Holies...but in this case...when we are saved, those sins go behind a veil to be covered...and not by a curtain, but by the blood of Jesus! Oh, what a marvelous thought! The psalmist said, "He removes our sins as far as the East is from the West. Our sins are buried in the depths of the sea, and He remembers them" – what? - "no more."

Turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. You have a ministry! Did you know that? Or do you know that? Do you think only pastors can have a ministry or missionaries? No...that's wrong... You have a ministry...

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[b] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling^[c] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

I love how A.W. Tozer described this ministry:

"The 'layman' need never think of his humbler task as being inferior to that of his minister. Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called and his work will be as sacred as the work of the ministry. It is not what a man does that determines whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it. The motive is everything. Let a man sanctify the Lord God in

his heart and he can thereafter do no common act. All he does is good and acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For such a man, living itself will be sacramental and the whole world a sanctuary. His entire life will be a priestly ministrations. As he performs his never so simple task he will hear the voice of the seraphim saying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.'" A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

I was studying this week and I listened to an old John MacArthur message on this passage of Scripture. As I listened to the message, MacArthur shared a letter he had received the morning he preached this message. He got the mail from the church mailbox and this is the letter.

"How are you? I hope things are going very well for you. I received your call on my tape machine, Sorry I didn't get back to you. I wasn't sure of your work schedule. I'm not very good at visiting or shooting the breeze anymore. I don't like to burden you with my problems because I know you have enough to deal with. I can probably say better on paper my feelings anyhow.

I would like to say thank you very much for the card and expressions of sympathy you sent to me. You are a wonderful person and I felt such a closeness to you as I read your card. Truly you are my brother. Honestly, I find it very hard to cope with life since my dear brother, whom I loved deeply, has passed into eternity - probably because of guilt, and rightly so. Because I never did confront him with the gospel point-blank and the message of salvation. I think if he is in hell, it is my fault, partly, because if I loved him, why didn't I tell him?

This summer, my uncle, who was very close to me - we could talk about anything; we took trips together. My wife died about ten years ago, and after she died, I would visit him weekly. He was only 68 years old at his death, one of my best friends, and we held the same beliefs. And he died.

I was very sorrowful when he died too, and I grieved, but not for long. I felt very much like King David, who was mourning the loss of his child from an immoral relationship with Bathsheba. After a time, he rose up and washed himself and anointed his head and said, 'The child cannot come to me, but I can go to him.' I felt very much the same about my uncle. I can go to him because I truly believe he's with God. What comfort.

But alas, if salvation leads to the evidence of a transformed life in Christ, if salvation leads to a love for His commandments and a hatred and declining love for sin and the world, I don't think my brother was really born again. There is an indescribable pain. My heart is sunk to my knees and is unable to rise. I can hardly comprehend the thought of my brother in eternal torment and nothing can change it. How can I be happy and joyful as a loved one I shall never see again is gone forever? And especially if I carry part of the blame.

I guess I shouldn't think this, but I felt if I would have died first, I would have been ready. Perhaps that would have brought my brother to salvation - true salvation - if I would have gone first. But I didn't. When they came to the breakroom at work to get me, as soon as I found out he was in a bad wreck, I prayed for a chance to witness to him - but one hour later they told me he was dead. I didn't have time to get to him. Why did I wait?

I even had a chance, as I was the last one in the family to see him. I changed runs this year, after being on the same truck route for ten years. I miss the people on my route. The last two days of my route, I made up a sheet of paper with a witness for Christ on it. I handed out 180 copies to all my customers. What a God-given opportunity to witness for Christ. Why didn't I do it for my brother? I believe in [Psalm 33:4](#), that everything that God does and allows to happen is good and right. It's just confusing to try and search for answers for the many questions I have. I guess time will heal the wound and make me forget. I'll just have to wait until enough time goes by and sweeps along with it the pain which is a constant part of my life right now. Please pray for me."

As I listened to that I felt the heavy burden that man felt. Church, we have a tremendous responsibility to people who may make the claim that they know Jesus. Look at the evidence, look for fruit and if you don't see any...it doesn't matter what they say...it matters what they do.

Ask the Lord for opportunities to share with those you love and those you know. Ask him to give you a burden. Ask Him for conviction to call them, to write them, to see them. And pray for the privilege to lead them to Jesus and then experience the joy of seeing a sinner turn from death to life.

Think about who the Lord is laying on your heart. And let's pray for them. But, before we do...make sure you know Jesus.
