

## James 1:18 January 14, 2007

Alright good morning. Let's get our Bibles out and go back to the book of James this morning. Last week we took a break from our study of this letter to take a look at our vision and the values that go with it. Today we'll pick back up with **James chapter 1 verse 18**.

While you turn there let me just remind you of a central command – a central truth from God's Word. The Old Testament said "Be holy, for I the Lord am holy." Then in the New Testament, in Peter's letter it says, "Be holy for I the Lord am holy." In order to enter into the presence of God, man must be holy. Set apart from sin unto righteousness.

The problem – as we have been seeing in James – is that we aren't. Men aren't holy. Men aren't righteous – they – we are sinful. We don't think right, act right, do right. We don't perceive God right. We don't see ourselves right – or God's truth – or God's will. But even though men aren't holy and aren't right with God, for the most part we don't get that. We don't understand that we aren't righteous or even see the need for holiness in its absence.

And if by some chance men do recognize that they aren't holy, they usually blame someone else for that reality. And that's what James has been pointing out. That indirectly, men push the responsibility for their sinfulness off on God and what we have been seeing in the past several verses of James is that we have no one to blame for our sin except ourselves.

It is our own evil desires that lead to temptation & sin & death – not God's doing.

God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he tempt anyone.

What verse 17 showed us is that God can't be blamed for sin because God is the author of every good gift – he is the unchanging source of good, not evil.

And now in verse 18 in context of what he's been talking about, James sort of sums up his argument by saying in verse 18: "He [God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

In other words – **the NATURE OF regeneration – of SALVATION – of new birth itself shows us that God does not lead us to sin**. The purpose of regeneration was to give us new birth into life – to create us to do good not evil and to give us power over sin as a part of a new creation.

So God is in no way involved in our sinfulness. The nature of God is that he only gives good gifts and **when God touches your life, it is to produce LIFE, not death – to produce righteousness, not SIN**.

But just like we did with verse 17, I want to look at verse 18 by itself for a moment before we re-insert it into what James has been saying.

Again verse 18 – "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth so that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

Now keep in mind what we saw earlier in the text – that man is filled with evil desires – those evil desires lead to sin – and sin leads to death. It is true that without holiness, no one will ever have a relationship with God – no one will ever enter into God's eternal presence. And yet man is unholy and he is sinful whether he admits it or not.

Turn to **Romans chapter 3** with me. I want us to have a clearer understanding of this today.

At the end of verse 9 it says that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. They are all under the control – the mastery of sin. And then he shows just to what extent that is true. Begin in verse 10 with me. (Verses 10-18).

Here is the definition of sinful man. Man without God. And the whole world comes under this verse 18 and every mouth is stopped and all the world stands guilty before God. And then if you read on, he says in verse 20 that there is no way that through their own flesh – by their own efforts – they can be justified before God by following some rules, by obeying the law even though it is the law of God.

What I want us to see this morning – what Paul is saying here – is expressed simply in **Ephesians chapter 2** – listen to it – “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

So now the question comes up, what are you going to do to help this man? What are you going to do to change this situation? External changes are not enough. He cannot by some resolution in his own mind determine that he’s going to obey the law of God and work his way out of deadness.

He needs to be recreated – he needs a new heart, a new inner person – he needs a brand new life.

See **our need for salvation isn’t a need to be made BETTER**. We don’t need to be better people, better parents, better friends, better workers, better whatever. We’re not bad. We’re dead. **Our need for salvation is a need to be made ALIVE**.

So when James talks about this new birth, he’s not talking about adding something or tacking something one. We’re not talking about putting a new set of clothes on an old man. To enter into a right relationship with God demands a total new person.

The best illustration of this is found in the well-known encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. Turn to **John 3** with me and let’s look at this briefly.

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.

Here’s a guy who is a leader of great renown – he may have been as prominent as any teacher of that time because Jesus in verse 10 calls him “the teacher of Israel”. And he comes to Jesus and says in verse 2:

2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

He says we know you do the miracles you do by the power of God. But Jesus doesn’t even respond to that. He looks into Nicodemus’ heart and knows his real question and he says that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

So he comes to Jesus and the question of his heart is what do I do to get into the Kingdom? And the implication here is “I’m very religious. I study the law. I try to live by the code of the Old Testament. I’m a very ethical man. I’m a trusted man – a respected man. What do I need to add to my life to get in the Kingdom?

And Jesus said you don’t do anything – you start all over again. You have to be born again. And Nicodemus responds in verse 4:

4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Now give Nicodemus a break here – he’s not saying physically how can I go back and be born. He knows what Jesus is talking about – he is simply picking up the same metaphor that Jesus used and

saying “how can someone with so many years in religion, so many years in following one code, so much to now be a Pharisee and a rabbi and a teacher of the law ever go back and undo all of that to start over again?”

And Jesus says to him – basically, you can’t do it. You can’t do it Nicodemus. It has to be done by a power and a resource outside of you. Unless a man be born again – be born of water and Spirit – he will not enter the Kingdom of God.

Now there is a whole other sermon in all Jesus says in explanation to Nicodemus, but we are in James and I want to keep us on task here. What we’re getting at is that new birth is essential. That’s what salvation is. **It is God by His GRACE cleansing the sinner and planting His Spirit in that sinner so that the cleansing makes him HOLY in relationship to God and the planting of the Spirit takes care of his power to LIVE in the will of God.**

This is completed in a moment of time – it is not a process. It is an event. It is an act of God by which he creates you new. It is a secret work – it can’t be perceived – which is why Jesus said we can’t tell the wheat from the tares – because **this act is imperceptible. It is only known through its EFFECT.** Which is why one of the 4 life values we talked about last week and that defines who we are in Christ is a life changed by belief into obedience. God implants a new life principle and a new disposition that is enabled and driven to keep the law of God – to live according to His will and for His glory.

James says God chose to give us birth. How? – “through the word of truth.” In the 4 other places this phrase appears in the New Testament, it refers to the message of the gospel. **Men are born again by the power of the WORD. If you don’t hear the Word, you don’t hear the message that saves.**

The implication here is that people have been believing all sorts of other words – false ideas, the popular theories that they’ve picked up from newspapers and magazines, half understood scientific theories, occult stories, political ideology, all the vague attitudes people have about God and eternity, anything but the truth.

Then God begins to work on them and he has this goal that they might meet the word of truth. God embarks on a life giving mission and again like we talked about last week – God entrusts and empowers us with that mission – **2 Corinthians 5:20** – as though God were making his appeal through us.

It is the word of God – the truth of God – the reality of Jesus as the book of John explains – that makes the difference.

**1 Peter 1:23** says “For you have been born again – not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”

And for the word of God to work, it must be heard. Let me say again what we learned when we studied Philippians 1:14 - that a lifestyle that never speaks the words – that never asks the question – that never verbally intentionally offers the truth – will not get it done and is not evangelism. **Lifestyle evangelism that never intentionally SPEAKS the gospel is NOT evangelism and will never be enough.**

We as Christians don’t have the market cornered on good living – moral decisions – or kindness. Counting solely on your being a good person in front of your classmates, teammates, neighbors, and co-workers as the way you share the greatest message ever shared will not get it done. Yes we have to live the life that shows what we believe. But at some point, we have to speak the words that explain the belief behind the life. **Romans 10:14** makes this clear when Paul says how can they believe if they have not heard and how can they hear without someone telling them? –

**Verse 17** – Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

God chose to give us birth through the word of truth – why?  
Last phrase – that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

That may sound a little odd to our ears, but this is an incredible picture. If we had time we could study the Old Testament in Exodus 23 and Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 18 and 26 about firstfruits. Basically at harvest time, the Hebrews would bring the firstfruits of all their crops and take them to the temple to give to the Lord in the form of his servants the priests. It was a powerful statement of their belief that everything they had belonged to the Lord – the lands, and herds, and crops, and seasons, and harvests – everything came from God. In him they lived and moved. Their breath was in his hands. Without him they would die. They were saying to their unbelieving neighbors that our God keeps his promises. If we are faithful to Him, He will be more than faithful to us.

The first fruits that God wanted meant **two things**. **He said he wants the FIRST in order and he wants the BEST of all**. When you harvest that crop, bring an offering to me and I want the first that you harvest and that will show that you live by faith because if you take the first – see the tendency for a farmer is to take the first thing he harvests and store it away in case nothing else comes through. So God says bring me the first and bring me the best. The first of a crop that's coming later. And that's what it means here. In James God is saying I want you to be the first and the best – **indicative of a whole crop that is coming LATER**.

Now listen to me carefully – do you realize that the world will not continue the way it is right now? Do you know that we are headed for a complete transformation of the world as we know it? This entire earth and life and system will burn up. And the Bible tells us that the Lord will recreate this earth to his liking. He will make a new creation – everything will be born again – men and women – dirt and hills and valleys and mountains and water and grass and plants and animals and everything. In fact he will make a new heaven and a new earth. **There is coming a whole new creation and we're just the first EVIDENCE of it**. God recreates us as examples of what is coming. All new on the inside – and soon all new on the outside. The firstfruits are the promise of the full crop. We are the proof that God isn't done.

So what is this birth James is talking about – it is us all new on the inside.

Who does it – God does, by his choice.

How does He do it – through the word of truth – it happens when we hear with believing hearts the Word of the gospel and then God mixes our faith with his sovereign power and transforms us.

Why does He do this – because we are to stand out in the world as living examples of where this world is headed when He recreates it. There is hope and purpose and it's not about us – it's about God.

Now to put this thing back in James' context – try and tell me now that God wants us to sin – that God is the author of our sin – that God has anything whatsoever to do with our sin – and I'll tell you you've got a screw loose. There's no way God wants you to sin. No way He's pleased with your sin. He created you in new birth to be a model of a sinless society. So when you sin, don't blame him. Put the blame where it ought to be, on your own evil desires – your flesh – and start putting your trust in the giver of every good gift.

Here's what I want you to take home today:

- 1) If you are counting on making yourself better to please God or doing good deeds to earn your way to heaven, realize it is not going to work. **Outside of surrendering your life by faith to**

**the truth of Jesus Christ, you are DEAD. And dead men don't need to be made better, they need to be made ALIVE – and only God can do that.**

- a. If that is you today – then when we stand in a moment, don't wait. Meet me down front while we sing and once and for all receive the life that God alone can give you.
- 2) If you've been given new birth and you know it, then two things:
- a. **Is your life the first fruit – the EXAMPLE – that God wants it to be to a world looking for purpose and joy and hope?**
  - b. **If you are living the life – are you also SPEAKING the Word of truth?** Knowing the helpless condition of those who don't know Jesus around you, are you just hoping that they'll figure it out – or are you taking every opportunity you can to speak the name of Jesus and the word of truth?

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.