**What Saves Your Soul?**

**James 1:16-21**

**Jubilate 5/10/2020**

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is it that saves your soul? I know there are there are some who keep a tally of how many souls they believe they have saved, some of those who make this claim, I know personally. In fact, I have been asked, “how many souls have you saved?”

My response left the person with a shocked look of unbelief upon their face, for I said, “I have saved none.”

Their follow up question was, “How can you say that you have saved none, aren’t you a pastor? Aren’t you doing your job? Isn’t it a pastor’s task to save souls?”

“No, a pastor’s task is to faithfully proclaim Word of God. It is God who does the work of saving souls. He does so by being present in the Word of Christ proclaimed in truth and purity. It is the Holy Spirit who works through that Word of Christ, and changes hearts of stone into believing hearts of faith. It is the Word of Christ the means by which He works.”

But I must admit that one of the hardest tasks of being a pastor is to have the faith to trust that God will work through the Word which is being proclaimed. Indeed, there are many pastors want to change that word, play with that word, make that word acceptable to people so that they will believe. It is because of this attitude that there are some who water down that word. They try to make the word of God palatable to 21st Century ears. It stems from their desire to make people “feel” comfortable with God.

I will admit that it is very tempting to do so, since it is human nature to think that somehow, we have our part to play – that it is our task to convince people to become Christians. But faith is not a mind thing, it is a God thing. Faith is built in the heart by the Spirit’s work.

Here, let me proclaim something to you – it is not my word, but God’s Word, which was recorded for us in our text. Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.

Have you ever been angry at someone else? Have you ever been angry at God? If you have not been both – I would ask you again to consider the veracity of your statement! What did you say in your anger? Who did your hurt in your anger? Did you ever deny God’s power in your anger?

Dear friends, it is true that there are times that we are moved to be angry at sinfulness. At that time, we are commanded by God to speak to those who have strayed from God’s word, and we are to do so with the love of God reigning. For it is in love that we are called by God to call sinners to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

When mothers (and fathers) apply loving discipline to their children they fulfill their God-given vocation as parents.

But there are also times that we get angry because of sinfulness, we like to think of this as righteous anger – but no anger is righteous – for (as God proclaims by James’ pen in our text) the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

There are other times that our anger is not even based on the sinfulness of others. There are times that our anger boils and comes out because we have been hurt, or we feel an injustice has been done to us. Which is why we need to be quick to hear and slow to speak.

How often has anger risen in your heart because you have been confronted by a friend or family member in your sinfulness? How often has anger risen in your heart during the pastor’s sermon when he proclaimed the law and it hit a little too close to home?

At those times, we were quick to tune out, and anger raged? Then we freely spoke the most vile things about those who offended us to others, our impenitence often ruins reputations and produces in us, sinful unrighteousness. When confronted by our sinfulness and called to repentance, there are times when we have rejected the word, because it didn’t fit our mood, our feelings, or the religion we had conceived in our own heart and mind.

There is a very, very, simple solution. If only we would put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word. If we were to do this, then we would always respond with repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

All too often our tongue is the source of our filthiness and rampant wickedness. We love to talk about others, especially the less fortunate or the well-known sinners, but in the process, we break the 8th Commandment, and reputations are ruined. We may feel justified in doing this, for we may know, without a shadow of a doubt, that we have spoken the truth! We may have been one hundred present honest and truthful, but we still have violated God’s law. How you ask? We violated God’s law for in doing that, we have not spoken well of others – nor have we put the best construction on everything.

Filthiness flows from our mouths in the form of off-color jokes and crude jesting. We hurt others with tongues that are sharper than razor blades, oftentimes deeply wounding even those who are our closest neighbors, our own family members.

We are to put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness – those things which easily flow from our mouths, and which come out in our actions, on a daily basis. We need to hear with meekness, the Word of God which labels sin by name, and calls us to repentance. It is in this repentance wrought by God’s Spirit that we receive the implanted word with meekness. It is only in repentance, which sorrows deeply over sin, and trusts solely in the work of Jesus Christ, that the salvation of our souls takes place.

Repentance is the work of God’s Spirit in the Word, producing faith which sorrows over sin, desiring a change of behavior, and trusts solely in Christ.

Dearly beloved of God, it was for this very purpose, ***the salvation of your souls,*** that the Word of God took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Although very God of very God, Christ was quick to hear – always obedient to the words of his Mother, and to all other the earthly authorities He was placed under as fully human. His anger did not rise even when He was unjustly arrested by those He created. He quickly listened to the charges raised against Him, and submitted to their authority, even when they beat Him in His innocence and crucified Him for His love.

When He did speak, His only thought was that those who abused Him might be forgiven for their evil deeds. And then, He gave up His life unto death to free them from their sin, even as they mocked Him.

Out of His great love for you, it is this Word of God which is implanted in you and able to save your souls.

Receive the Word which is able to save your souls – your sins are forgiven. It was for you that Christ was crucified, to make full payment for your sins. It was for you that Christ was raised from the dead, to seal your salvation and raise you to new life.

Receive the Word which is able to save your souls – take eat, this is My body; take drink, this is My blood; given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. As you eat and drink, Christ, the very Word made flesh, is implanted in you.

It is in great joy then, that we proclaim with Isaiah, what is most true about us. "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2) Amen.