

“BRINGING BACK A SINNER.”

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Scripture Text: James 5:19-20

Introduction.

Palm Sunday is a day of contrasts, the people thinking Jesus is a reigning King, when He is coming to be a suffering servant. The crowds shouting hosannas on Sunday and crucify Him on Friday, was revered one day and rejected the next. Jerusalem is rejoicing and Jesus is weeping.

Palm Sunday is the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem to set in motion the final pieces of His plan to rescue sinners from death, to confront sin. It was a plan that had lots of moving parts and involved lots of instruments, lots of players.

As we come to the end of James, we remember from two weeks ago he urged all Christians of the necessity of prayer. He commended us to pray in all situations and circumstances, for all our needs. And as an encouragement or motivation he reminded us of the example of Elijah and the great power there is in prayer.

Now James takes up another spiritual duty of Christians and gives us another great motivation to do this. As we ought to pray for one another, so ought we make every effort at reclaiming straying sheep. We ought to be like Jesus in what He came to do on Palm Sunday.

The Need for Restoration, vs. 19a.

First, James addresses who needs restoration. If anyone among you wanders from the truth. Who is he referring to? The among you means any Christian brother or sister, anyone in the flock of Jesus. We aren't just talking about non-Christians out there, this isn't just evangelism. This is straying and wandering sheep among us.

“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” This could be any of us.

Can you name one key person recorded in the Bible who doesn't also have his sins or errors recorded? Jesus said to his disciples, “See that no one leads you astray” (Matthew 24:4). Paul said to the Corinthians, “let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (I Corinthians 10:12).

God's own children can and do sin and sin grievously. In small ways or large it could be any of us. There are places and times and seasons when my faith is weak and needs to be corrected or rebuked. There are times I fall into discouragement or self-pity or pride or selfishness or some lie of Satan and need a swift kick in the backside.

What is this wandering James speaks of? In verse 19 it's someone who has wandered from truth, meaning errors of faith, errors in Biblical understanding. But it's not limited to that because we see in the next verse he speaks of sinners and of covering a multitude of sins.

Belief and practice go together. Truth is something we don't just think, but something we do, we act according to what we believe. We are talking about Christians who have gone astray in either life or doctrine, in either their actions or their thinking/believing.

I Timothy 4:16 (NIV) Watch your life and doctrine closely.

We have examples in Scripture of brothers in the faith who have wandered in both ways.

II Timothy 4:10 For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Demas wandered from the truth for moral reasons, he loved the world too much.

II Timothy 4:14-15 Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. 15 Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

Alexander wandered from the truth for doctrinal reasons, he opposed Paul's message.

In Galatians we read about Peter's hypocrisy toward the Gentiles when in the presence of Jews.

Galatians 2:11-14 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face ... 14 when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Paul saw Peter's error and turned him around. Who needs restoration? From time to time all of us do.

James doesn't leave his concern at that. He doesn't just warn about wandering from the truth into error or sliding into moral sin. James is the practical letter, remember. So he has something to say about what we should do about this and who should do it.

The Instrument of Restoration, vs. 19b.

Who restores us to the truth and convicts us of sin and calls us to paths of righteousness?

Of course the answer is God by His Holy Spirit and by His Word. God is the God of salvation, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin and brings us to repentance.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

But God has purposed to use various instruments in His work of salvation and reclaiming, and one of His most common instruments is the likes of you and me.

Notice James doesn't say pastors or elders or those who have special training. He says someone, anyone, one of you. This act of love and responsibility belongs to all of us. All of us can be instruments in God's hands to give counsel, to warn, to convict, to rebuke, to guide, to instruct, to steer back on course.

If you see someone in error or sin, go in the power of the Holy Spirit, with much prayer, but go. If you see it you are the one appointed by God to go. Seek the good of your brother or sister.

Yes, the supreme influence is God, but the intermediate influence is whatever means God chooses to bring into our lives.

When I look back on my faith journey I know that my salvation and growth belong to God and are the work of His Holy Spirit in my life. But I can also look back and name the instruments, my parents, Tyre Williams, Tom Tool, Doug Burleigh, Paul Brunson, Mark Branson, Frank Kik, Timothy Bayly, Jack Dabney, Phama and five sons and on and on. Not to mention countless dead saints who live on in their writing.

God means for us to take heed of our own salvation and the salvation of others.

Hebrews 3:12-13 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:24 Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.

Do for others what you would want others to do for you. If you are were danger and didn't know it, you would want someone to warn you or rescue you.

Go after those who wander off and let them know that there is hope and that you are seeking to pull them back from sin or worse.

We all are to do this, but it is especially the work of spiritual leaders in a church.

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.

The Results of Restoration, vs. 20.

There are some people in the world who have had the experience of being saved from physical death by another person. Some ex-soldiers carry pictures of someone who saved them or even gave their life for them. They carry that memory and a huge debt of gratitude.

We rightly honor policemen, fire fighters, search and rescue workers, doctors and nurses, for their self-sacrifice in saving others.

But what we are talking about here is even greater, saving someone from spiritual death. What could be more gratifying than to wrestle an eternal soul from Satan's grasp? What could be more motivating than to talk a brother or sister back from the brink of death or destruction? This is the greatest thing you can do for another person.

We know what Christ says about giving food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty and clothes to the naked. But far more valuable than these is to bring salvation to a soul. Our souls are more precious than our bodies.

By showing us the effect of correction, James wants to encourage us to do correction. There is great fruit and great reward in rescuing a soul from perishing, to deliver someone from the edge of the precipice of sin and evil.

It is an act of great love when what was lost is found, what has wandered is brought home.

We can't save someone in the ultimate or final sense, but God does give into our hands the means to deliver them from destruction. We are co-workers or co-laborers with God, His ambassadors, His servants.

Of course, we should all take heed to our own sins and how we are flirting with death, and should be quick to flee, to hate our sin and kill it. To embrace sin is to embrace our own destruction. But sometimes we need help and God often sends it in the form of a person and when they come receive them for God means to cover a multitude of sins.

Cover a multitude of sins.

Sin begets sin, one sin leads to another and another and another. So when we stop someone in their sin, we recover them from a multitude of worse sins, if left to their path.

Psalm 32:1-2 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

Is there anything better we can do with our time and energy, when we are presented with an opportunity to address error or sin than to bring them back to truth and holiness? Is there anything better than this act of love that buries sin.

What about when our admonition or correction or rebuke doesn't produce this good result?

That is one of the reasons we give for not doing this, fear that it will just make them angry or drive them away. Paul experienced this in Galatia:

Galatians 4:16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Not everyone responds the way David did when Nathan confronted his sin. Our hearts can become hard and we can become proud and resistant. But don't be put off or dissuaded, your labor for the Lord will not be in vain, trust the result to him. You be faithful and obey Scripture and leave the results up to the Holy Spirit.

May God be pleased to use each of us in the life of another in such a way that it turns them around from error to truth, from sin to righteousness, from evil to good, from darkness to light. Pray God would use you in that way for His honor and glory.

Application and conclusion.

This has special application with children.

Jesus had a special love and concern for children. He had strong words for anyone who would cause a little one to stumble.

We saw all these precious little lives up here singing hosanna to Jesus. And every one of them has in their hearts the seeds of sin and error, and some of those seeds are going to take root and start to show in their hearts and in their words and actions.

Let us pray and work for the salvation of our children, as parents and as a congregation. Let us make the children God has given us our greatest priority in the application of this text to our lives. Teach truth, correct error, discipline sin. Parents, this is a labor of love and it rescues their souls from death.

This has special application to our close friends and close relationships.

What is your definition of a true friend? Is it one who says what we want to hear, who flatters us, who doesn't say anything about our sins, who doesn't risk offending us? Or is a true friend one who speaks the truth we need to hear in love, who will warn us of spiritual danger?

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Proverbs 27:5 Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

Proverbs 12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.

What better way to love someone than to warn him that he's heading on a wrong path? If Christians and churches don't admonish, correct, rebuke and call to repentance, then who will?

The most hateful thing we can do to anyone engaged in sin is deny sin's reality and say nothing. To tell someone his sin is not sin is to rob that person of his ability to know forgiveness and love the Forgiver.

Love is not turning a blind eye or giving a knowing wink or excuse. Love is not coddling or pandering or indulging.

Love is telling the truth in a way that communicates that you care and you have their best interests at heart, without condemnation. Love is exhorting and urging and begging and calling to repentance. Love is heard in Jesus' words, "Go and sin no more." Love is praying fervently and frequently for the sinner struggling with their addictions or worldly desires or lusts of the flesh or pride of life.

James 5:20 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.

Prayer:

Holy Father, today we sing Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. We rejoice both in what you suffered for us and we rejoice in the victory you gained for us. We rejoice in the truth you told us and in the depth of your love for us in pursuing us when we were wandering in our sin. Grant us the same love and courage to show that same love to those around us. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, deepen our love, embolden our courage, fill us with your Spirit that we may imitate Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.