

Wasted Sundays

As she and Jim ate their lunch, Meredith suddenly asked her husband, "What do you think Pastor Andrews meant when he said that we've been saved to serve?" Jim glanced up from the sports section of the Sunday paper, "Uh, beats me." Returning to the NASCAR standings he saw that Tony Stewart was the new points leader.

"Jim, listen to me, I'm serious; what do you think he meant? Pastor Andrews said that God saved us for more than just dodging an eternal bullet." When Jim did little more than grunt Meredith fell silent. Although her husband attended worship services and was a professing Christian, Pastor Andrews' teaching seemed to have little effect. For that matter, *no* input did. Her husband wasn't a bad guy but after 14 years of marriage, Meredith still looked longingly for the day when Jim would give some evidence that God was getting to him. Meredith worried about his disinterest, and the lack of change in his life.

What would you say if someone asked you, "Why do you attend worship services?" Some might answer, "To get my tank filled" or something like that. Meaning they want to hear something that will boost their spirits, make them optimistic enough to tackle another week.

Others—maybe like Jim—might admit to going because a wife or husband expects them to, or because people *know* that they go to church; "keep up the image."

Others like to learn. These natural students scribble notes on my sermons, or in other settings where the Bible's taught, with eager faces betraying a love of learning.

And then there are some folks like Meredith. She does take notes, she likes a spiritual lift as much as anyone, and if she's home, she never misses worship services. But these are not her *goals*; she wants to be a 2 Cor.3:18 woman, a woman *changed* by God's Word, becoming who it says God calls her to become, and doing what it says God calls her do. Transformation, not just the gathering of information. She is not interesting in wasting Sundays.

READ Jas.1:21-25.

James wants believers to be sanctified, not just "saved." Changed, and not just challenged. Driven to do what is heard, not to dismiss what is heard. Action.

The "therefore" James begins v.21 with is a tip off that what he's about to say is the result of what he said *before*. In *this* case, what he said several *verses* before. 18, not 19-20. *Therefore*, since the "word of truth" produces the new birth, get changed.

The word of truth. What is the word of truth? Well, it's the gospel. Sometimes we call the entire Bible "the Word; we sometimes call Jesus the Word (Jn.1). But often the "Word" simply refers to the Bible's overarching message: the gospel; the redemption story from Gen.3 to Rev.22; Jesus died and rose again to save sinners.

This Word has been planted in you, James preaches, *Therefore* rid yourself of any and all moral filth and evil. The word "rid yourself" means to take off clothing, in this case, dirty clothing. When our son was in a motorcycle accident in June, the ambulance workers cut off his clothes so they could check him out and get to any

wounds easily. Even if his favorite shirt hadn't been cut off his body, he would have needed to get rid of it because it filled with blood, and road grime.

Who wants clothes like that? Shirts and skirts, blouses and pants of lying, lusting, stealing, slander, greed, and obscenities. You're a Christian now. Take off the clothes. Instead, Paul says in Col.3:12, *clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against each other.*

James puts it this way: humbly *accept* the word that was planted in you. A word so powerful it saves people. Now James is not suggesting these Christians yet *need* to be saved, just that the word, the gospel message, has *that* sort of power: salvation power. And as it first *saved* you, accept it (or, *let* it) *change* you; *accept the word planted in you.* There is planting, and then there is *planting*.

I wish I could have been near Jesus the day he told his planter's story. Sitting by a lake he described how different people have different reactions to God's word. He may have pointed to a farmer nearby planting field. He said some people are like the hard, sandal-packed dirt of a path at the edge of the field. Because they don't understand the seed fails to penetrate the dirt before birds swoop down and eat it (the birds depicted Satan's deflection).

Other seed lands on dirt full of rocks and stones. People like this kind of dirt seem open and respond gladly to the Word. A plant springs up quickly. But the dirt has too much junk in it to retain water, and there's no root. At the first sign of trouble, first time things don't go well for them as a professing Christian, they say, "I'm out;" the fledgling plant gets scorched by the sun and dies.

Other seed falls on thistle-ridden dirt. Again, initially the person looks like a genuine convert. She responds to the invitation, she raises her hand. But she's got a lot on her plate; she's a CEO for a large company, her husband has threatened to leave her, and her stock options are being devalued. She doesn't really have time to seek the Lord and 4 years later, though still pointing to that Sunday she raised her hand, the plant has been strangled by weeds; there's no evidence of true salvation,

But *some* seed fell on dirt on which the farmer had sprayed roundup; over the years he and his family had worked hard to clean up this field, removing stones and rocks, and it had been cultivated well. Among these people, the seed not only grew all during the growing season, but it produced a crop, a harvest. There was fruit from the Word God planted in them; those people received, and acted on it.

That's James' point. When God gives us the new birth, not only does a green plant break through the soil. The word that was planted in us, produces fruit. After it grows, there's a crop, there's fruit, something to harvest. Seed to fruit, James says, is the natural process, the natural progress.

Peter says the same thing in the next book, (1 Pet.1:23-2:2): *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (2:1-2) Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*

In vv.23-24 James gives his own illustration. My version of James' sermon illustration is that a guy grows up with wolves, and then is reunited with humans after 20 years in the pack. Learning to live as a human, he goes to the bathroom one day, to shave. First time in his life, spies his face in the mirror. Now, if he quickly runs away, it's doubtful he'll remember what he looked like by the end of the day.

However, if he stares at it intently, committing each scar, each feature and distinctive to memory, the next day it will look familiar. There was fruit from the look into the mirror.

God's Word is a mirror to our hearts. Nothing else as accurately pegs me as God's Word. I see myself everywhere, don't you? No psychiatrist, no well-meaning friend, no, not even your mate can so *accurately* expose your heart, as God's word can. And every time we come in contact with it, whether it's at a CONNECTION group study, personal worship, or a Sunday worship service, we choose whether we will be actors on what God says to us, or merely part of the audience.

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says (1:22). Don't just listen to what the preacher, teacher, shepherd, elder, evangelist, your friend, your husband, says, but *DO it*. Don't just memorize God's Word, *do it*.

When I discover someone who doesn't have enough food, instead of shaking my head and saying, "tsk, tsk," I get my wallet out. Obviously, if he's failing to do what he should, failing to work, then he *should* go hungry (2 Thess.3:10). But when I read what James says about the needy in chapters 1 & 2, to be a doer, I can no longer ignore the hungry person; the poor. And I will be blessed (25).

When you read 2 Cor.6:14 and hear the word, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers," instead of continuing your romance with that woman who's not a Christian, you gently and with remorse, end it. Don't just listen, obey. Or, you end the business partnership. And you will be blessed (25).

When you read 1 Tim.5:8 and hear the Word say that if a man fails to care for his aging parents' he's worse than an unsaved person, you talk with your spouse about what that means for the two of you, especially if one set of parents has limited means. Be a doer, not just a hearer. And you will be blessed (25).

When you read the Word of Rom.12:6 that you have been given spiritual gifts and that you're to use them in proportion with your faith, go volunteer with one of the church's ministries. And you will be blessed (25).

Jesus said in Lk. 11:28: *Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!* Calvin said much the same thing, "Obedience is the mother of true knowledge of God."

Concl:

Next week's message (*True Religion*) will be linked to this one. The clarion call James raised in these verses is, "Live what you hear." Next week we'll explore the *particulars*, examples of Word living.

As I finish, let me say something to those of you might be wondering about someone you know—or yourself: what if there is no growth? Person professed Christ, but they haven't taken off the dirty clothes, don't do anything—or much of anything that God says. Those are good questions. Ones that should linger in the air, rather than have me simply give you a pat answer. I couldn't answer conclusively anyway. Only give you hints. But your concern is not accidental. Now what will *you* do with the Word you have just heard?