Saving a Soul from Death
James 5:19-20
59-34

Well, we have had many many wonderful months in this great epistle written by James to a group of scattered Jews who name the name of Christ. And we return tonight for our last look at this wonderful epistle. The echoes of it are still in my heart and mind. I read it through a couple of times again this week as I prepared to bring the final message, just so that I would have fixed again in my own heart the fullness of the message that James has to bring. And it would certainly be my hope and prayer that though we have completed our preaching on James, you have only begun your study and the usefulness of this wonderful epistle in your life.
I'm going to be away for the next couple of Lord's days, ministering in other places. When I come back we'll begin a new book, I'm still a little unsettled as to what specifically yet the Lord is directing, but you'll know when I get back. But for now, it's enough to finish this wonderful epistle.
Let's look together at verses 19 and 20. Look at your Bible and let me read them to you. "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."
We've entitled the message, "Saving a soul from death." These two verses are a fitting conclusion to this wonderful epistle because they express the objective of James' entire letter. His entire letter is intended to convert the sinner from the error of his way, to save his soul from death and to cover his sin in forgiveness. In that sense the epistle is evangelistic, have we not learned that? And its evangelistic emphasis is primarily directed at a person who is within the assembly of the church, who outwardly names the name of Christ but inwardly is lost, who has a form of godliness, to put it in Paul's terms, but no reality, no power. The epistle is written like John's epistle was, to confront the assembly of professing Christians and call them to examine their profession to see if it's a real faith, or a dead faith producing nothing.
In other words, James wants to be sure that no one is deceived about their salvation. The Lord Himself first prompted the thought in Matthew 7 when He said, "Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, and I will then profess unto them, Depart from Me, I never knew you." And with that the Lord introduced the thought that there will be people who will name His name, preach His message, who will even in His name do wonderful things, but will not be genuine Christians.
And so James writes here almost an echo of the Savior, to call for a genuine real living saving faith, for he too faces the frightening and tragic reality that in all generations there are those who are soil in which no fruit is ever produced. There are those who outwardly seem to respond but no transformation of heart ever takes place. James points up again to us that there are tares mingled within the wheat. The false are sown in the same field with the true. There are professors who are not possessors, there are hearers who are not doers. That's his message.
The objective of the letter then takes the form of a series of tests by which you can evaluate your faith. There is your response to trials in chapter 1, your response to temptation, your response to the Word of God. How do you respond to the standard of holiness? How do you respond to all kinds of people? How do you respond to righteous works, righteous deeds? What kind of speech comes out of your mouth, chapter 3? What kind of wisdom is characteristic of your life? Again chapter 3. What is your response to the world? Do you love the world? Are you a friend of the world? What is your attitude toward self? Are you proud or humble? What is your attitude toward God's will?

He comes in to chapter 5, what is your attitude toward riches? And what is your attitude in chapter 5 verse 12 toward speaking the truth as opposed to lying, making vows you never intend to keep? All of these are tests by which you measure your faith to see whether it's real or not.
And in the heart of this wonderful epistle there is an invitation to salvation. Do you remember it? Chapter 4, look at it for a moment. Verse 7, "Submit therefore to God," that's the first of a series of ten commands that he gives. "Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you, draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned in to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." There is the invitation that ought to be outlined as the focal point of this epistle. And here he calls for a true salvation. In verse 6 he says God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.
And so James in the very heart of his epistle gives an evangelistic invitation and cries out and says, "Submit yourselves to God." If you've taken the test and failed, resist the devil and he'll flee, draw near to God, cleanse your hands, purify your hearts, be afflicted, mourn, weep, laughter--let it be turned to mourning and joy to heaviness, or gloom. Humble yourselves. In other words, bow the knee to Christ. Come to a real salvation.
So, you see, the epistle is clear-cut, it's evangelistic. It calls for salvation and self-examination. He calls on those who name the name of Christ to be sure they are genuine.
Now as he closes at the end of chapter 5, he has one more salvation appeal. But this time he's not calling to the unsaved, as he did in chapter 4, he's calling to the Christians to pursue the unsaved. This is a call to evangelism. This is a call to the believers to do evangelism in the church. Did 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, right? They have dead faith that produces nothing. They fail the test. He speaks to them in 4:6 to 10 and says, "Come to true faith." And here at the end he says, "And you that have true faith, pursue those others." If you look at some of them and you see that they fail the test, then pursue them in the name of Christ. "My brother...brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins." And wouldn't you like to do that on behalf of a sinner? That's what he's saying here.
Let's look at these two verses. He says, "Brethren," he uses it many times in this epistle, many times over. He uses it to refer to those who are his brothers in the flesh, Jews. And he uses it to those who are his brothers in Christ, who name the name of Christ. The use of the word "brethren" is general then. You who are my brethren, in terms of our common heritage nationally, you who are my brethren in that you also name the name of Christ...but it doesn't mean that there aren't necessarily some within that term "brethren" who are not genuine. It doesn't eliminate the reality that some of the brothers were only brothers outwardly and not at heart. And so we don't need to assume that because he says "my brethren" he is therefore talking exclusively to Christians throughout the epistle. I believe he is focusing here on those who are going to go out because they're genuine and turn the hearts of those who are false around. And so he uses the word "my" brethren, and draws them in to an intimate...a more intimate circle. That stands first in a sentence only here and in chapter 2 verse 1 and in each case it indicates a sharp break in the thought. So I take it that there's a sharp break in thought between verse 18 and verse 19, so do most of the translators, that's why they make a paragraph at verse 19. There's no connective link connecting the last two verses with the prior passage to make them one thought, so we assume that this is his final thought. It's another thought. It's not unrelated to the flow of thought, but it's another thought. That is, he is not still speaking about the need for the elders of the church to be involved in praying for the weak and the weary Christians and those who have been persecuted for the faith, he's not doing that any more. He

is now moving on to another group of people. He has spoken about how the weary and the weak are to come and the elders are to pray and the whole congregation is to uphold one another in prayer and care and compassion. And now he moves away from how the elders and the believers are to treat each other to how the believers are to treat those in their fellowship who fail the test of genuine faith. How do you deal with those who are showing up to be unbelievers in your fellowship?
And I think another dividing line, notice verse 19, "My brethren, if any among you..." did you see that? Go back to verse 13 and see how it begins. Verse 13 begins like this, "Is anyone among you...?" And he talks about those who suffer and tells them to pray. Then he moves to another category, verse 14, "Is anyone among you weary?" And he talks about those who are weary and weak under persecution and distress and how the elders are to care for them. Now in verse 19, "If any among you..." introduces a third category and that's the key phrase to let us know that he is dealing with a third category. In verse 13 it was the believer who suffers. In verse 14, the believer who needs spiritual strength to be infused through the prayer of righteous men. And now in verse 19 the one who claimed to be a believer but departs and needs to be drawn back to true salvation by the rest of the fellowship. This person then emerges in James' thought at the end of the list because really he's the theme of the whole letter. The whole letter is a calling to those whose faith is less than genuine to come to true faith.
The final instruction then sort of descends through those categories. Verse 13, we care for ourselves. Verse 14, we care for the weak among us. And verse 19, we care for others who are lost. He's not here calling on the readers to examine themselves, he is calling on the readers to pursue those people who have in their eyes failed the test.
You say, "Well, John, be more specific, what do you mean?" He's talking about the ministry of going after people who give evidence of not being genuinely saved. Do you know any people like that in the church? Do you know people who used to come here to church with you, they don't come anymore? They've turned their back. Do you know people who used to talk about honoring Christ and are now living in overt sin? Do you know people who used to say that they belonged to the Lord who now deny the faith and have joined a cult, or another religious system, or totally deny the faith? Someone was telling me the other day about a young lady who was very active in our church who is presently gone, once nothing to do with the church, nothing to do with Christ, and is living with a man who is not her husband. Do you know people like that? Those are the people who have failed the test. Now not all of them have failed it to the extreme where it's so very apparent that their faith is questionable, but this is the issue here. It's these kinds of people that James is concerned about.
The epistle then comes to the heart of the one who is less than genuine and it comes to the hearts of those who are genuine but who care about those who are less than genuine. This is a call for evangelism. This is a call for evangelism in the church.
Now how can we identify these people? How can we identify the people and help them? Let me give you several points...number one, the evidence. We have to understand the evidence. Before we can help someone we've got to look at the evidence and see if they're genuine or not. To identify the lost person we need some evidence, so look at verse 19. "My brethren, if anyone among you strays from the truth and one turns him back," let's stop at that first phrase.
"My brethren," again is an all-encompassing statement referring to the whole church..."if anyone among you shows that they weren't genuine, strays from the truth..." now there's the first evidence. That's a possibility phrase in the Greek. It means it's likely to happen. The word "to stray" is planetesfrom which we get planet which was a wandering body. It means to reject, to go astray, to apostatize, to wander. The term is used in Scripture many many times to refer to physical wandering and many times to refer to spiritual drifting. And frequently it is used to refer to the condition of the unsaved. The unsaved are said to wander, or stray.
And I don't want to take the time to show you every indication of that but in Matthew 22 for example, 29, "Jesus answered and said to them, You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures or the

power of God." And He uses that very same word. The condition of the unsaved...you don't understand the Scripture, you don't understand the power of God, you've strayed away, you've wandered away.
In Titus chapter 3 and verse 3, another verse, familiar one to us, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived..." and there is that same word, literally led astray, led off to wander away from reality and slave to lusts and pleasures and spending our life in evil and envy, hateful and hating one another. And the word is used many times with reference to those in an unsaved condition. Now these are the people then who have claimed to believe for a while and then come to a place where they just wander away from the truth. They now reject the will of God. They act contrary to the will of God. They willfully rebel against the truth. They're described throughout the epistle to the Hebrews. They are those who have heard everything but have a heart hardened against belief, mentioned in chapter 3...chapter 4. They're like those in chapter 6 who having once been enlightened and tasting the heavenly gift turn their back and fall away and reject Christ. They're like those in chapter 10 verse 29 who trample under their feet the blood of the covenant, counting it an unholy thing. These are the wanderers. Those who stray away.
By the way, the same Greek term is used in the Septuagint which is the Greek Old Testament, to refer to transgressions of the law, especially idolatry. It is so used in Isaiah 9:15, Jeremiah 23:17, Ezekiel 33:10, 34:4 and Proverbs 14:8...there it refers to one who transgresses God's law and goes after idols.
Now I'm saying all of this to let you know that this word is used frequently to refer to an unsaved person who has strayed away from God's truth. Now what does it mean to stray from the truth? What does he mean when he says, "If any of you strays from the truth,"? Well, the truth is the gospel, the gospel truth. James in chapter 3 verse 14 talked about lying against the truth. In chapter 1 verse 18, he talked about the fact that we were brought forth by the Word of truth. And when James speaks of the truth he's referring to the Word of God, the message of salvation primarily, or the gospel. That's the word of truth. This is an aorist passive tense which seems to indicate the fact of straying without reference to the process. This is a person who has gone away from the truth. Then the first evidence of a false faith is departure from the gospel truth. What do you mean? They reject the gospel...they go away from the Word of God. They depart doctrinally.
I'll never forget a young man in our church, his name was Steve. Very active in the church and all of a sudden somebody told me he became a Mormon. I absolutely was shocked beyond my wildest imagination with this young man, I never ever dreamed that his faith was false. And I'll never forget going to his house where he was having a meeting with the Mormon bishops and walking in the door and doing my best to throw the Mormon bishops out of the building, not physically but verbally so that I could talk to him and confront him before he carried on any further. And I was so shocked that he would go away from the truth and embrace the fact that Jesus was not God as if it were truth. The Mormon fact, not a true fact. People wander from the truth. That's why Jesus said if you continue in My Word, John 8:31, you're My real disciple.
So, there are people who will wander from the truth. That is not characteristic of a true Christian. A true Christian is never going to reject the truth of the gospel, is that not right? A true Christian is not going to deny Jesus Christ. A true Christian is not going to say that Jesus is not God. A true Christian is not going to speak against the saving gospel. They may fall in to sin, they may fall in to iniquity and disobedience, but they are not going to wander away from the saving truth. So the first evidence that somebody who once was around and claimed Christ is not genuine is if they deny the truth. Do you know anybody like that? Think about it. Do you know anybody like that? Can you think of anybody who is now denying the truth? Rejecting Christ and His gospel who was once a part?
And there's a second thing. Would you notice also verse 20, it says, "Let him that he...let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way," here's the second characteristic, the second evidence. The first thing is the people who aren't genuine wander away from the truth...the second

thing is they get in to the error of their way. Now what does that mean? Error...it's from the same verb form as wander, it's a noun from the same root. It means basically they have gone in to error, they have gone into rejection. But the key to this concept is the phrase "his way." "His way" simply means his own life style, his own pattern of living, his own path, his own kind of life...that's the idea. So the first thing you look for is an errant theology, the second thing you look for is an errant life style. Those are the evidences.

And if you see a person like that you know they have gone away. They have wandered, errant living may be the clearest evidence of devil faith, non-saving dead faith. So look for someone who has denied the substance of the gospel message or who is living a life style that is a rejection of the principles of the Word of God. That's what the word "error" means, rejection. Truth and virtue go together and falsehood and corruption go together. His way, his own self-styled living patterns. There are people who name the name of Christ. They claim to believe but they wander away and choose to live a life style in defiance to what the Lord has said. We do this...we do this discipline matter at the Lord's table month after month after month here in our church and inevitably we deal with people who are doing this, don't we? People who refuse to walk in obedience to God and they go off and live a life style that is repugnant and repulsive and contradictory to God. So you look at those people, if you see someone who drifts away from the gospel message and denies it, or someone who drifts into a life style that is contrary and in rejection to the principles of God's Word, that's evidence that that person may well have an ingenuine false dead faith.

Now just one other key. Notice in verse 20 this person is called a sinner. Did you notice that? This person is called a sinner. You say, "Is that important?" It's very important...very important. This term "sinner" is used, listen to this, only of the unregenerate. It is used in Scripture only of an unbeliever. In fact, it refers to a hardened unbeliever, one who openly defiantly disregards the law of God and ignores the standards of morality. It describes an openly bad person whose evil character is apparent to everybody, whose wickedness is common knowledge. In Genesis 13:13, the homosexual men of Sodom were called sinners. In Psalm 1, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the path of sinners." Verse 5, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." It is a characterization word, it describes the character of a person who lives in sin. In Psalm 25 again, to show you some Old Testament usages, verse 8, "Good and upright is the Lord, therefore He instructs sinners in His way." He gives the gospel to sinners, those who are bound in sin. In Proverbs it's used several times, I'm thinking of chapter 11 and verse 31, the writer says, "If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner?"

You come in to the New Testament, you find the word is always used with reference to those who are outside the Kingdom of God. Matthew 9 verse 13, "I desired compassion and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, said Jesus, but...what?...sinners...sinners." In Luke chapter 7 and verse 37 we find its usage again consistent. "Behold, there was a woman in the city who was a sinner, she was a sinner." That means she was an evil woman of ill repute, the vilest of human kind from a moral perspective. Luke chapter 15 and verse 7, "I tell you in the same way there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." And I could go on with Scripture after Scripture...in to John 9 verses 16 and 24, Romans 5:8, and that wonderful verse says, "God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Galatians 2:17, 1 Timothy 1:9 and 15 Paul says, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." And that's how it is.

Sinners is always used to refer to those who are outside the kingdom, who are lost. It is a characterization word. In 1 John 3, to compare, verse 8 says, "The one who practices sin is of the devil," that's the same as the sinner. "For the devil has sinned from the beginning, no one...verse 9...who is born of God practices sin." In other words, he's not characterized by his sin, he's characterized by his righteousness because God's seed abides in him, he cannot sin because he is born of God and by this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who

does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. So John says essentially the same thing, a sinner cannot be a Christian. While a Christian may sin he'll never be characterized as a sinner.
So I believe it's clear that James has in mind here sinners. And those who have strayed from the truth and those who have chosen a life style of wickedness, having once identified with Christ, once identified with the church. And John says in 1 John 2:19, and this is so very important, he says these words, "They went out from us but they were not really of us for if they had been of us they would have remained with us, but they went out in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." Names come into my head, just flooding my mind...people that I now believe never knew Christ and they deceived themselves perhaps and they deceived me. They're gone. They've chosen to reject the truth and live a life style inconsistent with everything Jesus Christ desires. They're lost. You know some of them as I do.
So the first thing we must understand to help them is the evidence. Secondly, the threat. We ought to be compelled by the threat. Do you realize what these people face? What is at stake? What is at stake? The eternal soul of a person, that's what's at stake. A person's soul. Look again at what James says, "Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his...what?...soul." We're talking about a human soul here. The word psuchemeans the real person, the whole person. We'll save that person. When God breathed into men the breath of life man became a living soul. That's the whole person. That's the real person that dwells in the mortal body. That's the immortal person that we're saving here. The soul...do you understand the threat? The soul is being threatened by what? Verse 20. Save his soul from what? Death...death. What death does James have in mind? Eternal death. Ezekiel 18:4 and 20 says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." That doesn't just mean physical death because all of us will die. It means eternal death, eternal death, death in hell, eternal judgment. Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is...what?...death." Way back in Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 2, "Righteousness delivers from death." What a great statement. "But where there's no righteousness there is death." Again in Proverbs 11:4 the same phrase is repeated. In Revelation, as John draws the New Testament to a close, chapter 21 verse 8, "For the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second...what?...death." What is the first death? Physical death...the second death, eternal death. Jesus Himself is the source of teaching on eternal damnation. Jesus taught more about hell then He did about heaven. Jesus taught more about hell than anyone else. Take out Matthew's gospel and just start going through it. Chapter 5, chapter 7, chapter 8, chapter 10, chapter 13, 18, 22, 23, 25 and you will find Jesus talking about hell, about eternal death, about punishment, about a fire that burns forever, a worm that never dies, weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, blackness of darkness. That's the death. Deep seriousness of the sinner's situation.
We need to help these people. They face death. And they face death, verse 20 says, loaded with a multitude of...what?...of sins. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. And through the life of man he accumulates a weight of sin that is going to pull him in to an eternal hell. In Psalm 5:10 the Scripture says, "Hold them guilty, O God, by their own devices let them fall, in the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out...in the multitude of their transgressions thrust them out." That's probably where James drew his thought, right out of Psalm 5:10.
Sin just keeps accumulating and accumulating. How many sins does it take to send a person to hell? One. Imagine how they accumulate and accumulate and accumulate and what a damning reality that is...a damning reality. And in Romans chapter 3 Paul writes, quoting really from the Old Testament, "There is none righteous, no not one, there is none who understands, there's none who seeks after God, they have all turned aside, together they are become useless, none that does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongue they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood,

destruction and misery are in their paths and the path of peace they have not known and there's no fear of God before their eyes." That's the sinner. And Romans 2, powerful statement, powerful statement, verse 5, "Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath." You're just piling it up.

Do you understand the threat then? Those people who were once a part of the church who have now drifted into false doctrine, who have now drifted into godless life style, do you realize the evidence is there that their faith is not genuine? That they were not belonging to Christ? And do you realize the threat that they are under? Do you realize that their eternal soul is headed for death carrying a multitude of sins? That's the threat...that's the threat.

And what about the instrument...thirdly...what about the instrument? Who is the agency of recovery? Who is God going to use? Who is He going to use? Preacher? Pastor? Somebody trained in seminary? Look at the text. Verse 19, "If any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back..." Hummm. Verse 20, "Let him know that he who turns a sinner." You know who is the instrument? One, or he who. Did you get that? It doesn't say elders here, does it? It doesn't say deacons, preachers, apostles, pastors, it says one, he who. That means what? Anybody...anybody, it's general, we all have the task. According to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 18, I love this, "All these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Did you hear that? Let me read it again. "God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

Listen, the "us" who has the ministry of reconciliation is the "us" whom God reconciled. Did you get that? So if you were reconciled by God, then you have the ministry of reconciliation. It's all of ours...it's all of ours. And we must tell the world that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, all of us...all of us. And I really believe, you know, we can wander around and hope that the Lord will bring somebody across our path we can evangelize, you know where we need to start? You need to sit down and think of anybody you know who used to be a part of the church and used to name the name of Christ and you don't see them anymore and you ought to go after those people. I'll tell you something, the threat of their eternal judgment is greater than the threat of the eternal judgment of someone who never professed Christ because how much greater the punishment will be, Hebrews 10:29 says, to the person who knowingly trods under his feet the blood of Christ? That's where our evangelism ought to start. It ought to start with the people who profess to know Christ but they're gone. What a job, what a task, what a challenge.

Jesus said He came to seek and to save the lost. Is that your desire? To be His ambassador? His emissary? His agent? What a tremendous challenge. In Luke 15 you remember how Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son and how the father rejoiced, tells the story of the lady who lost the coin and found it and how exhilarated and grateful she was and had a celebration and she too rejoiced. Tells the story about a man who had sheep and lost one and found the sheep and rejoiced. The common thread in all those stories and the point of them all is the joy of God in salvation. The sheep was found and everybody rejoiced. The coin was found and everybody rejoiced. The son was found and everybody rejoiced. If you want to bring joy to the heart of God, it comes through salvation. Is that your highest joy? To bring someone to Christ?

And finally the ministry of reconciliation demands the knowledge of the goal...the evidence, the threat, the instrument, the goal. What's the goal? Verse 19, "If any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back...turns him back, converts him," epistrepho, to convert, to turn him from sin to God, to righteousness. It's used in the New Testament, that verb, for just physical turning around and turning and looking, it's used for mental turning, it's used for all kind of turning, turning from sin to obedience as in the case of Peter who was a believer in Luke 22:32. But it often is used to refer to turning to God in salvation, and that, I believe, is its intent here because that is the context of the epistle. "Truly I say to you," Jesus said in Matthew 18:2, "unless you are converted, become like little

children, you'll not enter the kingdom of heaven." That's the same word. Unless you turn around and become humble like little children, you'll never be saved. So it refers to a turning to God in salvation in Matthew 18 and verse 3. Luke...pardon me, yes, Luke writing in Acts 3 uses it again in verse 19, "Repent therefore and return that your sins may be wiped away." That's an evangelistic call using the same word, be converted, be turned around, turn from sin to God.

Paul uses it in 1 Thessalonians 1:9. He says to the Thessalonians, "We remember how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Again it's used there to refer to salvation. Peter uses it in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 25, "For you were continually straying like sheep but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." Peter uses it again in 2 Peter chapter 2 verse 21, "It would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than having known it turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them." So it is a word that is used frequently with reference to salvation. And I think that's its intent here.

So, what is our goal? To convert...to convert. It's used again in verse 20, look at it. "Let him know that he who converts a sinner, turning him from false faith to true faith..." Then another word "will save", beautiful word, sozo, it's the word, the commonest word in the New Testament for salvation, the basic New Testament word for salvation. It's used five times in James and four times it refers to salvation...1:21, 2:14, 4:12 and here. In 5:15 we saw it used for restoring weak Christians but its dominant use is with those references to salvation.

So, what is the goal? To convert, to save. There's one other goal, to cover. What is the word cover? To cover a multitude of sins, to hide a multitude of sins. What does that mean?

Forgiveness...forgiveness. Back in Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 12 we get a helpful insight. Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all transgressions. It's talking about forgiveness. So what is the goal? We want to convert people, turning them from sin in order that they may be saved and being saved their sins will be...what?...forgiven. We're talking about evangelism, folks...evangelism.

And "the multitude of sins" has reference not so much to describing the state of the sinner as describing the extent of the forgiveness that God in His grace forgives the multitude of sins. "Plenteous grace with Thee is found, grace to cover all my sins," said Andrew Banar. And only the death of Christ can provide this covering. In Christ, says Ephesians 1:9, we've been forgiven all our sins...all our sins. Who is a pardoning God like You, the prophet Micah said. 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.

What is this ministry? It is a ministry of perception where we look at people and we examine the evidence. And if the evidence indicates to us that they have abandoned the truth or that they have abandoned a godly life style, we have every reason to assume that they had a false faith no matter what they claimed or claim. We then, secondly, must understand the threat that they are an eternal soul, loaded down with a multitude of unforgiven sins headed for eternal death. And we must then understand that we are the one or the he who, we are the instrument whom God might use to bring about the goal of turning them from their sin to salvation and the forgiveness of that multitude of sins. Soul winning, and it should be aggressively directed at people who were once a part of the church. It puts it right at our feet, beloved.

David Brainard(?) was one of the most celebrated missionaries the world has ever known. Laboring among the poor darkened Indians in Delaware, the banks of that river he once said, "I cannot go where I live...rather...I care not where I live or what hardships I go through so that I can but gain souls to Christ. While I am asleep I dream of those things. As soon as I awake the first thing I think of is this great work. All my desire is the conversion of sinners and all my hope is in God."

At the close of a meeting a critic approached D.L. Moody, the great evangelist. He said, "Mr. Moody--As I listened to you tonight in your address I noticed and counted 18 mistakes in your English." Looking at his critic Mr. Moody said, "Young man, I'm using to the glory of God all the grammar that I know, are you doing the same?" Fair question.

I received a letter today and I'll read it to you in conclusion. It's a very very heart-searching letter.
"How are you? I hope things are going very well for you. I received your call on my tape machine, 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 problem 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're wonderful people and I felt such a closeness to you as I read your card. Truly you are my brother and sister. I find it very hard to cope with life since my dear brother whom I loved deeply has passed in to 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?
"I had my truck accident last August 17. 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 I would visit him weekly. He was only about 68 years old, one of my best friends, and we held the same beliefs. And he died. I was very sorrowful when he died and very 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 Bath-sheba. 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 is with God. What comfort.
"But alas, if salvation leads to 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 if 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, I would not have left behind a young widow, ninth-month old twin boys and two daughters ages four and three. Perhaps that would have brought my brother to salvation, true salvation, if I would have gone first.
"I just can't be myself anymore. There's no comfort. Any good memories speed up to the tragic day thought and when I was in the break room that night and prayed for a chance to witness to him, as soon as I found out he was in a bad wreck. But one hour later they told me he was dead. 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 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 to 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 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."
I received that today. That's a heavy burden, isn't it? And we have a tremendous responsibility to people who may make the claim but as we look at the evidence we don't see the reality. Make sure we're faithful. God may give us the privilege of saving a soul from death. Let's bow and pray together.

Father, we ask that You would give us those opportunities. Lay on our hearts the people we should talk to. Convict us to call them, to write them, to see them. Lay them heavy on our hearts and give us the joy, the joy of turning a sinner from death to life.
Just spend a few moments in silent prayer, you and the Lord, and let the Lord speak to your heart about your own response to His Word tonight.

Father, seal this Word to our hearts and make us to be faithful, to hear the voice of the Spirit which prompts us to obedience in rescuing the sinner from death. Give us that privilege for your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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