

LIFE AFTER FAITH
A STUDY THROUGH THE BOOK OF JAMES

LESSON 9 – WHAT’S GOD GOT TO DO WITH IT? – JAMES 1:18

I think we can all look around and see the increasingly secular nature of our country. It seems as though any mention of faith or God in public is taboo and forbidden. Listen to what a district court judge in Texas said as he ruled against prayer at a graduation ceremony. “If any of you shall mention the name of Jesus or God, you will rue the day that you were born and will spend up to half a year in the Galveston jail.” That was back in 1995. Just think about how much worse things are now.

There are many today who want to completely remove God from the conversation...essentially asking, “What’s God got to do with it?” But no matter how badly secularists want to dismiss Him, there is one very important conversation that can’t be had without including God. That conversation is the one that seeks to discover how sin can be forgiven and how mankind can be saved from the penalty of that sin. You can’t talk about salvation without talking about God. What water is to the ocean...what sand is to the beach...what trees are to the forest...that’s what God is to salvation. As we look at this one verse, I want us to notice exactly what God has to do with our salvation. Let’s look first at...

The Heart of God in the Origin of Salvation

The Amazon is the largest river in the world. Its flow covers over 40% of South America. It has a width during the wet season of nearly 30 miles and the mouth of the Amazon where it meets the Atlantic Ocean is more than 250 miles wide. To trace the source of the Amazon, you have to go up some 18,000 feet above sea level to a small glacial stream in the Andes Mountains. Let’s compare this to what James says about salvation.

Salvation has flowed to hundreds of millions of souls but if you track it back to its source, you’ll find that it begins in heaven from the very heart and will of God. This is exactly what James means when he says, “He chose to give us birth...” Our salvation originates with God.

The fact that God chose to save us speaks of more than a desire or wish for something to happen. What James is really saying here is that before we were willing to choose God, He chose us. Long before our existence was even thought of, God had already put a plan in place to save us by His grace and through the blood of Jesus.

Paul said in Ephesians 1:4 that, “He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

For God to choose us before we could even choose Him, and to plan for our salvation through the death of His Son, even before our sinful hearts began to beat, is a testimony to His grace. James says our salvation originated in the heart and will of a sovereign, loving God. Notice a second truth regarding God’s role in our salvation...

The Hand of God in the Operation of Salvation

When James says, “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth...” he is telling us that our salvation not only comes by the will of God but is carried out by the work of God. In other words, the operation...the way in which salvation moves from the will of God to the heart of mankind...is the work of God.

Here, James goes back to the kind of language he was using earlier in the chapter...the language of procreation. James says that God willed our salvation, and then brought it to pass by giving a new birth. This is what Jesus was talking about in John 3, when He told Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again."

Make no mistake about it, Christianity is not simply belonging to a religious club or adhering to a set of rules and doctrines. True Christianity means that our old life ends and by the miracle of regeneration, we are born again to a brand-new life in Christ.

James goes on to tell us that the miracle of this new birth is performed through "the word of truth." The power to perform the miracle of salvation is found in the message of the Gospel. This is exactly what Paul meant in Romans 1:16 when he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes." Let's look at the third truth we find about God's role in our salvation...

The Hope of God in the Objective of Salvation

Notice how James ends verse 18, "That we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." If you've ever wondered or asked, "Where do I fit in salvation's picture?"...this is it. What we find here is God's objective...what He intends to accomplish through our salvation.

We must always remember that the objective of our salvation has to do with our relationship with God. The Lord made it clear in the Old Testament that the first and finest of whatever the people raised or produced was to be given back as an offering to Him. When James describes the Christian as "a kind of firstfruit," he is reminding us that once we've been saved, we belong to the Lord. Your life is not your own to do with as you please. If you're saved, your life is a purchased possession of God. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul wrote, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price."

The other thing we must remember is the objective of our salvation has to do with our responsibility to God. When James talks about firstfruits, he's talking about an offering. If you've been saved, then your life belongs to God, but you are responsible for offering your life back to Him.

When God saved you, He did all the work...and He did all that work with the objective in mind that out of a heart of gratitude and praise, you would offer yourself back to him. True salvation carries with it a responsibility to the God Whose grace has saved us.

This is what Paul meant in Romans 12 when he said, "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God..."

So, the question is this, "What's God got to do with it?" The simple answer is...everything. From conception to completion, from God's will to our hearts, salvation is all from God and His grace. That fact alone should motivate us to give ourselves completely to Him and see that the objective of our salvation is fulfilled. A salvation that is all of God is worthy of all we have.