*The Imperishable Word*

1 Peter 1:22-25

11/27/22

 This morning we return to this text for a second time. Last week, we observed how we have purified our souls in obedience to the truth. Purification is not a result of our efforts; it is a work of Christ, which we receive through faith. Yet faith is not passive. True faith seeks to conform our lives to God’s truth. Therefore, Peter directs our attention to one reason for our purification: it is *for the love of the brethren.* The love in view here is supernatural, meaning we are unable to love in the way God requires of us on our own. Before we can have any lasting victory over sin or consistently express love toward fellow believers, we must have a supernatural work done to us. That work is the new birth.

 This is the second time Peter has drawn our attention to the new birth. In 1:3 we saw that the Father *caused us to be born again to a living hope*. Last week, we focused on how the new birth enables our efforts to grow spiritually. Too often, we try to earn a relationship with God by cleaning up our behavior, doing good, and preforming religious activities. But we are no more capable of causing ourselves to be born again than we are of causing ourselves to be physically born. It is a work that must be done to us.

 It is a work that God took on for us. It is the Father who causes us to be born again to a living hope. He ordained salvation in eternity past and He chose us according to His foreknowl-edge. Then the Son entered time and space to accomplish salvation through His sinless life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. Finally, John 3 tells us that the Spirit applies the work of Christ to individuals. So, Father, Son, and Spirit are all active in the miracle of the new birth.

These truths have caused many people to ask *if salvation is a work of God, then 1) why does Scripture command people to believe, and 2) why should I bother doing evangelism?* What we see in the balance of this text helps answer those questions. The Spirit of God does not randomly transform individuals who are ignorant of the salvation Christ provides. He uses means. does People are saved as they are exposed to the message about Christ. The Word of God is the ordinary means through which the Spirit works the miracle of the new birth.

 Vs. 23 says *We were born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.* Scripture describes us as the seed, or offspring of Adam, for we descend from him. From him, we inherit the problem of sin and all that goes with it. Christ is described in Romans 5 as the second Adam who came to deal with the condition we inherited from our first parent. He did that through the glorious work we focused on in vs. 19-21. People are born again as they believe the message about Christ. Our first birth gave us physical life but spiritual death. Our second birth gives us a spiritual life that physical death cannot touch. We have talked about all these truths at length in this study.

 What we want to focus on today is the means by which the Spirit works the new birth. It comes *through the living and enduring word of God.* The proclamation of God’s word, publicly and privately, is the means the Spirit uses to do the work of salvation. This is the testimony of Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:15 tells us that the Scriptures *are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* 1 Corinthians 1:21ff. says *God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* Consider also Romans 10:13, 17 which says *Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*. The Scriptures make us wise to salvation. It is through the foolishness of preaching that people are saved. The Spirit uses God’s word to work the miracle of the new birth in people’s lives. Therefore, the bible must rest at the center of all our evangelistic efforts.

 Peter describes the word of God in three ways. First, it is imperishable. The perishable and imperishable have been contrasted throughout this chapter. Peter talked about our imperishable inheritance in vs. 4. In vs. 7, our faith is described as more valuable than gold, which is perishable. In vs. 18, we were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Now, we are born again, not of perishable seed, but with imperishable seed. Peter is contrasting what is temporal with what is of eternal value. Money, stuff, pleasure, and even life itself is fleeting. If we cling to what is perishable, not only will it be taken away, but we also will perish. But in Christ, we gain what is eternal. Nothing can take it away from us. We have received an imperishable word from an eternal God.

 Second, God’s word is living. The Bible is unlike any other book, for it alone is the word of God. No book has stood the test of time or universally transfers from one culture to another like the Bible does. It is dynamic, always accomplishing the work that God intends. As its message is proclaimed, God gives life to those who receive it. The author of Hebrews declares *for the word of God is living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* The Bible describes itself as the sword of the Spirit. It is the implement God uses to accomplish His work. That is true regarding salvation, which we are considering this week. But it is also true of sanctification, which we will see next week. The word of God is alive. When we proclaim its message, lives are transformed.

 Finally, the word of God is *enduring*. We see this at the end of vs. 23, and again in vs. 25. Because God is eternal, His word is eternal. Because God is all powerful, all that He has declared in His word will happen. Because this book proceeds from the very mouth of God, it will endure for all eternity. The Psalmist declared *Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven.* Jesus said that *it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.* God’s word endures, not because it is God…we do not worship the Bible…but because it proceeds from the mouth of God. His word never contradicts itself. It never grows stale or wears out. God would have to cease before His word could come to an end.

 In vs. 24 and 25, Peter quotes from Isaiah 40 to prove that his claims about the bible are true. Now, he does not give us an unbroken quote from Isaiah 40. Instead, he quotes portions of vs. 6, 7, and 8. Although I do not recommend doing this, when you are under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you can pull this off without corrupting the meaning of God’s word. The point is that, unlike the grass, which is here today and gone tomorrow, God’s word will endure. Not only will it endure, but it accomplishes what God intends for it to accomplish.

 As I was studying this week, I found, not only does the quote validate the point Peter has already made regarding the word of God in vs. 23, but the context from which the quote is taken also drives the point home. Isaiah 40:3-8 is predicting the ministry the forerunner. God said that, just before the Messiah arrived, a prophet would appear to prepare the people for the Messiah. His job was to declare the coming salvation of God. John the Baptist fulfilled this ministry by announcing the Kingdom, calling the people to repentance, and declaring the salvation of God. He knew what Paul knew: that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word concerning Christ. So he preached the gospel. Through the foolishness of his preaching, many were saved.

 At the end of vs. 25, Peter connects the imperishable, living, and enduring message of God to his audience by saying *this is the word which was preached to you.* Having received it, they were born again. They were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. They had received an imperishable inheritance. They were being protected by the power of God and kept for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last times. All the glorious truths we have considered in 1 Peter 1 were theirs. They could lay ahold of God’s promises because God had laid hold of them in Christ. The Spirit had used the word to them to bring them to salvation. Declaring the word of God, whether in a public setting like this or through your private witness in the community, is the ordinary means God uses to work the miracle of salvation.

 The application flowing from this should be plain. If you have not believed the message concerning Christ, turning from your sin to trust in Him, you must if you are to be saved from sin. He will remove the body of your sin, reconcile you to God, and give you new life in His name. Will you receive Him?

And for those who have received Him, we must remember that the power of our message is not found in the messenger, but in the message. Charles Spurgeon gave a helpful illustration on the power of the gospel to work salvation. He compared it to a lion in a cage. And around the lion is a crowd of people. Some are there to attack the lion, seeking to do it harm. Others, fearing for the lion’s well-being, gather around the cage to defend it. Yet, Spurgeon observed, that is a foolish and arrogant endeavor, for a lion does not need defended. Simply open the cage and let the lion out. He said that to ministers, reminding them that God’s word does not rely on the minister for its power. It is the word, not the herald, that God uses to do His work.

 Brothers and sisters, the word of God is unfailing and unbreakable. Its authority is universal. It is equally binding on those who receive it and on those who reject it. It does not need us to make it relevant. It is always relevant because it speaks to the universal condition of man as sinners and of God’s willingness to save through the gift of His Son. The message must never be edited. We do not soften its message on sin and God’s wrath; we do not remove barriers to belief by ignoring its demands for discipleship. Rather we accept it for what it is: the living, active, and powerful word of God, which He uses it to bring people to salvation. The Scriptures give people the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

 For many years, Christians have tried to get people into church through sales gimmicks. Then they try to keep them coming back through entertainment and meeting their felt needs. Sadly, God’s word, if it is present in the service at all, has been relegated to a secondary place. I fear that many churches have become like the church at Laodicea, whom Christ is standing outside of the church knocking on the door while He is being ignored by those in the church. Then we wonder why so many churches shrinking or closing their doors for good. We forget that the power of the church is not in the ministries they run, the quality of the music team, or the personality and giftings of the preacher. The gospel is the power of God. It is time to let the lion out of the cage. If God’s people will humble themselves, repent of their sin, and proclaim the whole counsel of God, God will delight to bear fruit through us. If the church is to thrive in these troubling times, it must have an unflinching confidence in God’s word. Do we want to see the lost in our town come to faith in Christ? Then let us graciously, clearly, and patiently proclaim the word of God, calling people to repentance. Someone did that for us; may we be faithful to take the message to others, knowing that God will keep His word to save those who hear us.