

INTRODUCTION

1. Today conclude series in Book of James. (**Show**) This = 19th sermon. Very diff. than 18th.
 - a. Message 18 was on the issues of prayer, healing & God's almighty power.
 - b. Love to preach those themes. Today is a harder message. Sermon is on backsliding.
 - c. When I was a boy I used to hear older Christians use that word. It was very serious.
 - d. I don't hear that word so much anymore. *I haven't heard that word in a long time.*¹
2. Why today? Guess what's James' last subject? (**Show**) Conclusion = sudden/abrupt.
 - a. Normally epistles like James conclude w/greetings, well-wishes, blessing, benediction.
 - b. James doesn't include any of that. Last words are on the seriousness of backsliding.
 - c. He ends his letter wanting these words to ring in our ears as we close final chapter.
3. Two things we need to know as we delve into our text today. 1st, Can happen to anyone.²
4. 2nd, James says backsliding is like sheep. Vv. 19-20 give us four comparisons to sheep.

I. THEY WANDER AWAY FROM THE TRUTH (v. 19A).**A. Discuss Term Wander**

1. From *planao* fr. which we get *planet* - a wandering star.
2. Also used of sheep which are legendary for wandering (see 1 Peter 2:25a).
3. Several ideas involved.
 - a. A professing Christian who belongs to a Christian church (*among you*).
 - b. It's deliberate, not accidental action—a conscious choice to wander off.
 - c. It is encouraged by Satan—described w/the word *planon* “astray” in Rev. 12:9.³

B. THREE POTENTIAL WAYS OF BACKSLIDING - (WANDERING)**1. Wandering from God's Word (v. 19a).**

- a. *planao* = to no longer believe what is true, but to start believing what is false.⁴
- b. Belonged Bible believing church where truth taught but seduced by a false cult.
- c. Cults are great at causing people wander cause use Bible, spiritual lingo, caring.
- d. 3 marks - add to God's Word, diminish God's Son, hope so salvation, not know so.

2. Wandering from God's Morals (see 3 John 1:4).

- a. In the Bible truth is often associated with the way one lives. Read 3 John 1:4.
- b. What John means is that he is joyful that his converts are living right.
- c. Truth is not simply what we believe but also what we do.
 - i. Notice the word used in v. 20 is *wandering* (lifestyle, pattern living).
 - ii. In the LXX it involves transgressing the law and lapsing into idolatry.
 - iii. Idolatry always included moral corruption as well as worshiping idols.
- d. People will often change their beliefs to accommodate a new morality.

¹ My mother-in-law, who has attended church her whole life, said that to me when I mentioned the word “backsliding” to her one day.

² I know of pastors, Bible college students, missionaries, youth leaders, and many others who have backslidden. Some of the most tragic stories I could tell you today are stories of backsliding.

³ The great dragon was hurled down— . . . called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.

⁴Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*.

e. Must be sensitive to changes in our moral behavior cause can change our beliefs.

3. **Wandering from God's People (see 1 John 2:19).**

- a. Backsliders inevitably wander fr. the church. 1 Jn.2:19 - *They went out fr. us.*
- b. Sometimes cult lures away, sometimes sin/indiff. lures away, sometimes hurt.
- c. But ultimately they stop coming to the church less and less, and finally not all.
- d. How about you? Do any of these three conditions describe you? Me?
- e. I have known people in all three conditions
- f. ***If I have ever been closer to God than I am right now, I have slidden back.***⁵
- g. ***If I am not as close to God as I once was, guess who moved?***
- h. Exactly right. If used to be closer to God, I have slidden away. Need come back.

II. **THEY NEED A CARING SHEPHERD (v. 19B).**

A. **Someone Brings Him Back.**

1. Notice this person doesn't come back on his own. Someone helped bring back.
2. Sheep don't normally come home on their own. ***Little Bo Peep*** was wrong. (**Show**)⁶
 - a. Do you know how they come home? Jesus gave answer in Matt. 18:12-13.
 - b. Sheep come home because a shepherd cares enough to go find them.
 - c. Backsliders come home because someone with a shepherds heart cares enough.
 - d. This text assumes that someone cared enough to try to win them back.
3. Backsliders often feel alienated. Sometimes they're wounded. Other times are guilty.
4. Very hard when feel that way to come back. Feel like not wanted.
5. But when someone reaches out hand. Feel like you are wanted.

B. **What Won't Bring Them Back.**

1. Judgmentalism won't bring them back. ***They weren't much of a Christian in 1st place.***
2. Harsh criticism won't bring them back. ***Why haven't I seen you in church?***
3. Gossip won't bring them back. ***Do you know what I heard about so and so?***
4. Indifference won't bring them back. ***I wonder what happened to so and so? Oh well.***
5. Truth spoken in love may bring them back
6. Tell about little girl who said to her daddy, ***Daddy, is God dead?***⁷ Truth fr. loving child.

III. **THEY MAY BE LOST FOREVER (v. 20).**

A. **Two Kinds Of Backsliders**

1. Heart-faith backsliders who really have Christ in hearts and desire to return to God.
2. Head-faith backsliders who have intellectually received Christ w/mind but not w/heart.

⁵ Robert Ricker, former president of the Baptist General Conference, said this in a sermon I heard in my church.

⁶ Little Bo Peep poem. http://images.slideplayer.com/19/5736545/slides/slide_3.jpg. Accessed 12/2/16.

⁷A father was so backslidden that he stopped praying with his family. One evening when all was quiet his little girl with an anxious-ridden face looked up into the eyes of her daddy and asked, ***Pa, is God dead? No, my child. Why do you ask me such a question as that?*** said her Father. ***Why, Pa, you never talk to him like you used to do,*** she replied. Those words so haunted that man that he returned to the Lord. ***Oh, for more little girls who would say, Dad, is God dead? We don't worship Him like we used to.*** Elon Foster, 6000 Classic Sermon Illustrations, #6666.

3. Have said yes to Jesus mentally, but have not surrendered heart to Jesus.

B. These People Are In Danger Of Being Lost Forever

1. They don't have the changed heart that will give them the "want to" to return.

2. This is the person James is concerned about.

a. Wander is associated with the apostate who rejects the will of God.

b. Sinner usually refers to hardened unbelievers who defiantly reject God's law.

c. Death means not just physical death, but eternal death (Rom. 6:23).

d. Save refers to eternal salvation.

3. Who do you think wrote these words? His Was a Shocking Change of Heart.⁸

IV. They Can Be Rescued And Forgiven (v. 20).

A. Cover A Multitude Of Sins

1. Cover = conceal or hide, so that no trace can be seen.

2. Used of a veil that covers something so no one can see it.

3. James is describing the forgiveness that someone receives when they are saved.

B. Two Weeks Ago in 16th Message Felt Forgot to Emphasize Something

1. If he has committed sins, he will be forgiven him, v. 15.

2. As I reflected on the sermon on way downstate for Thanksgiving, I thought...

3. I should've made a bigger deal about that. He **WILL** be forgiven.

4. God is a forgiving God. No sin is so great that it cannot be forgiven.

5. Jesus died to pay the price for all sin. 1 John 1:9.

6. Did notice how many sins were covered over? A multitude. Not few. All of them.

Conclusion

What Is The Church? (James Chapter 5)

1. A praying fellowship where prayer is emphasized & practiced individually & together.

2. A caring fellowship where people are encouraged to be honest about their faults & needs.

3. A correcting fellowship where people seek to restore those who fall away from the Lord.

⁸ Karl Marx story in *Moody Monthly Magazine*. <http://sermonhall.com/www/sermon/0.13415>. Accessed 12/2/16.

His Was a Shocking Change of Heart

According to *Moody Monthly*, a brilliant young man once wrote: "Our heart, reason, history, and the work of Christ convince us that without Him we cannot achieve our goal, that without Him we are doomed by God, and only Christ can save us." These thoughts of a mere seventeen-year-old revealed spiritual wisdom beyond his age, and insights that few attain. He had been baptized at age six into the Lutheran Church in 1824 and was confirmed at 16. Now, to graduate from high school, he had been required to write an essay on a religious subject. He chose to explore the subject of the union of believers with Christ, according to the Gospel of John.

He explained that the fruit of our union with Christ is our willingness to sacrifice ourselves for our fellow man. And the joy which the Epicureans in their superficial philosophy sought in vain...is a joy known only to the innocent heart united with Christ, and through Christ to God.

So wrote the young Karl Marx.

But by 1844, just nine years later, he had abandoned any Christian commitment he may have once had. In fact, his new ideas established him as one of the most influential atheists of history. Worse, his ideas spawned, through the former Soviet Union and Communist movement, one of the greatest epics of human misery and death in history. This radical change of heart is astonishing and difficult to understand, but it shows the horror that can occur if a person turns away from the light that has been given him, rejecting the love and mercy of our Savior.

This story causes Hebrews 10 to ring in my ears: "*Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord, no matter what happens. Remember the great reward it brings you! Patient endurance is what you need now, so you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. For in just a little while, the Coming One will come and not delay. And a righteous person will live by faith. But I will have no pleasure in anyone who turns away. For we are not like those who turn their backs on God and seal their fate. We have faith that assures our salvation*" (vv. 35-39 nlt).

Yes, thankfully, "*we are not like those who turn their backs on God and seal their fate. We have faith that assures our salvation.*"