James 1:18

**“In the exercise of His will He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.”**

Good morning to you all. Today we are continuing our study through the epistle of James. What we discussed last week was that God is not the cause of the trials we face, but He gives us every good and perfect gift from above to be able to withstand those trials so that we may keep the faith after facing them. Today we will be looking carefully at verse 18 which will show us four ways that God gives grace to His creation by making each person who trusts in His Son a new creation in His name. God does this through the exercise of His will, by giving us a new life in His name, by providing us with His Scripture (the word of truth) to guide us in this new life and by using us as his first fruits to share the good news of the gospel with His creation.

**A. The exercise of His will**

The first point that James makes in this verse is that salvation is the gift of God and is done because of His will, not ours. We see throughout the pages of Scripture that it is God who reaches out to His creation wanting to fix the broken relationship between them and Himself. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God by disobeying His command it was God who walked in the garden and called out to Adam after sin had been committed. Even though Adam and Eve knew they had disobeyed they really did not understand the consequences of that choice. This shows us what life is like for those who do not know God and who live as if they are their own God. Those who are dying in their sins do not know that they are dying or what sin is unless the Holy Spirit enlightens them to this knowledge (John 1:12-13, 3:19-20). In order to know what sin is man must first know that he is a created being who has been created for a purpose. Without there being a creator, man has no purpose for existing and therefore only exists to pursue his own passions. The Apostle John in his gospel explains the hope that we have in knowing our Creator. **“12But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name, 13who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).** When someone accepts Christ as their Savior, they have the right to become children of God and all of this happens because it is the will of God.

A second why we know that salvation is a work of God is because everything in our existence shows us that we are here not because of our own doing, but because it is God’s will. How many of you had the chance to decide before you were born who your parents would be? Of course, none of us had that power. A baby cannot control his or her time of conception or birth. The child in the womb is at the mercy of the parents who must allow the child to be born and then care for that child until the child reaches develops the ability to take care of him or herself. Since we cannot decide when we will be born, we also do not have the power to control how God will create the new spiritual life in the believer. The prophet Jeremiah shared with the people how God would do this through the coming of His Son. **“31“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. 33“For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord: “I will put My law within them and write it on their heart; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34They will not teach again, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their wrongdoing, and their sin I will no longer remember” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).** This promise of the coming of the holy spirit has happened and was fulfilled in the life of Christ. God has written His laws in our hearts and has made Himself known through His Son. The forgiveness of sins allows each believer in Christ to walk with a newness of life free from the sins that used to hold him down.

A third example of how this is illustrated in Scripture is in the discussion that takes place between Jesus and Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Jesus explains to Nicodemus that being born again is an act of God. **“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2this man came to Jesus at night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” 3Jesus responded and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a person be born when he is old? He cannot enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born, can he?” 5Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born of water and *the* Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6That which has been born of the flesh is flesh, and that which has been born of the Spirit is spirit. 7Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it is coming from and where it is going; so is everyone who has been born of the Spirit” (vv. 1-8).** Nicodemus was confused by what he heard because the teachers of the law thought that making themselves right with God was through obedience to the Law of Moses. They believed that by following the law as closely as possible would gain them the approval of God. Jesus challenged him with the teaching that it is not the works of man that make Him right with God. Salvation is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. He then makes the point that God sending the Son to the world was to redeem it and that all who believe in Him have the hope of eternal life with God in heaven. Man did nothing to earn this, it is the gift of God.

B. God has given us new birth when He saved us. What is this new birth? When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, He makes that person a new creation in Him. **“5even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,” (Ephesians 2:5-6).** We were once dead in our sins and had no knowledge of needing saved. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God have we been able to come to this knowledge. The Apostle Peter confirms this in **1 Peter 1:23 “23for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.”** And through the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel God explains how He gives this new birth. **“25Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances.”** When God has caused this new birth to take place, we now are able to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh.

C. God has provided us the Word of Truth which He uses to give us spiritual new birth.

“James is very clear that salvation comes through the message of the gospel, that is, the word of truth about Jesus and his work on our behalf” (J.I. Packer).

The word of truth is referring to Scripture, which is the gift that God has given to humanity. If it were not for Scripture we would be lost and not have the ability to know God or His plan for all of His creation. Many times, the Apostle Paul also refers top Scripture as the word of truth. Here are a few examples:

1. **2 Corinthians 6:7** **“in the word of truth, *and* in the power of God;”** In this verse Paul says that the power of God is revealed in His holy word.

2. **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).** When a teacher of the word of truth handles the word accurately this shows that the teacher is an approved worker of God. It is important that whoever teaches the word of God is doing so being faithful to the message of Scripture and not bending Scripture to support their own agenda.

The new life that comes from God is the result of someone hearing the good news of the gospel, trusting Christ for their salvation and then living this new life in faith and obedience to the word of truth. **“How then are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:14,17).**

D. As we conclude the verse James explains that those who have the new spiritual birth in Christ are the first fruits among God’s creatures. What he is referring to here are those who were the first believers in Christ who laid the foundation for others (like you and me) who would later come to join in the family of God. God is working through His creatures to bring about the healing and restoration of His creation as a whole. Paul writes these words in his epistle to the **Romans 8:19-22 “19For the eagerly awaiting creation waits for the revealing of the sons *and daughters* of God. 20For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it*, in hope 21that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.”** As God works to redeem mankind from the bondage of sin, He is also working to deliver the entirety of creation from the curse of that sin. What we see around us today is the results of sin and how it has plagued the creation. Through the power of the gospel God is bringing new life to His creation preparing it for the day when Christ will return and the new heaven will come to earth.