

The Works of the Spirit.  
Acts 2:34-47

Colossians 3:1-17

Colossians 3:18-25

Responsive Proverbs 21:1-8

This morning we are going to be picking up where we left off which is in the middle of Peter's message to the multitudes who had gathered in Jerusalem. We talked about it a bit last week how it really is interesting in the way that Peter here is addressing this crowd less than 2 months after the events of him denying that he even knew of, or was a part of the group who had followed Jesus. And now we see him here, standing up in the midst of this multitude and loudly proclaiming the gospel, and even bringing forward the issue that some of the very people he is addressing here are the same who had crucified Jesus. Let us read this morning verses 34-47

Such bold statements to make from someone who not even 2 months previous out of fear denied even knowing Jesus. I think that the stark difference and change is because of the Holy Spirit, as we also discussed last week, up until this point the disciples did not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is not to say that they did not believe, but rather they had yet to receive the promise that was foretold. Now, being on the other side of this, having the spirit come upon them granted them not only the ability to speak in the many different languages to reach those who had gathered there in Jerusalem but also the boldness to proclaim the gospel of Christ.

We even see it in the fact that Peter quotes the prophet Joel and equates his prophecy to this moment which is something that could only be discerned by the Spirit. For before they were not able to understand even when Jesus himself would tell them plainly, for the things of God are spiritual, and unless someone has been given the spirit no one is unable to discern the things of the spirit. And this same spirit is the spirit that dwells with in each and everyone who is a child of God, for the spirit given to God's children is his promised gift so that we will be a people of God, a nation of priests, who having the veil of separation between God and man torn asunder by the death of Jesus on the cross. We are not able to discern the things of the spirit, we are not able to understand God's word, and not only that we now have direct access to the creator of all things.

We should never take this faith for granted, we should never discredit the work of the holy spirit within us for it is such a miraculous gift that was given to us that it should drive us to be every thankful, ever worshiping, and always praising out Father who has given us such a gift. As Jesus said, "If a son ask for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

The New birth that was given to us, is the greatest gift given. There seem to be many who claim Christ, yet they do not live as one who has received such a gift. There is a reason why Jesus called believing upon him for salvation the new birth, for it truly is that drastic of a difference. Those who have been given this gift of the faith to believe, and therefor have been indwelt by the spirit are new creatures having their very thoughts and desires changed. If one is living as one always has and despite their claims are still living to please themselves and fulfill their own selfish desires then the spirit is not in them and their claims of faith are empty. For the Spirit desires that which is spiritual, and the new birth changes us to desire the things that are spiritual.

That is how we can be known by our fruits, that is how our actions, our conduct, our speech, works as a proof of our claim to faith. For if one confesses faith, yet lives a life defined by sinfulness it doesn't matter the claim, for out of the heart springs forth desire, if the heart is wicked then it will desire wickedness. Yes, that's right... we have free will to choose anything we desire, for we will always choose what we desire which is why the new birth is so imperative, which is why scripture says that we are given a new heart, we are given new desires. But honestly, it goes deeper than that even, for not only is our faith proved out through our works.. our faith is also proved out through what we support. Look at what Paul wrote in Roman's, chapter 1. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God nor were they thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man-and birds and four-footed creeping things"

While I think that Paul here is talking about idols and worshiping images of God's made by man really we can say the same thing is still happening. Mankind may not create an image out of gold and bow down to it, but we do still elevate things to take the place of God. There are a myriad of things that people elevate to a level of worship, animals, environmental issues, science, sports, money, and family just to name a few. It is no different if you are bowing down to the idol of family, or looking to humanistic science or psychology for all knowledge and wisdom then it is to be bowing down to a golden calf. All of these things are given, are created by God..and when we chose to worship the creature over the creator, or the gift over the gift giver then we are guilty of idol worship. It is changing the glory of the incorruptible God, and giving it to corruptible man.

Continuing on in Romans 1. "Therefore God gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchange the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever, amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions, for even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature, and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do the things which are not fitting" We who are his, have the mind of Christ...but those who are not his, have a debased mind which desires to fulfill its lustful desires. being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful." And pay attention here to the last verse, "who knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same, but also approve of those who practice them."

The out-flowing of the Christian heart is more than just our mere actions, but it is also in our approval of the actions of others. Accepting the sinful lifestyle of others despite their claims of faith, or encouraging people within their sin and rebellion also shows that the spirit is not within you, for the spirit will not condone such sinful rebellion against God. Kinda scary to think about huh, how many people, even those in our own family and friends actually fall into this category. Who may themselves not be practicing any particular sin...but are approving of those who do. It says, that even they also are deserving of death. It is in exactly this same way that Peter is addressing this crowd when he says, "in verse 23, you have taken Jesus by lawless hands have crucified and put to death, and again in verse 36 he doubles down and says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Did everyone there take a spear to Jesus? Did everyone there nail his hands and feet to the cross? Of course not...but as we know from the account the multitudes shouted for his crucifixion, they were approving, they were encouraging, and therefore are just as guilty of the act as those who put him there. But look what they did upon hearing this.. upon being confronted the the gospel and being shown their rebellion, verse 37 "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." That right there is the gospel, we are all lost, we are all in our sins, we are all guilty of the blood of Christ.. our heart, our lives, our thoughts, condemn us. For we are all included in that list that Paul wrote in Roman's that we read, not a single one of us escapes that....and he says that they who do, and practice such things are deserving of death. This isn't just the death of the body, but it is the death of eternal suffering in hell.

This is the natural state of mankind, this was each and every one of us, going about our lives, choosing to fulfill our desires, making excuses for the sins of others....and scripture says, that we are deserving of hell. This cuts to the very issue at hand, no one will choose God, for no one wants God, in fact even though one may claim him, unless the heart and desires have been changed that claim is nothing more than an empty proclamation in an attempt to convince themselves by the repetition of a lie that they are right with God.

One can not, and one will not be right with God as long as one is yet enslaved, or approving of sinfulness. Sin is not about our actions...Sin is done in the heart, sin is a thought, an intention, our actions are the product of the outflowing of a sinful heart. Just as good works is the out flowing of a heart that loves God. This is why the approval of sin in others is just as guilty as the sin itself. As Paul Wrote, both are deserving of death. This is really the opposite of everything we see today, our society tells us that we must accept anything and everything otherwise we are bigots, and we are hateful and evil people. The world is in rebellion against the nature that God has created, the world says.. Why did you make me like this God, I don't like it.. and I will remake myself into an image that I prefer. It is the proverbial shaking of your fist in God's face. Who are we, the created being to think that we have any such authority against the one who created us? What a horrid place to be....if you think life is hard now, you think that you, oh Christian, have struggles in this world....imagine being one who God has turned over, one who God has left to your own devices, to wallow in your vial sin and rebellion. To seek comfort and hope, but only be able to find despair, anger, and hopelessness.

This really is the fate of the world that we live in today. There has always been sin in the world since the fall of Adam, and as Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun....yet it seems that we are living in a time where evil is called good, and that which is good is called evil. So how do we live in such a world? Well, I think Peter here in the book of Acts is a great example. Proclaim the gospel to the lost, shine God's light into this dark world, and show God's love in this world of anger and hatred. There tends to be an idea that we must separate ourselves from the world, create our own little societies, but that is not what we are called to do, we are called to be salt and light to this world...but we must do so out of compassion for this lost world. By that I mean, I have seen far too many who claim Christ respond to sinners in judgment and in a holier than you attitude..forgetting that they themselves were once just as those they are talking to.

What is the greatest commandment? I mean.. we all know this right? To love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind...to love God with everything you have..nothing is left out. And the second is like it....love your neighbor as yourself. I am not talking about the kind of love that we see promoted today, love does not approve of wrong doings, love does not approve of sinful behavior, love warns, love instructs, in order to deliver and protect. As Casey has a way of saying...When you are witnessing, or when you are in a place where it is necessary to point out and discuss the sinful behavior or lifestyle of another.. whether a believer or not, we should be doing so through tears, not through anger.. not through some form of self righteousness.. but out of compassion and love for the very soul of that individual remembering that you yourself were no different.

In the backward logic of the world, in the world's idea of love and acceptance they are doing nothing more than driving one another into darkness and death. If you had a friend who is standing on the edge of a cliff about to jump off, would you not do all in your power to save them? In the logic of the world, as Paul says in mankind seeking to be wise they become fools....the idea and practice of love through acceptance is nothing more than pushing your friend off of that edge. For you are encouraging them in what they desire, they desire to jump and if we were to be consistent in the world's way of thinking then we should out of love encourage them to pursue their passion and desire. But true love for that person will seek to save them from their own destruction. Even the world knows you don't encourage someone to jump off a bridge...yet that is exactly what is happening in this radical idea we see today of the acceptance of sinful behavior. And it is for this reason that Paul said, if you even approve of such you are guilty of it yourself, for the spirit which indwells in you can not approve of such. So the reality is, one who is approving of sin in another, despite any claims they may make of faith or belief, does not themselves have the spirit in them, therefore their faith, and their claims are empty and false.

Do you see the importance of the indwelling of the spirit? The symbiotic nature in which the spirit works within us to will and to do? The importance of the new birth? IT truly is the defining difference between the lost and the saved, for without the new birth and the indwelling of the spirit we are left to our own desires, the pursuit of our own lusts, but God has given us a new heart, and himself is a part of us changing our desires to be after him. Who, through his love, teaches us to love not only him, but one another. This is the promise that was given to God's children, this is the power of the Holy Spirit, to be able to think God's thoughts after him...that is, to be discerning of his word, to seek his favor, to live in love toward him and others, to be given the power to overcome sin, to be a witness to those who are perishing, to be a light in this dark world, and to deliver a message of hope to the hopeless.

Peter did not mince words, nor did he cower but he stood up and proclaimed the gospel to the multitudes, confronted them of their sin, and it says verse 37 “now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your Children and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying Be saved from this perverse generation, then those who gladly received his word were baptized and that day about three thousand were added to them.”

As much as things change, things stay the same....we are still living in a perverse generation, which calls evil good and good evil, who celebrate sin, who encourage rebellion, a generation who curses God.....yet, it is not hopeless for God's word is still doing its work today, just as it did on the day of Pentecost. God is still about the business of calling his children to repent and believe. The message is the same today, as it was then....repent and believe, turn from the path of death and destruction, despair and depression, darkness and turmoil, and rest in him who by his mercy and grace gives everlasting peace.