

## **HIS WILL, HIS WORD, HIS TRUTH**

James 1: 18 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

This past week, as I was studying to preach on this one verse, I couldn't find a soul in my research willing to preach on this one verse. Then I stumbled onto a message by a 58-year-old Baptist preacher, Pastor Jimmy Haile at Macedonia-Hix Baptist Church in Burleson County, Texas, a rural church about thirteen miles northeast of Caldwell, Texas. Caldwell, Texas is about 110 miles north west of Houston. He told a story I wanted to ask him for permission to use, and I hope to use his story as I close. He told me his rural church used to have about 60 people in it, but now has only 12-15 people. I prayed a long time with Pastor Jimmy. He told me, "I'm keeping your phone number. Can I call you if I need prayer again?" I agreed. I researched this pastor and I found one interesting thing he wrote. Here it is, and I quote. "If I could preach one more time, I would say...: "I need Jesus more than He ever needed me! Preaching fulfills a part of my life I never even knew was empty! He has given me more than I have ever given Him! I have been the happiest in the ministry and I have been the most miserable when I have been out of the ministry!" I started thinking about many of you—just like Pastor Jimmy Haile, you are re-created, born again believers walking with Jesus and it shows to this watching world. Would to God all of us who know Jesus would make this text our own. Can we say of Jesus? "Of His own will He brought me forth as a new creation in Christ, by the word of truth, that I should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures."

Let's study and glean a few rich, golden nuggets. Let's pan the gold. To claim the truth of this text is like striking it rich and staking a claim. Last fall as my wife and I were out hunting, we came across a creek that was dammed up and we found the place where gold was being panned in the creek, and we found the claim staked. It was a crude marker, but it had the name of the person who was panning the gold. What did James mean by his use of the word first-fruits. Whatever he meant, it all happened by God's will and by His Word of Truth that we would be a kind of first fruits of His creation. Let's attempt to answer three "how" questions today. First, how are we God's first-fruits of His creation? Secondly, how are we God's first-fruits by His Will? Thirdly, how are we God's first-fruits by His Word of Truth?

**HOW ARE WE GOD'S FIRST-FRUITS OF HIS CREATION?** (I.) There are three phrases here. Let's start with the third and last phrase first, "that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." The apostle Paul knew those who are called to follow Jesus, who come and follow Him in this age of grace, are representatives of the Lord, and part of His plan and purpose to show the world who He is and what His plan is for the salvation of His creatures. Paul speaks of this word "first-fruits" five times, himself. His first use of this Greek word **aparche**, is found in Romans 8:23 when he associates our being born again or brought forth as coming from the first-fruits of God's Spirit. We read, "We ourselves, who have the first-

fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” What we are as first-fruits, comes from the Holy Spirit. It’s a God thing to be first-fruits and it is accomplished as we are the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and He groans inwardly in us as we eagerly await the day of the climax of our adoption, when we get our new bodies in heaven.

The word **aparche** means a beginning of sacrifice, referring to an offering of Jewish first-fruits of grain from their harvest. In Romans 16: 5, Paul names one man as the first-fruits of Asia. He wrote, “Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first-fruits or the first convert to Christ in Asia.” In I Corinthians 15: 20-23, Paul used the word twice. We read, “But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the **aparche**, **the first-fruits** of those who have fallen asleep—whose who have died in Jesus. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ.” When Christ arose, he was the first-born or first-fruits of all those who have died. At the coming of Jesus, all believers will become the first-fruits of all those belonging to Jesus. Again, in I Corinthians 16: 15, Paul said, “Now I urge you, brothers, -- you know that the household of Stephanus were the first converts or first-fruits in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.” Jesus said in Luke 14: 33, “So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.” In the New Testament, we as believers are called the body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the called-out ones—the church. It is this Holy Spirit who enables us to belong to Jesus Christ and be a part of the Church. In Romans 8: 9, we read, “You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to Him.” For the Lord’s New Testament Church to exist, it was necessary for God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to send His Holy Spirit. So, be sure, first-fruits are disciples, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the church, and Christ’s first-fruits follow Jesus.

There is one final use of **aparche**—in Revelation 14: 4, about first-fruits who are the 144,000 Jewish witnesses, redeemed by the Lamb who had the Lamb’s Name and his Father’s Name written on their foreheads. They are singing a new song before the throne and before the 24 elders. No one could learn that song except for the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. They are all unmarried men, who are virgin men who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. And we read these words about them, “These have been redeemed from man-kind as first-fruits for God and the Lamb and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.”

The word first-fruits is mentioned 24 times in the Old Testament and refers to the harvest of grain. In Leviticus 23:9-11-And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land

which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf.” These fruits were sacred. They belonged to God, just as we believers, the Bride of Christ, are a special possession to God. The first-fruits were also indicative of a greater harvest to come, which would follow among God’s new creatures or new creations in Christ. In the plan of God, we now live in the age of the first-fruits, the time during which God is preparing a special, chosen people to reign with Christ in His Kingdom. Peter says of us, in I Peter 2: 9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Are you today a part of this mighty group—Christ’s first-fruits? Secondly,

**HOW ARE WE GOD’S FIRST-FRUITS BY HIS WILL?** (II.) Notice with me phrase # 1—describing us as a kind of first-fruits of His creatures, James says, “Of His own will He brought us forth.” What is this about? This defines who we as first-fruits are. We are those who are gifted by God’s good and perfect gift from above with birth from above, a new birth, born again—we are born again believers. James uses a phrase speaking of our new birth as an accomplished fact—the KJV states—“begat He us.” We read in the ESV, “He brought us forth.” We who are first-fruits all had to come into the family of God by the same door, and Jesus is the Door. Like Nicodemus in John 3: 7, we had to be born again. No good man, no matter how good can go to heaven by his works. We all need new birth. That’s how we become first-fruits. There’s only one way, Peace through the power of the cross of Christ. None of us can ever forget, we did not accomplish this for ourselves. Becoming first-fruits means it is never ever, for even one person, by our own doing. And our main point here is – how does this new birth come to be? The answer is—“Of His own will, He brought us forth. It’s not by our merits, our efforts, our track record, or our goodness, but only by Christ’s mercy, of His own will. Pastor Larry read in Ephesians 2: 4—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.”

Jesus says to every one of His first-fruits, His born again, the sweet words in John 15: 16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide...” The first-fruits in the Old Testament were a powerful statement from God’s people, that they belonged to the Lord, their lands, herds, crops, their seasons and harvests – everything came from God. It was all of His will. So, they brought to God the very best of their first-fruits, with thankfulness, joy and praise. To their unbelieving neighbors, their testimony was, “God is faithful. He keeps His promises!” When God’s people refused to bring the first-fruits to Him they were saying, “This is ours. It belongs to us. We’ve worked hard for it. We are keeping it all for ourselves.” Giving the first-

fruits was a barometer of spiritual health in God's people. When we act like God's first-fruits and give our all as His first-fruits, it is all of His will. Thirdly and lastly,

### **HOW ARE WE GOD'S FIRST-FRUITS BY HIS WORD OF TRUTH? (III.)**

Notice with me phrase # 2, "He brought us forth, by the Word of Truth." What a mighty instrument God used to make us His first-fruits. Sooner, or later, when we listen to any testimony from a born-again believer, they almost always mention a text from God's Word of Truth. Maybe it is John 3: 16. Maybe it is Rev. 3: 20, or Acts 16: 31, Acts 4: 12, Romans 3: 23, and 6: 23, or I John 1: 11, 12, Matthew 11: 28-30, John 5: 24—"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life." Sometimes God the Holy Spirit speaks through Words of Truth like Galatians 6: 7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever one sows, that will he also reap." No matter what we testify or preach, the ignition (the starter for salvation that brings salvation, that turns us into first-fruits, is a Word of God's truth. The word of a witness or preacher can be so helpful, but it is ultimately God's Word that does the work. Leading a soul to Christ is first and foremost, leading a person we are witnessing to, leading them to the Word of Truth. God loves us the way we are, but He loves us too much to leave us that way. That's why His purpose is to bring us forth by the Word of Truth. It is God Himself who brings the Word of Truth to men and women, in a sermon, from a friend, a neighbor, a coworker who speaks to them, or in a tract placed in a hand, or through a book, or through a song. God uses all kinds of tools, radio, television, the internet and so many other avenues to reach people with His Word of Truth.

Peter said it well in I Peter 1: 22-25, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the Truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God. "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the Word of the Lord remains forever." And this Word is the good news that was preached to you." Did you know, you can make up a perfect testimony, share the story of your salvation, and refuse to use the Word of Truth. You will not reap a harvest, for we become first-fruits by being begotten and brought to faith in Christ by the Word of Truth. If you are biologically inclined, you could well learn how to put into a little brown seed all the nitrogen, hydrogen, carbon, and other elements to make it a clone of a kernel of corn or a seed of wheat. But if you plant your man-made seed or kernel, it will not produce corn or wheat. Only God puts life in a seed or kernel. Only by planting the seed of the Word of Truth can souls be saved. You may talk someone into praying a prayer, but true salvation comes when we are brought forth by the Word of truth. Witnessing without the Word of Truth is not what God calls us to do. Plant the Word of Truth. Memorize it. Use it. Plant it in hearts. God blesses and multiplies by His Word of Truth. God's will in a new birth

is for the Word of His Truth to be the seed that brings forth fruit. God uses each of us as first fruits, by planting us where we live, in our family, in our home, in our school, in our church, in our job, and in so many other ways. He plants us in His chosen soil and asks us to be willing to die to our selfish desires that He will bring sons and daughters to glory. Jesus said in John 15: 8, "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." Now let me close my message with a story I read that my new pastor friend from Macedonia-Hix Baptist Church wrote about.

"Carl was a quiet man. He didn't talk much. He would always greet you with a big smile and a firm handshake. After living in our neighborhood for over 50 years, no one could really say they knew him very well. Before his retirement, he took the bus to work each morning. The lone sight of him walking down the street often worried us. He had a slight limp from a bullet wound received in World War II. Watching him, we all worried that though he had survived the War, he may not make it in our world with its ever-increasing random violence, gangs, and drug abuse. One day, he saw a flier from our local church asking for volunteers for caring for the gardens behind the minister's parsonage. He responded in his characteristically unassuming manner. Without fanfare, he just signed up. Carl came to know and love the Lord. You could tell by the change in his life, he belonged to Jesus. He was well into his 87th year when an awful thing happened. He was finishing watering the pastor's garden when three gang members approached him. He asked, "Would you like a drink of water from this hose?" The tallest, toughest-looking of the three said, "Yeah, sure!" The Pastor was watching from inside his house. Carl offered the hose to him. As the man got a drink, the other two gang members grabbed Carl's arm, throwing him down. They stole his retirement watch and his wallet, and then ran before the Pastor could run outside to stop them. Carl tried to get himself up, but he had been thrown down on his bad leg. He lay there trying to gather himself as the pastor came running to help him. "Carl, are you okay? Are you hurt?" the pastor kept asking as he helped Carl to his feet. Carl sighed, shaking his head and said, "They're just kids really who need to wise up and grow up someday. His wet clothes clung to his slight frame and he bent over to pick up the hose. He adjusted the nozzle again and started to water. Confused, the pastor asked, "Carl, what are you doing?" "I've got to finish my watering. It's been very dry lately." The pastor could only marvel. Carl was a man from a different time and place.

A few weeks later the three returned. Just as before, the same gang members came and Carl offered them a drink from his hose. This time they didn't rob him. They wrenched the hose from his hand and drenched him head to foot in the icy water. When they had finished humiliating this old man, they sauntered off down the street, throwing catcalls and curses, laughing at what they had just done. Carl just watched them. Then he turned toward the warm sun, picked up his hose, and went

on with his watering. The summer was quickly fading into fall. Carl was doing some tilling when he was startled by the sudden approach of someone behind him. He was afraid, and he stumbled and fell into some evergreen branches. As he struggled to get up, he turned to see the tall leader of his summer tormentors reaching down for him. He braced himself for the expected attack. "Don't worry I'm not gonna hurt you this time." The young man spoke softly, offering his tattooed and scarred hand to Carl. As he helped Carl get up, the man pulled a crumpled bag from his pocket and handed it to Carl. "What's this?" Carl asked.

"It's your stuff," the man explained. "It's your stuff back. Even the money in your wallet." "I don't understand," Carl said. "Why would you help me now?" The man shifted his feet, seeming embarrassed. "I learned something from you," he said. "I ran with that gang and hurt people like you. We picked you because you were old and we knew we could do it. Every time we came and did something to you, instead of yelling and fighting back, you tried to give us a drink. You didn't hate us for hating you. You kept showing love in spite of our hate." He stopped for a moment "I couldn't sleep after we stole your stuff, so here it is back. That bag's my way of saying thanks for straightening me out, I guess." Then the tall man left. Carl took out his retirement watch and put it back on his wrist. Opening his wallet, he checked for his wedding photo. He gazed for a moment at the young bride that still smiled back at him from all those years ago. He died one cold day after Christmas that winter. Many people attended his funeral, in spite of the weather. The pastor noticed the tall young man he thought he had seen before, sitting quietly in a back corner of the church. The pastor told of Carl's faithfulness to God in tending his garden. He said, "I will never forget Carl and his garden." The following spring another flier went up. It read: "Person needed to care for Carl's garden." The flier went unnoticed. Then a knock was heard at the minister's office door. Opening the door, the minister saw that tall young man with two scarred and tattooed hands holding the flier. "I believe this is my job, if you'll have me," the young man said. The minister recognized him as the man who had returned the stolen watch and wallet to Carl. The pastor handed him the keys to the garden shed, and said, "Please take care of Carl's garden and honor him." The man went to work and, over the next several years, he tended the pastor's flowers and vegetables just as Carl had done. In that time, he too, found the Lord, he went to college, got married, and kept the pastor's garden as beautiful as he thought Carl would have kept it. One day he approached the pastor and told him that he couldn't care for the garden any longer. He explained, "My wife just had a baby boy last night, and she's bringing him home on Saturday." "Well, congratulations!" said the pastor, as he was handed the garden shed keys. "That's wonderful! What's the baby's name?" "Carl," he replied. That's the whole gospel message simply stated as James put it, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures." Are people seeing Jesus in you?