

James – Life after Faith

James 5:19-20

“Sanctified Search and Rescue”

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1. With funding from a \$1.2 million grant by the National Science Foundation, researchers from Texas A&M and Stanford University are working on a new generation of what are known as Rescue Robots.

2. Rescue Robots are used to get to people who are trapped in the wake of earthquakes and other disasters, when search and rescue teams are unable to reach them.

3. The engineers from the two universities have already created a prototype rescue robot that they call the “survivor buddy”. The robot can access the web, provide two-way video conferencing, and play music, among other things.ⁱ

4. So, the next time you are trapped in a collapsed building, at least you will be able to check your email, and listen to a song.

4. Natural disasters are not the only time that search and rescue work is needed. In fact, as Bro. James finishes his letter, he points us to the need for sanctified search and rescue.

5. In verse 19 of chapter 5, James describes a scenario in which someone among us “err(s) from the truth” and strays from that which is right.

6. Rather than letting that erring person continue in their dangerous path, James encourages us to go on a search and rescue mission after them, and seek to restore them to where they should be.

7. The U.S. Army Ranger creed says, “I will never leave a fallen comrade to fall into the hands of the enemy...” That should be the motto of the Church as well.

8. Consider with me some things that James teaches us in this text about our responsibility to go after those who have gone astray. First of all, James reminds us that:

I. WE SHOULD BE CONSCIOUS OF THE POTENTIAL TO STRAY

1. The overall point of this text is the recovery of those who "*err from the truth.*" However, in calling us to go after those who stray, James reminds that is absolutely possible for some among us *to* stray.
2. No matter how strong you may feel you are; no matter how committed to Christ you may seem to be, all of us should heed the words of I Corinthians 10:12. "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*"
3. You and I must consider the sobering possibility that there could come a day when we are the straying one that James describes in this text.
4. Think with me about the potential there is for us to stray, and consider:

A. The process involved in this erring

1. James raises the possibility of someone among us "*err(ing) from the truth*". The word translated "err" in this passage means to go astray; to deviate from a prescribed path.
2. Jesus used the same word in Matthew 18:12 to describe a sheep that wanders off from the flock, and has to be pursued by the shepherd.
3. The ESV translates the phrase, "...if anyone among you wanders from the truth..." James is talking about someone who gets off course from that which is right.
4. This erring from the truth may happen in a couple of ways. For one, someone among us might wander from the truth *in principle*.
5. In other words, a person may begin to deny certain truths they once believed. For instance, someone might say that they no longer believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God. That is erring from the truth in principle.
6. Also, this erring from truth could be *in practice*. In other words, a person may not openly deny the truth of Scripture, but in their daily practice they no longer live as if those things are true.
7. Someone may profess to still be a Christian, and yet completely contradict Christianity with their life. They never open their Bible. They never worship the Lord. They never do anything for Christ.

8. That person has wandered from the truth just as much as the man who openly denies the truth. Whenever someone veers off the course of following Christ, they have "*erred from the truth*".

9. When it comes to the potential to stray that James mentions in this text, consider not only the process involved in this erring, but notice carefully:

B. The person indicted in this erring

1. Look again at verse 19. James says, "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth...*" The phrase translated "any of you" is the same one found in verses 13 and 14. There is rendered as "among you".
2. This wayward, wandering person in verse 19 is someone who strayed out from among the brethren – those who belong to Christ.
3. Think about that. This one who errs *from* the truth was once standing alongside other Christians *in* the truth. There was a time when this straying soul appeared to be a strong saint.
4. They *used* to sing in the choir. They *used* to teach a Sunday school class. They *used* to come to prayer meeting. Now, their names are mentioned at prayer meeting.
5. The truth that ought to get our attention is that this person James is describing was at one time just like most of us. That means that it is possible that some of us could one day be just like them.
6. Hebrews 2:1 offers this instruction: "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.*"
7. In Revelation 2:25, our Lord Jesus said, "*But that which ye have already [,] hold fast till I come.*" We are instructed to "hold tightly" to the truth, because we all have the potential to stray from it.
8. During the critical years when I was a teenager, I had a youth pastor who made a tremendous impact upon my life. He invested a great deal of time in me, and helped to create a desire in my heart to serve the Lord.
9. I ran into him not too long ago, and as I tried to thank him for his influence upon me, it was an awkward conversation. You see; my former youth pastor is now divorced from his wife, completely out of church, and living in open sin.

10. Don't think that you will never be the one who wanders from the truth. We should all be mindful of the songwriter's confession:

*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love,ⁱⁱ*

11. In this passage, James teaches us not only that *we should be conscious of the potential to stray*, but in looking closely at these verses, notice also secondly that:

II. WE SHOULD BE CLEAR ABOUT THE PERIL OF STRAYING

1. James ends verse 19 with the phrase, "*...and one convert him;*" that is, if one were able to bring back the person who goes astray.

2. Then James says in verse 20, "*Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*"

3. While it is not the main point James is trying to make in the passage, in this verse he reveals to us the danger that accompanies the erring from the truth described in verse 19.

4. This is an important concept for us to grasp. Think about the peril that a person places themselves in when they wander from the truth. Consider with me:

A. The indication of this text

1. James says that if a person is able to turn around the person who has erred from the truth, he will "*save a soul from death*".

2. The indication of this text then, is that if that wayward one *does not* convert and *is not* rescued, their soul will suffer death.

3. This makes some people, and their personal theology, very nervous. Some people struggle with the idea that the soul of someone who was once "among us" ('one of you' as James says) could ever, possibly die.

4. We should not, however, be startled by what this text seems to indicate. The New Testament is clear about what happens to those who turn from the faith, and never return.

5. They are called "apostates", and the Bible portrays nothing but a grim prospect for their eternal state.

6. Jude says of them, "*Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain...*" Hebrews 10:27 says that all the apostate has before them is, "*...certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*"

7. In harmony with the teaching of the New Testament, James indicates that those who err from the truth, and never return are in danger of death. It is perilous, dangerous thing to wander from the truth!

8. With that being said, in order for us to fully grasp the peril of straying, we need to consider not only the indication of this text, but also further:

B. The interpretation of this text

1. Some of you may be thinking, "Now wait a minute. If a person was 'among us', or 'one of us', then how could their soul ever die?"

2. Some of you long-time Baptists will have a flashback to your training union days and say, "Preacher, we believe in once saved always saved."

3. Let me assure you, I do too. To be more specific, I believe in once *truly* saved, always saved. To understand the correct interpretation of this text, we need to consider the larger teaching of the Bible.

4. For instance, consider the parable Jesus gave in Luke 8, as well as Matthew 13. He told about a man who sowed some seed, and the different types of soil upon which the seeds fell.

5. Jesus went on to explain that the seed was the Word of God, and the soil was the different hearts of those who hear it.

6. Jesus taught that there are times when people seem to embrace the truth, and believe the gospel. They may even show signs of spiritual life. But eventually something turns them away from that truth, and chokes out the gospel in their lives.

7. Comparing what Jesus taught with what James says in this text, we then understand why the soul of the person who *permanently* errs from the truth will die.

8. The fact that they never return to the truth indicates they have never really believed with genuine, saving faith.

10. The Apostle John gives the clearest statement about this principle. He says In I John 2:19, "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*"

11. We must be careful assuming that everyone who claims to have been saved has actually been saved. If they stray from the truth, never to return, they reveal that they didn't fully believe the truth in the first place.

12. Now, if you and I were to visit the art museum and spend all of our time examining and studying the frames around the art, we will have missed the point of the art museum.

13. Likewise, if we read the last two verses of James, and think only about the death of the soul, and what happens to those who err, we will have missed the real point of this passage.

14. Therefore, as we look at this text, we learn not only that *we should be conscious of the potential to stray*, and that *we should be clear about the peril of straying*, but we see also thirdly that:

III. WE SHOULD BE COMMITTED TO THE PEOPLE THAT STRAYED

1. Though we had to drive around the block a couple of times, we have now reached the real destination of meaning in this text.

2. Let's look at it again as a whole. James says, "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*"

3. The primary principle James is trying to convey with these closing verses is that those of us who see someone err from the truth have the opportunity and the obligation to search for them and rescue them from the danger they are in.

4. Think with me about this commitment we should have to those who have strayed from among us. First of all, notice:

A. The mission we have

1. Notice again that phrase at the close of verse 19, "*and one convert him.*" The word "convert" simply means to turn around, or to turn about.

2. It is the word John uses in Revelation 1:12, when he says, "*And I turned to see the voice that spake with me...*"

3. Our mission then, according to James is to go to those who have strayed from the truth, and we are to turn them around, back toward the truth.

4. We are called to restore those wanderers back to the place from which they have wandered. Paul says in Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness...*"

5. If our mission is accomplished, James says we will have rescued them from death, and brought them to forgiveness so that we "*hide a multitude of sins.*"

6. Think of what a noble and awesome ministry this is! Preaching from this text over a century ago, the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon painted this word picture. He said:

"A house is in flames, and in it is a woman with her children, who cannot by any means escape...She has lost all presence of mind and knows not how to act. The strong man comes, and says, "Make way! make way! I must save that woman!" ...he marches through the fire. Though scorched, and almost stifled, he gropes his way. He ascends one staircase, then another, and though the stairs totter, he places the woman beneath his arm, takes a child on his shoulder, and down he comes...He has jeopardized his life, and perhaps an arm may be disabled, or a limb taken away, or a sense lost, or an injury irretrievably done to his body, yet he claps his hands, and says, "I have saved lives from death!"

7. Spurgeon goes on to say, "But ah! brethren, the body which was saved from death to-day may die tomorrow. Not so the soul that is saved from death: it is saved everlastingly."ⁱⁱⁱ

8. This is our mission, to save the souls of those who would otherwise be everlastingly lost. With that being said, consider not only the mission we have, but also further:

B. The means we have

1. How are we to carry out these "search and rescue" missions after those who have strayed from the truth?
2. James does not specifically say in this text. However, the Word of God offers us some instruction on what we are to do to restore those who have erred.
3. What are our means for restoration? First of all, we are called to pray for those who have strayed. I John 5:16 says, "*If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.*"
4. The phrase "he shall ask" describes the work of intercessory prayer. Our first means of restoring those who have strayed is to pray to God on their behalf.

5. Not only can we speak to God for them, but II Thessalonians 3:15 indicates that we should speak to them about God. Paul says, "...count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

6. In Matthew 18:15-16, Jesus also instructs us to go to someone who has done wrong, and confront them with their error.

7. One thing is clear; it is not an option for us to simply sit by and let people wander off without using some means to try to save them.

8. Far too many churches have membership rolls filled with the names of people who long ago wandered away without anybody so much as asking them where they were going.

9. We can't lock the doors and keep people from leaving, but we can make sure nobody leaves without knowing that their church family is absolutely committed to doing whatever we can to turn them around, and save their lives.

1. It sounds incredible, but almost a full month after the devastating earthquake in Haiti, a 28 year-old man named Evan Muncie was found alive inside the rubble of a market where he sold rice.

2. Muncie was emaciated and badly injured, but with some kind of limited water source, he had managed to stay alive for four weeks until someone trying to dig out the marketplace discovered him.

3. It is interesting that the Haitian government had declared search and rescue operations to be over almost two weeks before Muncie was discovered.^{iv}

4. There are countless people who have strayed from the truth out wandering who knows where in this world.

5. Bro. James reminds us at the close of his book that the church has no right to call off the sanctified search and rescue until Jesus returns.

6. May the Spirit of God remind us of the potential to stray, the peril of straying, and most of all, the people who've strayed that need someone to turn them around.

ⁱ Cimon, Marlene, New in Rescue Robots: Survivor Buddy, 6/2/10, *usnews.com*, accessed 6/10/10, <http://www.usnews.com/science/articles/2010/06/02/new-in-rescue-robots-survivor-buddy.html>

ⁱⁱ Robinson, Robert, *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, 1758

ⁱⁱⁱ Spurgeon, Charles, Spurgeon's Collected Sermons (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit): 0045 – Conversion, (Wordsearch CROSS ebook)

^{iv} Doctors: Haitian may have survived 4 weeks in rubble, 2/9/10, *cnn.com*, accessed 6/11/10, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/02/08/haiti.rescue/index.html>