**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

 ***The Difference the Birth of Christ Makes to You***

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December 27th In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

 When we talk about Christmas, we often start with the story of Mary and Joseph in the first century. However, many of us know that the origins of Christmas start in the book of Genesis. Last Sunday, we noted that the Apostle Paul was writing to the Believers in Corinth contrasting Adam and Jesus.

**1 Corinthians 15:45-47** 45 So also it is written, (Gen. 2:7) "The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. 47 The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven.

 With this verse, we see the origins, purpose and success of Adam and Jesus are analyzed to be a contrast. We learn the primary difference is between Adam from “natural earth” and Jesus from “spiritual heaven.” Adam was just a man (a soul from earth), but Jesus was a life-giving spirit from heaven.

We also see the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 stated and fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel." (Genesis 3:15)

Jesus coming into the world made it possible to defeat Satan, as chronicled in Matthew 4 (Test in the Wilderness), and, also, by rising from the dead and walking from a tomb proven in the Gospels. These triumphant altercations defeated Satan, because, by them, death and sin were shown to have been defeated. How so? Because God in the flesh, as Jesus, demonstrated that through the power of His Spirit, sin and death can be overcome here in this fallen environment. God, as Jesus, demonstrated that Satan does not have any power over a person who has the Spirit of God in them. Remember, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8:2). “Game over”, as they say. God had to become a man to demonstrate this victory to us. Yes, it is possible to overcome sin and death, but only with God’s Spirit in a human being can there be victory over Satan and his tools of sin and death.

The practice of sin brings death. Believers live in a sinful world and fail at times. However, Believers do not walk in darkness as a practice of life. Death is the absence of God’s Spirit in a person’s heart. Once a person surrenders to God from their heart, no one can take them from His hand.

**John 10:24-33** 24 The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. 26 "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 27 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

 **28 and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.**

 29 "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30 "I and the Father are one." 31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" 33 The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."

**Ephesians 1:13** In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were **sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**

 Believers may have bad days and seasons like King David, but we come to the Lord and seek forgiveness (Psalm 51, 1 John 1).

**1 John 1:5-10** 5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him

and yet walk in the darkness,

we lie and do not **practice** the truth;

 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light,

we have fellowship with one another,

and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

 8 If we say that we have no sin,

we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

 9 If we confess our sins,

He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

 10 If we say that we have not sinned,

we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

 **So, what difference does the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, make to you?** God coming in the flesh, to live as one of us, affords us the opportunity to be victorious over sin and death in this life. This victory that can start now and stays with us when we pass from this life to our eternal life when we join God in His heaven. Remember, Jesus has a place prepared for us (John 14:1-3).

 However, there is opposition to what God has done. Satan works all the time to thwart/prevent people from surrendering to/joining God. We see this throughout the Bible. Voices of opposition can come from within and outside the Believer’s group. Sometimes, those within the Church do not see they are being a stumbling block to God’s Good News.

 Let us read the difficulties Paul, Barnabus, Peter and others endured to deliver the greatest message the world has ever heard. Acts 15 is the account of the Jerusalem counsel. This is the meeting in Jerusalem that takes place after the Apostles have been in the mission field a number of years. Scholars see the dates between 48 and 50 A.D. The significant issue focuses on membership in “The Way” predicated on certain aspects of meeting the legal requirements within Judaism. First of which is circumcision and then dietary laws including eating meat sacrificed to idols. After hearing Paul, Barnabus and Peter speak, James (half-brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem Church) stands and delivers a judgement starting in verse 13.

 **The Text of Acts 15:1-19**

Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren,

"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

 2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

 3 Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.

 4 When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

 5 But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying,

"It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

 6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

 7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them,

"Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

 8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

 10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

 11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

 12 All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. (Acts 15:1-12 NAU)

**James’ Judgment**

13 After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.

 14 "Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

 15 "With this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,

 16 'AFTER THESE THINGS I will return, AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN, AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS, AND I WILL RESTORE IT, (Amos 9:11)

 17 SO THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD, AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,' (Amos 9:12, Deut. 28:10)

 18 SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM LONG AGO.

 19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we **do not trouble** those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

Here we have a definitive statement from the leader of the Jerusalem assembly, James, that the Gentiles can come to God without going through the Law. James does outline common sense practices from which to abstain, so as not to be a bad witness. The demand for circumcision was averted. It is by faith a person comes to the Lord. Paul is the most prolific writer of the New Testament to compare/contrast the Law and faith. In Galatians 3, Paul makes very accurate and declarative statements about faith coming before the Law. Abraham was justified and made righteous before God by faith 430 years before the Law was given to Moses. Romans 3 and 4 are very exacting about “faith” being the path to right-standing with God. All throughout Paul’s 13 New Testament books, the majority of the letters address that “Faith” is the requirement from God to humanity for salvation. Faith is not a work to be seen. In Hebrews 11:1, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Works are seen, faith is not. Only God can judge true faith, not man.

James, being the leader of the Jerusalem council writes extensively in his letter (the book of James) that “faith” saves and produces good works. Real saving-faith produces good works. This understanding brings to mind Jesus’ words from the Cross, “It is finished!”. I continue to say - why did God go through all the work of the Incarnation, the Cross and Resurrection to leave us something to do? God did not leave any unfinished business at the Cross. What can we add to the Cross? Nothing! God does not ask us to add anything to the Cross!

Paul clearly states that water-baptism is not the power that saves. If water-baptism saves, then why did Paul **not** make it the center piece of his work? No, he did not. Paul declares to the Saints in Corinth. . .

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**1 Corinthians 1:18-17**

**AMEN**