

# "THE HAVE'S AND THE HAVE NOTS" JAMES 1:18

Have you ever considered the confident assertion of the songs of Christmas? They declare the incredible gift of God's grace in salvation. One of the greatest songs is Handel's Messiah. Perhaps the biography of how we received this great song will stir our love for the Christ we possess this morning! This great<sup>1</sup> masterpieces of music composition is the work of George Frederic Handel simply called Messiah.

Prior to its composition Handel had not been successful as a musician and had retired from much professional activity by the age of fifty-six. Then, in a remarkable series of events, a friend presented him with a libretto based on the life of Christ, the entire script of which was Scripture. Handel shut himself in his room on Brook Street in London. In twenty-four days, breathtakingly absorbed in this composition and hardly eating or drinking, Handel completed the work all the way to its orchestration. He was a man in the grip of profound inspiration. Later, as he groped for words to describe what he had experienced, he quoted Saint Paul, saying, "Whether I was in the body or out of my body when wrote it I know not." <sup>2</sup> Handel's servant testified that on one occasion en he walked into the room to plead with him to eat, he saw Handel with tears streaming down his face saying, "I did think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God Himself "<sup>3</sup>

When Messiah was staged in London, as the notes of the Hallelujah Chorus rang out- "King of Kings and Lord of Lords... And He shall reign forever and ever"-the king of England, drawn irresistibly, stood to his feet, and the audience followed as one. Listen to how one writer sums up the impact of Messiah:

Handel personally conducted more than thirty performances of Messiah; many of these concerts were for the benefit of the hurting and the needy. 'Messiah has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan..... Another wrote, "Perhaps the works of no other composer have so largely contributed to the relief of human suffering." Still another said, "Messiah music has done more to convince thousands of mankind that there is a God about us than all the theological works ever written."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ravi Zacharias, DELIVER US FROM EVIL, p. 208-209.

<sup>2</sup> Hertha Pauli, Handel and the Messiah story, (NY: Meridith, 1968), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Kavanaugh, The Spiritual Lives of greta Composers (Nashville: Sparrow Press, 1992), 6.

Even if overstated, the point is well taken. The work was based entirely on Scripture. The focus was on the person of Christ. The spirit of a man was enraptured by the holiness of God. A king rose spontaneously to his feet. The people followed his example. The first performance was a charitable benefit to raise money to free 142 people from prison who could not pay their debts. In the prison of suffering and evil within which the whole world now lives, the same Messiah offers us deliverance.

That deliverance comes in the free gift Christ offers. Let's examine His great salvation we can confidently know we have this morning. Would you follow along as I read it? James 1: 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

James here describes genuine conversion, a genuinely born again person has experienced the transforming internal work of God. This is a theme in the Word of God. Look now with me in I John 5: 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

So God says there are only two types of people on earth. Not rich and poor, not religious and irreligious, not civilized and uncivilized, not white and black, not male and female – no He says either a person at exactly this moment is a HAVE or a HAVE NOT! The question I would urge you to consider today is, do you have the Son of God in your life this morning.

A GENUINE LIFE COMES BY THE WORD OF TRUTH: James 1: 18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

## **WHAT DOES THE NEW BIRTH (HAVING JESUS) DO IN OUR LIVES?**

- IT MEANS WE KNOW THAT IT IS GOD WHO KEEPS ME. John 10: 27-29 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father's hand.
- IT MEANS WE KNOW THAT IT IS GOD WHO WILL ALWAYS LOVE ME. John 13: 1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. Romans 8: 35, 37 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.
- IT MEANS WE KNOW THAT WE ARE IN A DEEPENING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. John 14: 21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." As we who are born again yield to the Father, love His Word, come to Him in prayer, and obey what He has revealed to us, we enter a deeper relationship

with the Father, Son, and Spirit. "Salvation means we are going to heaven, but submission means that heaven comes to us!"

*This truth is illustrated in the experiences of Abraham and Lot, recorded in Genesis 18 and 19. When Jesus and the two angels visited Abraham's tent, they felt right at home. They even enjoyed a meal, and Jesus had a private talk with Abraham. But our Lord did not go to Sodom to visit Lot, because He did not feel at home there. Instead, He sent the two angels. Our experience with God ought to go deeper and deeper, and it will as we yield to the Spirit of Truth and permit Him to teach us and guide us. If we love God and obey Him, He will manifest His love to us in a deeper way each day.<sup>4</sup>*

Remember we are looking at THE HAVES AND THE HAVE NOTS. Who are the HAVE NOTS? To find out turn back with me to Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.<sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'<sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Jesus here introduces us to the HAVE NOTS. They say they know Him, they say they are serving Him, they think they are going to heaven – but in the end they are cast out into the endless darkness! For a moment this morning we need to carefully examine: FALSE FAITH vs. TRUE FAITH

Have nots or Spiritual fakes can point to "an experience," but it was a *false* experience. Satan is the counterfeiter. The Scriptures say that Satan has:

1. A FALSE GOSPEL Galatians 1:6-9 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,<sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.
2. PROCLAIMED BY FALSE MINISTERS 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.<sup>14</sup> And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.<sup>15</sup> Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.
3. LEADING FALSE CHRISTIANS (2 Cor. 11:26—"in perils among false brethren").

Remember Christ's Parable of the Tares? Jesus taught that Satan plants his counterfeits ("the children of the wicked one") wherever God plants true believers (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43).

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

Now for an unforgettable sight of these fake HAVE NOTS turn with me to the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter of Peter. True to his colorful personality, Peter uses some vivid illustrations from life to portray the true birth from above and the false birth from beneath.

Here is an outline starting at II Peter 2:15-22

1. v. 15-16 PROFESSION WITHOUT POSSESSION
2. v. 17-18 APPEARANCE WITHOUT REALITY
3. v. 19 TALK WITHOUT WALK
4. v. 20 EXTERNAL NOT INTERNAL
5. v. 21 SEED BUT NO FRUIT
6. v. 22 EXPERIENCE BUT NO CONVERSION

The fakes in Second Peter had *knowledge* of salvation and could use the language of the church, but they lacked that true saving experience with the Lord. They had been exposed to the gospel and even received the Word of God (2 Peter 2:21), but then they turned away from it. What really happened was: *they never trusted Christ and became His sheep*. Peter compares them to pigs and dogs, not sheep of Christ. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century dogs were not pampered pets! The Jews called the Gentiles "dogs" because a dog was nothing but a filthy scavenger who lived on garbage! It was hardly a title of respect and endearment!

What kind of "experience" did these false teachers have? To use Peter's vivid images, the pig was washed on the outside, but remained a pig; the dog was "cleaned up" on the inside, but remained a dog. The pig *looked* better and the dog *felt* better, but neither one had been changed. They each had the same old nature, not a new one.

When Peter notes both animals returned to the old life, he is explaining it merely was part of their nature. When our family joined two other families in raising a couple of pigs in New England, we all quickly learned pigs stay clean only a short time. Soon they race to the nearest mudhole. There's nothing wrong with a pig for acting like a pig because it has a pig's nature. The first time you see *a sheep* choosing to head for the mudhole, be concerned!

When I was growing up my parents raised hunting dogs (German short hairs and Weimeraners). I soon observed some had the habit of eating what dogs should not eat, and then regurgitating it out messily somewhere in our yard. But that was not all. They would then return to the scene of the crime and start all over again! Apparently dogs have been doing this for centuries, for Solomon mentioned it in Proverbs 26:11 "As a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly." This is the text that Peter quoted.

Think about what God is trying to say. A sick dog feels better after emptying its contaminated stomach, *but it remains a dog*. "Having an experience" did not change the dog's nature. Instead it only confirms the "dog nature". Why? If the dog came back and (just like a dog) lapped up his own vomit it is only confirming that it is genuine dog. It is a disgusting picture, but that is exactly the response Peter wanted to produce.

Have you ever met people who have told you about their “spiritual experiences,” but in their description there is no evidence of the supernatural reception of a new nature. Fakes are like the sow, some of them were cleaned up on the outside. Fakes can be like the dog, some of them were cleaned up temporarily on the inside and actually felt better. But by God's standard, the Word of truth, they have never become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). They tragically only thought they were free from the wickedness of their sins, in reality they were still in total, damnable bondage to an old sinful nature.

According to 2 Peter 2:20, these fakes “escaped the pollutions of the world.” This biblical word describes only an exterior kind of defilement. God says that those who are genuinely born again have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through [because of] lust” (2 Peter 1:4). The Bible word for “corruption” speaks of deep and internal defilement: it is no less than the cancer of sin decaying the soul. True born again children of God have received a new nature, a divine nature. This becomes evident through new and different appetites and desires. They have been transformed from the inside out. They have been reborn from the Satan's earthly kingdom of spiritual pigs and dogs into heavenly kingdom of God's sheep!

Can you imagine the indescribable terror of the person who thinks they are headed to heaven, only to discover that, in the end, they are condemned to Hell! Now we can see the depth of Peter's appeal in 2 Peter 1:10—“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” In other words, “Has your spiritual experience been genuine?” This morning there are many people in our churches who have never truly been born again, but who are convinced that they are saved and going to heaven! They have had “an experience,” and perhaps look better (like the sow) and feel better (like the dog), but they have not been *made better* as “partakers of the divine nature.”

## **HOW CAN WE BE SURE WE ARE GENUINELY BORN AGAIN THIS MORNING?**

Let's start in 2 Corinthians 13:5 “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”

These words were not written so that you and I might check on other people. They were inspired so that we may examine ourselves. Each of us must answer honestly before God:

1. Do I have the divine nature within me or am I merely pretending to be a Christian?
2. Do I cultivate this divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?
3. Has any unconfessed sin defiled my inner man? Am I willing to confess and forsake it?

4. Do I allow my old nature to control my thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule me?
5. When temptation comes, do I "play with it" or do I flee from it? Do I immediately yield to the divine nature within me?

Now look back with me in Acts 11. Unfortunately, the word Christian has lost a great deal of significance over the centuries and no longer means "one who has turned from sin, trusted Jesus Christ, and received salvation by grace" (Acts 11:21–23). Many people who have never been born again consider themselves "Christians" simply because they say they are not "pagans." After all, they may belong to a church, attend services somewhat regularly, and even occasionally give to the work of the church! But it takes more than that for a sinner to become a child of God. It takes repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins on the cross and rose again to give us eternal life. The believers in the early church suffered because they were Christians (1 Peter 4:16). Dr. David Otis Fuller has asked, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" A good question! And the answer is a matter of life or death! 5

The unsaved outsiders watch us Christians and are very critical of us. There must be nothing in our lives that would jeopardize our testimony. This story has often been told about Dr. Will H. Houghton, who pastored the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City and later served as president of Chicago's Moody Bible Institute till his death in 1946. When Dr. Houghton became pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta, a man in that city hired a private detective to follow Dr. Houghton and report on his conduct. After a few weeks, the detective was able to report to the man that Dr. Houghton's life matched his preaching. As a result, that man became a Christian. 6

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5 Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

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