Galatians 6:1-10; Hebrews 9:27,28 June 3, 2018

*Half Truths, Part 5 (Final)*

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*Ancient Words by Michael W. Smith*

Holy words long preserved for our walk in this world
They resound with God's own heart. Oh, let the ancient words impart
Words of Life, words of Hope. Give us strength, help us cope.
In this world, where e'er we roam, ancient words will guide us home.

Ancient words ever true. Changing me and changing you.
We have come with open hearts. Oh, let the ancient words impart.
Holy words of our Faith, handed down to this age,
came to us through sacrifice, Oh, heed the faithful words of Christ.

Holy words long preserved for our walk in this world
They resound with God's own heart. Oh, let the ancient words impart
Ancient words ever true. Changing me and changing you.
We have come with open hearts. Oh, let the ancient words impart.

 When I was thinking through this Half-Truths sermon series, I had four phrases on which I wanted to teach. And then, this ole’ Path Valley farmer named Steve Ruby came along after the first week’s sermon and asked, “Is karma in the Bible?” It’s an excellent question and it definitely falls into the half-truth category because part of its meaning comes from the Bible but part of it does not. We need lots of prayer for this one, folks. So, let’s begin.

 *Merciful God, help us, we pray. Help us learn. Help us want to learn. Help us want to learn your Truth so that we may walk in your Way and reflect the fullness of Life you died to give us. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all of our minds and hearts be pleasing in your sight, O God, may they rise up as true worship as we study your Word. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.*

 As someone was going out the door after worship last week I mentioned that this week we were going to look at the truth about karma. The response was something like, “That’ll be interesting. I’ve always thought I had bad karma in my life.” Certainly that was not the first time I’ve heard some of us use the word in some form or another.

 Let’s look at the definition of ‘karma.’ The word ‘karma’ comes from the ancient language of Hinduism called Sanskrit meaning 'act', 'action', or 'word'. The law of karma teaches (very simply) “what goes around comes around,” or “you’ll get what’s coming to you.” It’s the notion that all of our thoughts, words and actions begin a chain of cause and effect, and that we will personally experience the effects of everything we cause. It sounds very much like Galatians 6:7-10, *“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”* We reap what we sow. That’s the law of karma, and that’s the half that’s based on biblical truth.

 If I have a pack of cucumber seeds I should not expect that a tomato would grow from those seeds. If I plant a watermelon seed I should not expect that peppers would grow from those seeds. What I plant, I harvest. If I plant kindness into the world, I will receive kindness back. If I plant impatience and frustration into the world, I will receive impatience and frustration back. This truth of reaping and sowing should make us think. For instance, if I have trouble making and keeping friends, I should think hard about what kind of friend I am. Am I a trustworthy friend, a friend who looks out for the needs of the other, or do I want to be your friend for what I can get out of it? Reaping and sowing. If I am constantly getting into arguments with people, mostly likely it’s because I am sowing discord. I’m ‘looking for a fight,’ even though I might not be consciously aware of it. If we are reaping something in our lives over and over that’s not good, we need to take an honest look at what we are sowing. That makes sense, right? We reap what we sow. We harvest what we plant. So, does that make karma biblical? Let’s go a little further into it.

 The goal of Hinduism from which we get the word ‘karma’ is divine perfection and integration, which equals a rejoining of our body’s positive energy into the energy of the cosmos, the end result for the person then is a perfect nothingness. That’s the goal. According to their teachings, it takes the average person many, many, many *lifetimes* to reach divine perfection or full integration. The truth about the law of karma is that how you live this life will determine the quality of life you will have *in the next life*. If you are unselfish, kind, and holy during this lifetime, you will be rewarded by being reincarnated (reborn into a new earthly body) into a pleasant life. However, if you live a life of selfishness and evil, you will be reincarnated into a less-than-pleasant lifestyle. In other words, you reap in the next life what you sow in this one. Some people who have a lot of troubles blame bad karma. “I must not have been very good in my past life, so I’m suffering the consequences now.” Are you starting to get a little uncomfortable, brothers and sisters? You should be.

 Christians don’t believe in reincarnation. We believe in resurrection. Not reincarnation. Resurrection. Have I heard Christians say things about their past lives or make suggestions as to what they want to be in their next life? Yes. Are they joking? Probably. Maybe. Does it bother me? Yes. It should bother anyone who calls themselves a Christian because nowhere in the Bible are we taught that we get more than this one life.

Some people who want to mix and match beliefs from a variety of religions to make their own designer belief system point to the scriptures that talk about the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist (as one in the same) to support their belief in reincarnation. Luke 1:17 says, *“And he* (John the Baptist) *will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”* But listen to what happened when John himself was asked if he was Elijah in John 1:19-23, *“This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.”And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said.”*

 Others point to the scripture in John 9:1-2 when Jesus’ disciples asked him about the man who had been born blind as their proof that reincarnation is biblical. *“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”* In other words, is his blindness the result of bad karma? He sowed too much negativity and heartache in his past life, so now he’s blind. Jesus’ answer? *“Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that work of God might be displayed in his life.”* (John 9:3).

 I’ve heard people say about children, “She’s an old soul.” You’ve heard that, I’m sure. What they are indirectly saying is that this child’s soul has been through many reincarnations and has a wisdom beyond their chronological years. Well, some children do have wisdom beyond their years but it’s not because they are on the 10th time through. That’s just the way God made them.

 Sometimes I hear people use the notion of karma as a point of revenge. “Karma’s gonna get you.” Well, if you’re talking about reaping what you sow, it’s true. We do reap what we sow. If we sow gossip about others, we’re going to get gossip back; if we sow ill will towards others, we will receive ill will back. But karma is not a Christian belief. It arises from the eastern religions and practices that include belief in reincarnation until a person finally gets everything right.

 Listen folks, it’s important that we know what we believe. To remain theologically consistent, a Christian must either dismiss the theory of karma which includes reincarnation or dismiss the religion of Christianity. To mix and match terms from other religions just because you always have, or you sort of like that particular part from that one, is to do an incredible disservice to our Lord and what he died to give us.

Graduates, you’re going to be hit hard wherever you go next with the opportunities and the temptations to toss aside the truths that you have been taught in the Church. You’re going to be called old-fashioned, or stupid, or weak, or brainwashed if you take a stand for your historical, biblical faith in Jesus Christ. I’m sure it’s probably already happened to you. It has happened to anyone who truly is committed to living the way Jesus taught us to live. But listen to these wonderful, ancient, time-tested words from 1 Peter 3:13-18, *“****13****Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?****14****But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”****15****But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,****16****keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.****17****For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.****18****For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.”*

It’s no mere coincidence that before this passage in Galatians 6 about reaping what you sow, the apostle Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If that’s what we’re sowing, even towards people with whom we disagree, who may hurl insults at us, who may turn others against us because of what we believe, if we just keep sowing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, that is what we will reap. That is what we will harvest. Listen to Jesus’ words from Luke 6:37-38, ***37****“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.****38****Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* This is not karma. This is learning to live and love like Jesus. This is discipleship.

Let’s be crystal clear what the Bible says about death. Hebrews 9:27,28 declares that *“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many…”* We die physically one time. One time. After that, we face judgement. We are born once physically. We die once physically. One life. That’s it.

But there is another birth and death to consider. John 3:1-7, *“There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee.****2****After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.”* ***3****Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again,you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”* ***4****“What do you mean?” exclaimed Nicodemus. “How can an old man go back into his mother’s womb and be born again?”* ***5****Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.****6****Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life.* ***7****So don’t be surprised when I say, ‘Youmust be born again.’”*

Jesus tells us we need to be born again, *spiritually*, by water and the Spirit. That’s not a reincarnation. That’s a rebirth in the same body, but with the Holy Spirit taking control of the reigns. It might *look like* you’ve been taken over by someone else to your family when this happens – but it is not a reincarnation! It is a rebirth! It is a Whooo Hoooo! It is a freeing from the chains that bound you up, from the reaping and sowing of the sins of the flesh (which are mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21, *“sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”).* Who hasn’t sinned in any of those ways? No one! Even babies have fits of rage when they are hungry. We are born into sin, and I’m telling you, dying and getting into someone else body is not going to fix it! Only Jesus can fix our sin problem – and that’s why he came! He came to destroy the works of the devil – which are intended to keep us enslaved to our sin forever and ever and keep us from entering into a relationship with our Heavenly Father. ONLY Jesus can fix it – and he DID fix it by taking the punishment we deserve for our sins by dying on the cross for us. The wages of sin is death. He paid the wages. He paid the price for you and me, and when we believe that he was raised from the dead, when we confess that Jesus is Lord, the Holy Spirit comes and puts a new desire within us for love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It’s a rebirth that one day leads to our own eternal resurrection!

 When we were thinking that Joan Shoop wasn’t long for this world about a month ago, one day when I had some time alone with her I said, “You know, one day, when you take your last breath here, your next breath will be in the presence of the God of all creation. And when he looks at you, Joan, he won’t see all the stuff you did that you’re not proud of. He won’t see all the sins against him and against others. When he looks at you he will just see the righteous robes of Jesus Christ that were wrapped around you the moment you put your faith in him. He will see those robes of pure white and he will open his arms and say to you, “Welcome Home!” And this dear woman in her hospital bed, with tears in her eyes and a beautific smile on her face, said, *“Wow.”* ***“Wow.”***

 Yes! W O W! Jesus said (John 14), *“I go to prepare a place for you so that one day you can be where I am.”* He said to the thief beside him on the cross, *“Today, you will be with me in paradise.”* The visions that John recorded for us in the book of Revelation include people around the throne of God. People worshipping. People praying. People crying no more. People in pain no more. People grieving no more. Individual people whom we will recognize and who will recognize us, people we will celebrate with for all eternity! Kick the word ‘karma’ out of your vocabulary, believers. It is Christ who makes all things new. Thanks be to God! Amen.

*In the Sweet By and By*

*There’s a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way
To prepare us a dwelling place there.*

*Refrain:
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

*We shall sing on that beautiful shore
The melodious songs of the blessed;
And our spirits shall sorrow no more,
Not a sigh for the blessing of rest.*

*To our bountiful Father above,
We will offer our tribute of praise
For the glorious gift of His love
And the blessings that hallow our days.*