

## Humble Yourselfes

<sup>5</sup> . . . do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? <sup>6</sup> But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:5-12)

Each week, as we read further into these words given to us by the Apostle James, we become more and more aware of why so many people within the churches of today only want to hear their preacher give the "kindest and gentlest" of messages about God and about His expectations of us and of our behaviors. People want to hear how God loves them and wants them to be happy, healthy and prosperous.

But, here again, as with so many of the other rebukes that James has already given to us within this Book, these words continue to be difficult to hear and difficult to accept. Verse after verse, the Apostle's words continue to appear harsh and strict and severe, some of them even sound condemning.

And folks, the mindsets within many of the people of today just will not tolerate coming to a church each Sunday to hear preachers, like James. They think him to be "brow beating" them with his words. But may I say to us, these words of James are really not "brow-beating" words. They are not!

And may I also be faithful to remind us over and over again that while yes, these words do come out of the mind and the emotions of the Apostle James, they are still the very "breath of God". God wanted James to say these words to you and me today, so He breathed them verbatim into the mind and heart of

James. Then James put them down on these pages for you and me to read today. Those words again, first from 2 Timothy 3,

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And then also from 2 Peter 1

<sup>20</sup> knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

So then, as we read these seemingly harsh and severe words, we must remember that they are coming from the loving heart of God, our Father, whose desire is to "bless" you and me, His beloved children, and to "grow us up" in the nurture and admonitions of righteousness.

I'm reminded of those times, when in raising our children, my own words, on occasion, would have seemed overly harsh and severe to them. With their limited life experiences, they would not have been aware of some of the dangers that lay in front of them in some of the things they wanted to do. And I would often warn them away from some of those things.

And on some of those occasions when they would object to my instructions, my response to them would have increased in its intensity, no-doubt seeming harsh to them. And such seems to be the occasion with these words of our text here in this Book of James.

But again, always remember that these words of scripture are given to us to do just as our loving Father intends, to help us, to teach us, to reprove us, to correct us and to train us in ways of righteousness, to equip us for the "good works" that He wants us to do.

And folks, we must humble ourselves and accept that we really do need to be rebuked and corrected! We are not the "good and righteous" people we so often think ourselves to be! Yes, we may behave better than some other people. And we may be better now than we once were, but even so, our ways

are still sinful! As the words of Romans 3 remind us, "There is none righteous, no not one", including you and me.

And while some of these words of James may not fit us on this given day, tomorrow we may suddenly get caught up in some of the very sins he is talking about here.

Recall also that James is writing these words to believers just like you and me. And in the first few verses of this chapter, how he warned his Christian brethren. He said,

<sup>1</sup> What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. <sup>3</sup> When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup> You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:1-4)

Folks, I know of no one in this church who is caught up in any of these behaviors right at the moment. But recall how, in the past two messages, we have been reminded that, yes, in the furor of ungoverned political passions, we really can very easily let those emotions get so out of control that we will do things we should not do.

And God loves us, and He wants to warn us away from those behaviors. And so, here in today's text, He identifies the underlying cause of our misguided passions and He gives us the only remedy that will take it away.

Listen again to these words. They are so very clear. Verse 6,

<sup>6</sup> . . . "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:6-8)

As I read these words, I am reminded that the Lord Jesus is the "Speaking Voice" of God. And in these words, we can hear His voice commending the very essence of His own character to us . . . that of "humility". Jesus is "humble and meek".

Recall that in Matthew 11, Jesus invites each of us to “come to Him and to learn of His humility.” He calls to us saying,

**28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

**29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29)

Here, Jesus gives us two words that describe the very essence of His character, they are the words “gentle” and “lowly of heart”, both of them expressions of “humility. One of those words means “to consider another person’s needs above your own needs”. The other means “to be willing to even suffer humiliation for the benefit of another person”. That is true “humility”!

And Jesus calls you and me to have and to always show that kind of “humility” as we involve ourselves with other people. He is “gentle and lowly in heart”.

Why does God take this and other similar opportunities to instruct us about “humility”? It’s because “pride”, in all its many forms, is mankind’s most destructive sin, often causing very hurtful behaviors towards other people. Pride was so very evident in the many recent misguided behaviors and ungoverned political passions seen during the national election process.

And folks, please know that on our own, you and I can’t “fix” our prideful hearts. The only remedy for pride is for the “humility” of Christ to rise up and take control within our souls.

And please do also remember that God has already done His part in our receiving the precious humility of Christ. In those first moments of our “salvation”, the “righteousness of Christ” was, by “grace”, “imputed” into our souls. That means that His presence, His humble character is already within us.

But you and I must also do our part in that transaction. We must yield our hearts to “receive” the “gift” of His “grace”. Recall the words that we studied some time ago in John 1. There, we are told . . .

<sup>12</sup> But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: (John 1:12)

Both of the instructions in this verse are necessary. We must “believe”, but we must also “receive” God’s “grace”. Yes, His “grace” is complete! And it is “by

grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone” that we are saved. And we come to Christ because the Father “draws” us.

But within that eternal transaction, there are also requirements on your and my side of that Covenant Agreement. You and I must do two things. We must “believe in Him”, and we must “receive Him”. And when we do, we also receive His blessed “character”, and especially His “humility”.

And no, I don’t understand the mystery of that whole transaction. But on the authority of this Word of God, I know it to be true.

So then, as we “receive” the “righteousness of Christ”, we then are able to be “humble”. And His humility in us will then begin to rise up and overcome the “pride” that seeks always to have control over our lives. Praise be to God!

And with that truth as the foundation for the rest of these words, then these words really don’t seem to be quite so harsh and condemning. With the “humility” of Christ abiding within our soul, we are then able to see ourselves as Christ sees us, as weak and sinful children. And we are then able to do as James tells us here, to “submit” ourselves to God. And how precious that is when we do it!

And may I empathize that this word “submit” does not imply a “forced” kind of submission, where we feel compelled to “give in”. And neither does it imply a half-hearted yielding, as we, so often do, saying, “Ok, if I have to”.

This “submission” is the kind of submission that takes place in “absolute surrender”. The giving up of our “claim to our right to our self”, and the giving over of all the struggles of life to a Savior we can trust, a Savior who will guide and protect us as we get about the work that He has called us to do.

And praise be to God for that protecting presence of Christ our Savior. Because, as we know, our enemy, the devil, will never cease his attacks on us. And with the presence of Christ within us, we can do as verse 7 tells us to do, we can “resist the devil, and he will flee from us”.

Sadly, so many people, within our churches, don’t like to talk about the devil and about his evil effects in our lives. I have some good Christian friends who

intentionally avoid even considering the devil, saying such things as, “we have enough sin within ourselves, we don’t need to blame the devil.”

But folks, please, please, on the authority of these very words given to us right here, I strongly encourage you to fully understand that the devil is ever and always at work, inserting his evil presence into your and my daily life. And we need to know that he is there, that he has power, and that we must actively and intentionally “resist him”, else he will surely get his way in our behaviors.

But as we resist the devil, we must be very careful. Our resistance is not to be as some of our brethren attempt, “rebuking satan” and trying to “cast him out” of our presence. No, our resistance is instead to be a very simple and non-violent confrontation. Our resistance is to “draw near to God, and He will draw near to us”.

It is as simple as that folks. The devil will not remain in the presence of the Spirit of Christ. Recall the words of the Lord Jesus when He said, “Get thee behind me satan”. That is what will take place as we “draw near to Christ”. The Presence of Christ will drive the devil away from us.

And then, as we look at these next words, we see that even more is required of you and me.

Listen beginning in verse 8,

<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.  
(James 4:8-10)

You and I cannot be “passive” or “milk toast” Christians. There really is a battle that is always being waged. And there is “work” to be done on our part. And probably, the hardest “work” we will have to do is to actively “participate” in God’s “sanctification” of our souls, to actively seek His cleansing of our hands and His purifying of our hearts. Otherwise, folks, our tendency will be to slip into being “doubleminded”.

As believers, we really do want all the blessings that God has for us. But not many of us enjoy some of the steps it takes to get where God wants us to be in our sanctification. These words,

<sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. (James 4:9)

These words are not very inviting. But recall the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. There He told us that we would be blessed and even “happy” if we willingly submitted to His kind of “humility”. In Matthew 5, Jesus said,

- 3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- 5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- 6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- 7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- 8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:3-8)

And on and on! And again, here in today's text we read much the same . . .

<sup>9</sup> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:9-10)

No dear friends, these instructions are not very inviting to our modern form of thinking. But folks, on the authority of this word of God. If we will do exactly this, we will surely be more blessed and happier than we could ever hope or imagine.

And then, to further sanctify our errant souls, here in verse 11, God gives us a simple truth about the foolishness of our rebellious tongue. We, too often, find ourselves saying something bad about another church member, or about a neighbor or about a politician or about a news commentator. And as we ridicule those people, most often, our minds don't give God one moment's thought.

But here God is saying that whatever we say about those people, we must remember that our offense is, in reality, against Him, personally. Listen!

<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)

Isn't this truth so very simple! But we fail to see the error of our ways as we get about our daily "rants". We really don't want to think that as we judge those people, and as we make "railing accusations" against them, we are actually judging God.

But it's clear from these words that when we speak evil against the law, we are speaking evil against the "Lawgiver". How very foolish we are!

Also, as we mentioned in the message last week, you and I must never usurp the authority of God by placing ourselves in the position of being another person's "judge". Yes, we are to recognize the wrongful behavior of other people and we are to steer clear of those behaviors ourselves.

But God really does not want us to usurp His authority and ourselves be another person's judge. He and He alone is their judge. We can neither condemn nor forgive their sins. God alone can do that.

Yes, we are to always forgive offenses against us personally, even to seventy times seven. But folks, our forgiveness of someone else's misdeeds does not absolve that person of their sin. Only God can do that. And for that to take place, they must go to God with a repentant heart.

One last warning before we close. Yes, these words of the Apostle James are sometimes difficult to hear. They are strong and often severe. But please know that God gives them to us from a loving heart.

And there is still much work to be done in our souls. And God wants you and me to humble ourselves before Him, and before our friends, and before our neighbors, and to allow the Holy Spirit to finish the work He has begun within us.

So then,

<sup>6</sup> . . . "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." <sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:6-8)