

MBC – 11/14/2021 – Pastor Doug Thompson

JAMES: TESTS OF A LIVING FAITH

***“The Way of Greater Grace”***

James 3:1-12

Last week James showed us how jealousy, quarrels and conflict get into our homes and our churches. James doesn't blame the devil – or false teachers – or the world. He points the finger right at us and says, *“I'm talking about you!”* Let's read it again—

- James 4:1–10 <sup>1</sup>What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. <sup>4</sup>You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup>Or 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”? (*He longs for us to be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit.*)

And if we *have* drifted into worldliness, he shows us the way back – it's a hard path, but it's the way back to God—

- James 4:6–10 <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.

### **I. Greater grace.**

I thank God that I get to preach to a church family who loves the meat of God's Word!

I said last Lord's Day that a lot of churches wouldn't touch this passage. They are so used to weak-sauce, feel good sermons that these words hurt their ears. What God says here is not weak-sauce. This is *hot sauce!* It kicks us right in our self-esteeem. But it's tough love and *strong* medicine and it will bring deep healing, *if* you will take it. But I will say this: You must be a doer of this word. If you are only a hearer this morning, it will make you sicker.

So after chewing us out and calling us names last week, look how the road back begins—

- <sup>6</sup>**But** He gives more grace.

Who is the He? God! God is on our side here. He is *for* us, not against us. He longs for His children to put off their worldliness and draw close to Him. And He will give us everything we need to do this. It's not easy or painless, and there will be relentless opposition from the world, our own flesh, and the devil—*But He gives more grace!*

*More* grace – the Gk. word is *mega* – greater – greater grace. Greater than what? Greater than anything you run up against in seeking to obey all that God requires of you.

- He gives Grace that is greater than all of your weaknesses, deficiencies, flaws, defects, and inadequacies (helps to have a thesaurus!) God's sufficiency is *always* greater than your insufficiencies. Always *more*. It never runs out, it never runs short.

You say, "My biggest obstacle is my own sin!" —

- But He gives "Grace that *exceeds* our sin and our guilt – grace that will pardon and cleanse within." "Our sins they are many – His mercy is more!" Do you really believe that? You can't *out-sin* the grace of God. Beloved, where your sin abounds, God's grace much more abounds! And what does God's mega grace look like?

Peace that surpasses all understanding; inexpressible comfort and joy; inner strength to keep you standing, and resisting temptation. Sustaining grace through physical and emotional pain. How many times have you come through some trial, looked back and said to yourself: "The only explanation is God's grace!"

- Scottish pastor Andrew Bonar wrote in his diary, dated October 15, 1864, of his "grievous wound:" his wife of 17 years, Isabella, died of complications from childbirth. He wrote that on the day of her death he had been meditating on a Scripture text: Nahum 1:7: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows those who take refuge in Him." He wrote, "Little did I know much how I would need this promise just half an hour later."

Beloved, we *don't* know when we will need God's grace and we need to be ready to receive it, when we need it. "What do I mean, '*ready to receive grace*'?" I mean not everyone receives God's grace—

- James 4:6 . . . Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the *humble*."

What is necessary to receive the grace of God? *Humility* – it is that word for "lowly-minded." – it's knowing that you *need* God. It's coming to Him empty-handed, spiritually poor. Saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" God rushes to lavish grace on people like that because He gets all the glory!

- Matthew 18:2–4 <sup>2</sup>And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup>and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever *humbles* himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

But James says, He *opposes the proud* – it means that God is an *enemy* of the proud, who *think* they don’t need Him or His grace. They have not because they ask not, because they are *self-sufficient*. They rob God of His glory because they seek it for themselves: Remember King Herod in Acts 12. He was giving a speech to some of his subjects—

- Acts 12:22–23 <sup>22</sup>And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” <sup>23</sup>Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last. (I hate it when that happens.)

It’s hard to find a sin that God hates more than pride, and pride is the root of all sin. But humility before God is the root of all righteousness - Listen to what God says in—

- Isaiah 66:1–2 <sup>1</sup>Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? <sup>2</sup>All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

\*So understand what James is saying here: We have quarrels and fights, war without and war within because of **pride**: we selfishly seek our own lusts and evil desires – we are drawn to love the things of the world. How do we escape our own self-destruction? *God gives greater grace!* But He only gives it to the humble, so James shows us the way to get low. If you have drifted from God this morning, if your heart has become proud, and hard and cold, this is how to return to God. It’s a downward path, but there is no other way back up. These are so powerful—

## II. The way back to God.

### 1. Submit to God.

This is where your return begins: Submit, stop resisting, stop rebelling. Place yourself, again, under the loving lordship of Jesus as your King. I was talking with a brother this week. We were talking about how all of us feel rubbed raw from restrictions, and lockdowns, mandates, and govt. overreach – even Christians are ready to snap—

- “Hey, could you bring some gravy for the Holiday pot-luck?” “Don’t tell me what to do! Are you telling me what to do??”

Beloved, we have been saved *out of* our rebellion! That's the way of the world: shaking the fist, carrying the signs, red-faced and revolting. ("Are you saying Christians should never protest and demand their rights?") I'm not preaching on that this morning – I'm just telling what God says here.

But beloved, the world around us resists *any* submission: children to parents, wives to husbands – don't submit to authority, "Question authority!" God's people should show the world something completely different: we joyfully submit to our King Jesus. He is our benevolent Master, and we are His happy slaves – yes, *slaves!* Therefore, we willingly and joyfully submit to *Him* when He commands us to submit to human authority – as far as we can. And even when can't we should be respectful, and peaceable – what an amazing witness to the world when they see that!—

And then, when we call on unbelievers to submit to Jesus, they have some context for understanding what in the world we are talking about – because they see it in us.

- I read a beautiful quote— "Submission to God is the beginning, middle, and end of the prodigal's return from the brutality of the world, to the security of the Father's home."

\*Rebellion is rooted in self and in pride; submission is rooted in humility. And which one receives God's grace? Let me ask you a simple question: "Is your life marked more by submission or rebellion?" *Submit yourselves, therefore, to God.* And then—

## 2. Resist the devil.

This is the flip side: stop bowing down to the authority of the devil, because – news flash: He has no authority over you! He's a poser. When God saved you, you were transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of His beloved Son. You are under the authority of King Jesus, and you are no longer the devil's subject. Amen?

So don't act like it, right?

- Stop acting like you can't say no to him and his temptations. The devil can't lead you anywhere you don't want to go! Whenever you sin, it is *consensual*. He always uses his one-two punch: he tempts you into sin, then heaps guilt on you after you fall. And he's laughing the whole time. Stop being a weenie. Resist him, because you can.

And this is so important: to resist the devil does *not* mean going on the offense against him—

- Ephesians 6:10-11 <sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong *in the Lord* and in the strength of *his might*. <sup>11</sup>Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to (Cast out demons? Bind the devil? No:) "stand against the schemes of the devil."

**Stand** – The word means to stay put, to be established, firm, fixed – you don’t move! And Paul repeats himself—

- Ephesians 6:13–14 <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, *that* (i.e., here is the purpose) you may be able to *withstand* (stronger version of the same word) in the evil day, and having done all, to *stand* firm. <sup>14</sup>*Stand* therefore . . . and he goes on.

To resist the devil simply means that when he comes at you through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, you don’t give in to his temptations, and when the smoke of the battle clears – you’re still trusting God. That’s what it means to resist the devil: *dig in and stay put*.

And when you do that, who runs from whom? The devil will flee from you!

*Our cold and ruthless enemy, his pleasure is our harm.  
Rise up O Lord, and He will flee before our Sovereign God!*

### 3. Draw near to God.

You’ve heard that saying: “If there is distance between you and God – who moved?” Listen to Isaiah—

- Isaiah 59:1–4 (NLT) <sup>1</sup>Listen! The LORD’s arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you. <sup>2</sup>It’s your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. <sup>3</sup>Your hands are the hands of murderers, and your fingers are filthy with sin. Your lips are full of lies, and your mouth spews corruption. <sup>4</sup>No one cares about being fair and honest. The people’s lawsuits are based on lies. They conceive evil deeds and then give birth to sin.

When worldliness creeps into your life – you become more friendly with the world, and the things of the world – you *will* drift away from God—

- James 4:4 Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity (hatred toward) God? Therefore whoever wishes (that is too weak, the word means, *chooses*) to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Again – who moved? “Yeah, but the world was flirting with me!” Yeah, but you didn’t have to answer her text, or write down her phone number. You *chose* to cultivate that illicit relationship. And now you wonder why things are so cold between you and God?

\**You* must break it off with your lover, return to your *first* love – the one died for you. *You* have to do it. It will be painful – really painful. And it won’t happen without maximum effort and spiritual discipline: by that I mean what the Puritans called the “means of grace:” The means through which God gives His *mega grace* to His children—

- Sit under the preached Word – which happens in church. Spend personal time in the Word; and prayer; regularly come to the Lord’s Table – which also happens in church. These are the basics, right? There are no shortcuts. And there is no drawing near to God apart from these. But if you desire to return to God, no one will have to twist your arm.

It’s been said that “You might not be as close to God you would *like* to be, but you are just as close to God as you *choose* to be.”

So what can you expect from your heavenly Father if you’ve wandered off and want to come back? Listen, this is a promise, isn’t it? “*Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.*” And Jesus illustrated this—

- Luke 15:20–24 <sup>20</sup>And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

You draw near to God, and He will *run* to draw near to you. But there’s some serious business that has to be taken care of in order to return to God. You must *repent* of your sins – turn from them and be *done* with them. Repentance means pulling sin out by its roots. And James doesn’t soft pedal this at all. You must—

#### **4. Thoroughly repent.**

- James 4:8 Cleanse your hands, you sinners. (You must –)

##### **A. Purify the outside.**

Repent of your evil actions: maybe its with your hands, or your feet, or your eyes, or your lips, but whatever it is, stop it! You belong to Christ now, and so does your body – so when you sin with your hands or feet or eyes or lips, you are sinning with *His* hands, feet, eyes and lips. Paul shocked the Corinthians when he said to them—

- 1 Corinthians 6:15 <sup>15</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Then he says—
- 1Co 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought (redeemed) with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Your body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and was purchased for Christ by His own blood – how dare we use it for sin!

- No wonder James calls us “sinners.” There is no other place in the NT where God’s children are called sinners, so this should grab our attention. But if you sin, what are you? A sinner. And we will never be anything other than sinners this side of heaven, so you (and I) should be constantly confessing and repenting of our sins. Start with the outside, but don’t stop there—

***B. Purify the inside.***

- “purify your *hearts*, you double-minded.”

The Pharisees did pretty well on the outside, didn’t they? They were masters at controlling what men saw, but Jesus saw right through them—

- Matthew 23:25–26 <sup>25</sup>“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup>You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

\*Is there something in your life where you are fooling people: your spouse, your closest friends, people in this church – but inside, you are a hypocrite? Purify your heart and let the outside match what is on the inside.

There is no true repentance and no returning to God without purifying your heart. David knew it—

- Psalm 32:3–5 <sup>3</sup>For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah <sup>5</sup>I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

In Ps.139, he prayed a prayer that I believe he prayed often, over and over, and so should we—

- “Search me O God and know my heart, try me and know my anxious thoughts and see if there be any hurtful way in me and lead me in the everlasting way!”

“Search me God, where only You can see, deep inside, and purify my heart! Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart – for they, and they alone, shall see God.”

Pulling sin out by its roots starts in your heart. Are you killing sin, in your heart? In your thoughts – one by one? You have to do this—

- 2 Cor.10:5: “We are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ!”

If some worldly thought slips by the guard – you wrestle it to the ground and make it submit to Christ! And then you have to replace worldly, sinful, lustful thoughts with thoughts that please Christ. It won’t happen by accident. It will take work. We should all memorize this passage—

- Philippians 4:8 <sup>8</sup>Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Our battles are won or lost in our hearts, right? Do you need to purify your heart? And then James goes even deeper, to the emotional level, to the way we *feel* about our sins. And let me say, this can take you from superficial repentance to thorough repentance—

### ***C. Grieve deeply over your sins.***

- <sup>9</sup>Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

And Jesus said in—

- Luke 6:25 “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep (later).”

But Jesus also promised: “Blessed are those who – *mourn* – now, for they shall be comforted.” So what is it that we are to mourn and weep over? Our sins.

It’s about mourning, grieving deeply over our *sins* because they have offended our God. Not mourning over the consequences of our sins – we got caught, we got in trouble, it cost us money, it cost us a job, a relationship – no, but because we have brought sorrow to our Savior!

That is a mark of true repentance, and I question if there is true repentance unless there is some measure of sadness over our sins—

- WCF: “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with a full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience.”

Because we take sin too lightly, we repent too quickly. Too superficially. James says: “Slow it down. Take *time* to feel the weight and the gravity of your sins, until it makes you sad.

The Puritan John Owen slows us down in this statement—



Bring *thy lust to the gospel*, -- not for relief, but for further conviction of its guilt; look on Him whom thou hast pierced, and be in bitterness. Say to thy soul, "What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on! Is this the return I make to the Father for his *love*, to the Son for his *blood*, to the Holy Ghost for his *grace*? Do I thus requite the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, that the blessed Spirit hath chosen to dwell in? And can I keep myself out of the dust?"

What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus? How shall I hold up my head with any boldness before him? Do I account communion with him of so little value, that for this vile lust's sake I have scarce left him any room in my heart? How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation? In the meantime, what shall I say to the Lord? Love, mercy, grace, goodness, peace, joy, consolation, -- I have despised them all, and esteemed them as a thing of nought, that I might harbor a lust in my heart. Have I obtained a view of God's fatherly countenance, that I might behold his face and provoke him to his face? Was my soul washed, that room might be made for new defilements? Shall I daily grieve that Spirit whereby I am "sealed to the day of redemption?" Entertain thy conscience daily with these questions. See if it can stand before this aggravation of its guilt. If this make it not sink in some measure and melt, I fear thy case is dangerous.

Beloved, this is way to greater grace. It begins with tears, but joy comes in the morning. It's a sweet sadness. God promises to dry every tear that we weep in mourning over our sins. Spurgeon said this:

- "I do not know when I am more perfectly happy than when I am weeping for sin at the foot of the cross."

Several years ago, there was a man whose marriage and family were an absolute train-wreck due to his drunkenness, drugs, and pornography – I remember his wife and kids showing at our doorstep the day after Christmas asking if they could stay with our family for a few days – it was so bad at home. So they did and I said, you should not go back until he shows the fruit of true repentance.

I talked to him for hours in my office, on the phone. And finally one day he told me that he was making progress: he was reading his Bible, going to church and a Men's Bible study, he had stopped his addiction to porn, and was just so happy. He was laughing on the phone – so happy. Ready to have his family back. And I said, "Not so fast. I don't think you should be so happy. I don't think you've really come to grips with your sins. Immediately, his whole tone changed! "What do you mean?" So I read him this very passage here in James. Then I said, "Are you still smoking pot?" He said, "Well yeah, but God doesn't expect me to change everything at once."

And I said, "Oh yes He does. You're a phony and God doesn't accept your phony, superficial repentance." Click.

His family did move out by the way! But his marriage and family were destroyed. And his life went from bad to worse – because his repentance was fake. It reminded me of what Paul said in—

- 2 Corinthians 7:10 <sup>10</sup>For the sorrow (mourning, grieving) that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

And finally James comes full circle to what he said in v.6—

***“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”***

You do that by submitting to God, resisting the devil, purifying your life, and thoroughly repenting of your sins. But I urge you this morning to seek to humble yourself before the Lord—

--Humble yourself by reminding yourself how much you depend upon your Father and need Him for literally everything: every beat of your heart, every breath of your lungs – and just stay there for awhile in that place of childlike dependence—

- Peter said (1 Peter 5:6) <sup>6</sup>Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God!
- That it always reminds me of driving in front of the SR mall years ago, it was raining, and there was a teenager with his skateboard, hunkered down in that great big concrete hand, trying to keep dry! Pretty good picture of God’s children!

--And humble yourself by looking at the cross. You are the sinner, but the sinless One is on the cross, taking what you deserve! It’s like a t-shirt I saw: “I killed Jesus. Jesus died for me.” Wow.

If that doesn’t make you humble, nothing will. But it also makes you so, so grateful: *“It was my sins that held Him there, until it was accomplished, His dying breath has brought me life, I know that it is finished.”*

- Isaiah 53:5–6 <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup>All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

When you are making your way back to God, returning to your heavenly Father, and the way gets hard, and painful, and dark – keep your eyes fixed on the cross and be reminded that God is for you! The One who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up – so that you could be His child, forever.