

Humble Yourself

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 September 2018

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now, as most of you have come to expect, I started this morning sermon with a verse from my sermon text.

But today, I don't want to stop there. I want to include more of our sermon text right up front, because I think that we really need to hear it. So here goes.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

So with that said, did you get your dose of encouragement for the week? Is it alright if I go ahead and sit down now? Now, I've been intentional about preaching from James these past couple of weeks, and the text is not cutting me any breaks.

[1:27] This is hard stuff to preach about. The kind of texts that usually don't lead to the preacher being told, you really encouraged me this week, after the sermon is over. Last week, I talked about pride, which is, of course, one of the favorite sins of most of us.

And this week, I'm talking about pride some more, but also throwing in the depth of our sin and the absolute necessity of repentance. At this rate, if it keeps going like this, you guys are probably going to throw me out the door eventually.

First, a little context for this morning. Let's think about this for a second.

What are the sins that James has been condemning his hearers for throughout his letter? The striking thing is that, for the most part, there are things that we might tend to think are no big deal, right?

Not keeping control of your tongue, saying hurtful things, gossip, partiality, quarreling with one another, pride, judging others. And yet, we find in James that these sins that we might tend to think are no big deal, actually are a very big deal.

[2:48] And has anyone here been guilty of any of these things I just mentioned? I'm not asking for a show of hands, but that's partially because I don't have to, because I think that if everyone were being honest, and if I were, I would expect that pretty much every hand in this room would go up.

So we need to listen carefully this morning, because it is us that is being called to repentance. James has a series of points of instruction for us, and I think that we need to hear every one of them.

So let's look together at our text in James chapter 4. Starting in verse 7, we read, Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Now, why should we submit ourselves to God? What's this therefore about? Well, we read in verse 6, the verse immediately prior to what we read this morning, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

So God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble, and therefore, we are called to submit ourselves to God. And that is to realize that it is God who is on the throne, and we are not, right?

[4:14] That God is the king of everything, including my own life, and that I am not. To realize that I am not the one who calls the shots. God is.

That means that God is the one who can give grace and show mercy. That means that God is the one who was the judge and the king of the universe.

Although we might struggle with that reality, it's actually good news, because we are generally not very good at being our own kings, are we? Most of us can attest to the reality that when we're seeking our own will instead of the will of God, we make profoundly stupid decisions.

Anyone here ever make a profoundly stupid decision? Yep. Me too. But God is perfectly wise, he's perfectly merciful, he's perfectly just, and he's perfectly good.

Submitting ourselves to him does not mean a life of bondage. It means a life of true joy and blessedness. Submitting to God is the only way to true freedom, because God is the only one who can set us free.

[5:34] Free from our selfish desires. Free from sin. Free from death. Submission to God is the way to freedom and to joy.

But that's not always easy, is it? You ever struggle with that? Because first of all, we have our own sinful desires that tempt us to disobedience to God.

But even beyond that, as our text reminds us, there is a devil. He is real, and he really tempts us. Our text tells us to resist him, and that he will flee from us.

Temptation is hard, no doubt. Let's be honest about that. C.S. Lewis once said, no man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means.

That is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. Lewis' point is that if we have tried to resist temptation, then we know how difficult temptation is, right?

[6:55] Maybe we've given in to temptation. We've realized that it's stronger than we are.

Maybe we find ourselves really feeling that, as the author and playwright Oscar Wilde once said, we can resist everything except for temptation. But the point that James is making isn't simply that we just need to try harder when tempted to sin.

That's not what he's getting at. Thinking about myself for a second, there is nothing about me that is going to scare the devil away. I'm not very scary to anyone, I'm pretty sure, much less to Satan.

Satan flees when we resist as Christians. Not because there's anything inherently strong or awesome about us. But because we belong to Jesus and the Holy Spirit lives in us.

You know, I've counseled people that when they face spiritual warfare, when they feel that they are being demonically tempted to praise the name of Jesus continually. Because our victory is in Jesus, is it not?

[8:12] Our victory is in the authority and the power and the precious name of Jesus. He is the one who crushed the devil's head.

And if we resist the devil with Jesus on our side as our defender, the devil has no choice but to flee in terror. What do we do if we know that we have messed up?

As James' hearers must have known about themselves after being told to come to Jesus for basically the entirety of the letter before this point, right? Well, James says this, Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

And what a revolutionary statement that is because what is the typical human impulse when we know that we have sinned against God? When we know that we have disobeyed Him? Let's go back and think for a second about the account of the fall in Genesis.

What do Adam and Eve do when they know, when they realize that they have sinned and disobeyed God? They run and hide. Yes. And when we as Christians sin, we still face that impulse to run and hide from God, don't we?

[9:38] Sometimes it takes the shape of not really wanting to confess to God what we've really done, not wanting to face up to it. Sometimes it takes the shape of not wanting to pray. Sometimes it takes the shape of not wanting to come to church or not wanting to read our Bibles.

The list can go on and on. But is that the right answer? Not according to James. Harken back for a second to the parable of the prodigal son.

God is the father who sees his wayward child on the road starting to come home, coming home after entering into all kinds of sin and rebellion. What does he do?

He runs to meet his child. And what is repentance really if it is not deciding to quit running from God and to run back to him instead, trusting that he is a loving and forgiving father?

And everyone who has ever repented can attest to this. We turn by God's grace and he runs to welcome us home before we even get there.

[10:44] Now this is unbelievably good news. But James follows it with some hard words.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your soul to gloom.

Or your joy to gloom, rather. Well, that is not the kind of message that sells. James obviously wasn't trying to land a book deal with that one.

Sounds incredibly harsh to us, doesn't it? He's calling his hearers sinners. He's calling them double-minded. He's telling them to mourn and weep. Man, that's rough.

But if it sounds harsh to us, I think it's partially because we don't realize the magnitude of our sin or the magnitude of God's holiness.

[11:44] We need to remember what it is to be convicted of our grave sin in the presence of our holy God. Now as the great preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones once put it, it is an essential part of the gospel that conviction must always precede conversion.

The gospel of Christ condemns before it releases. And that means that if we are going to know what it means to be forgiven, what the joy of the gospel really means, we have to realize that we have sinned against a God who is holy, that we have violated His perfect law, and that if that is all there is to it, then we are lost.

Now if we haven't reached that understanding, then we don't really understand the gospel. If we don't know that we would be hopelessly lost, apart from God's grace in Christ, then we don't know what salvation really is.

Because Jesus did not come for perfect people. Jesus came for sinners who knew and know that they are sinners.

He lived a perfect life for us and died the death that we deserve and secured forever the salvation of everyone who trusts in Him.

[13:03] And that's not so that we could assume, okay, I have lived a good life so God will accept me. No. So that we could be convicted of our sin and realize.

If I'm being honest, I have not lived a good life. I have failed so many times. But God loves me so much that He gave His only Son for me. Not because I'm good, but because God is good and merciful and loves me unconditionally.

We should weep and we should mourn for our sins. They're truly awful. Jesus was crucified for them. But the purpose of weeping and mourning for our sins is not so that we can beat ourselves up forever.

It's because we need to be led to repentance. To turn from our sins. To go home to the God who loves us and gave His Son for us. And to live from now on for His glory.

So to mourn our sin, isn't about whipping ourselves. It isn't about beating ourselves up. It isn't about being morbid. It is taking an honest evaluation of our hearts to know that we are sick and to point us to the one who can heal us.

[14:25] As Martin Luther taught, the recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation. So we can be sure that if we mourn for our sin and turn to Jesus, joy is going to follow.

Because God is in the business of saving sinners who repent. That is what He does. Let's be clear. Repentance is necessary and it involves humbling ourselves before God.

James writes, Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will exalt you. And that should encourage us that we can come before God acknowledging our poverty, acknowledging our sin, acknowledging our wretchedness, knowing that not only will God receive us, but He will lift us up and exalt us.

That is good news. That means that we don't have to lie to ourselves or to God about our failures. We can go to Jesus just as we are without one plea except that He died for us. Now, one final point of application for us this morning.

[15:48] Let's take a brief look at the next couple of verses. We read, 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. There is only one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Now, I could easily preach a whole sermon on these two verses, and don't worry, I'm not going to do that right now. But I really want us to take a simple point of application home with us this morning.

as we think about humbling ourselves, as we think about repentance, as we think about casting aside our pride. And that point of application we find in these couple of verses is basically this.

Don't be a judgmental jerk. Right? Sounds straightforward enough, but there is a reason that Scripture warns us against it. And the reason is that we have a hard time with this one, don't we? [17:10] It's absurd because sinners presuming that we are in any place to judge other sinners is complete nonsense. Case in point, it's really easy for us to hear an admonition like this in a sermon and to find ourselves thinking, man, I really hope that judgmental person in the next pew is listening to this right now.

But what we have is an opportunity to examine our own hearts. And if what we find there, if we're being honest, is a judgmental attitude, if what we find there is pride, if what we find there is double-mindedness, we can be honest about that.

We can, not only can be honest about it, we must be honest about it. We can go to God confessing these sins, humbling ourselves, and you know what it is we will find.

The blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all unrighteousness, and God will exalt us. He opposes the proud, but He exalts the humble.

Let's go to Him with humility this morning. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

[18:42] Amen.