

Humbling Grace

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: 27 January 2021

Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] I want us to think tonight on James chapter 4 and verse 6 in particular. But he gives more grace.

Therefore it says God opposes a proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you and so on.

Now James here has been talking about squabbles and fighting and divisions and wars.

And he has shown where these things come from. And very clearly it is from a heart that is not right with God. And the root problem of everything really in this world is brought about by selfish ambition and self-centeredness and pride.

And I believe that pride really is at the root of all these things. Pride is something that God hates.

And in fact he tells us that in this very chapter it says God opposes the proud.

[1 : 06] But James doesn't just deal with the problems that we face and the problems that the church faces and the problems that society face. But he goes on really to deal with the cure of these things.

And it begins with grace. That's where it is very evident. Now as we know grace is God's dealing with us in kindness.

And we very often call it unmerited favor or undeserving favor. And we struggle with grace. I often struggle with the whole concept of grace.

Because there is within us something that operates in life where we have this sense of deserving.

And if we're doing all right we feel that God owes us something.

But you know when grace really begins to work in our heart and in our life we see that we deserve nothing. And that's where the Christian comes to realize that actually we deserve nothing.

[2 : 12] And we are often amazed at God's grace towards us. Because he just continues to give us of his grace. And the resources of course as we know are limitless.

And it tells us here that he gives as it were grace upon grace. He gives more grace. His grace is sufficient for us. And I think it's something that we're all aware of at different stages.

And some are very, very aware of God's grace. And you and I know that there are times when we're going through troubles, going through difficulties, going through challenges.

And we pray for grace. And we know, we've come to realize and discover that grace doesn't remove the trial. It doesn't remove the pain. It doesn't take away the difficulties.

But grace gives us the enabling to bear with. It gives us the strength to cope with. It is called grace sufficient.

[3 : 15] And we have to trust that when God says, my grace is sufficient for you, that we will, whether we will all be able to say, well, truly it has been sufficient for us.

But, you know, part of the problem with the whole area of grace is that there is pride within our heart. And that pride sometimes doesn't want to acknowledge grace.

Now, that might sound like a strange thing to say. But, you see, we can be resisting God's grace.

And we can be, as it were, trying to cope ourselves rather than rely upon his grace.

And I think we're aware of times where we're maybe going through a really, really trying, difficult situation. And we know that we ought to be calling to the Lord for, excuse me one second.

We ought to be calling to the Lord for his grace. But we're so determined to keep going ourselves that we say, well, I can sort this out myself.

[4 : 30] I can deal with this. You know, that's the pride. And I'm sure we've all been in situations where it could be, the pain could be physical, it could be emotional, it could be spiritual, it could be mental.

All these, the trauma of life, the difficulties in life. And there's something about us, there's a determination that is rooted in pride, saying, I want to deal with this myself. And we might be saying to the Lord with one breath, Lord, help me. And yet, on the other hand, we're saying, no, I'm going to carry on myself. I'm going to, I'll see this through. Because there's this sinful pride, this determination within ourselves that somehow we won't submit to God. And of course, that's what God is asking us to do. He says to submit ourselves, therefore, to God. So, we face these kind of issues and problems all the time.

[5 : 27] Now, we notice here that grace is added to grace. When God gives grace, he gives more grace. And that we find here that the time when God really gives us grace is where there is humility.

And humility and grace are kind of inseparably bound. Because where grace is really working within a person's heart, part of what is being produced there is humility.

And humility, in turn, is depending upon God's grace. So, there's this, as it were, this circle, this never-ending circle. And when we are humble, we are submitting ourselves to the rule of God in our heart and in our life.

And we're even submitting ourselves to the rule of God in his providence. And it's not just submitting to God, but learning to submit to one another, to esteem one another highly for the gospel's sake.

All that is involved or should be involved in the whole area of grace. And so, we need to seek for the grace to submit ourselves to God.

[6 : 39] Because we have to confess that it's one of the things that we probably find so hard to do is to submit ourselves to God. And God is calling for us to humble ourselves before him.

Now, as we know, humility is one of the great virtues in life, particularly in the Christian life. And we know that humility is not a posture.

Some people think that if you kind of look in a particular way. I've heard people say, I remember way back, you know, he's a wonderful Christian.

See the way he walks. Well, with all due respect, the way a person walks, their posture or something has got nothing to do with humility.

Humility is not a cloak that we put on for occasions or something that we can address up in, as it were. Humility is a state of heart before God.

[7 : 44] Humility is a state of heart. And where we acknowledge him as Lord over everything. Where we are living in absolute and utter dependence upon him.

And recognizing that it is in him that we live and we move and we have our being. Now, God wants us to be humble. It's one of the calls we find right throughout scripture.

This desire, this call from God that we ought to, we're told, in fact, humble yourselves. And we're told that in Peter as well. And God humbles his people.

It's part of what he does in your life and my life. Along the way, you and I have been humbled. Maybe tonight you're going through part of that humbling process. You remember God's people, the children of Israel.

God humbled Israel for 40 years in the wilderness. As we know, he could have taken them there in no time to the land of promise. But all the time he was breaking them and reshaping them and molding them.

[8 : 47] They had become a displaced people. And it must have been really hard for them. Because everywhere round about, all the nations had their own identity and their own land.

And here are God's people. And they, at that particular point, have no place to call their own. And it's a reminder to ourselves that we, to a certain extent, are displaced people in this world.

Because we're just pilgrims and strangers. We're just passing through. And God continues to remind us of that. And when God sees us getting kind of settled into the world.

And when God sees us, as it were, like the anchor going down deep. The tent pegs of our life being hammered into the ground. The Lord will say, no, no, no.

I'm going to loosen. I'm going to loosen the peg a wee bit. I'm going to loosen that anchor. This is not your rest. You're just passing through. And these things are, all these kind of things humble us along the way.

[9 : 53] So God allows humbling events and humbling circumstances into our life. He allows trials and all kinds of differing problems.

He allows Satan to bombard us. And, you know, that is an area of real humbling. Because when Satan is bombarding us with temptation, day after day after day, you know, it really brings us down. And there are times that we equate temptation with sin. And when we are being tempted all the time, we feel that we are just the worst people in the whole wide world.

Now, of course, we know that temptation doesn't equal sin. But the movement from temptation to sin is often very, very powerful and very close.

It's often very hard to separate where temptation ends and sin begins. But as we are being humbled by the Lord, the Lord is also wanting that we would humble ourselves.

[11:01] And it's something that we should be doing all the time. It's all part of what we find in this particular verse here. Because it says that, But he gives more grace.

Therefore, it says God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. So we are to submit ourselves, therefore, to God. And then it says in verse 10, Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

So how do we humble ourselves before the Lord? Because it's imperative. This, as we said, this humility, this humbling of ourselves is essential for our journey through this world as we discover more and more of his grace.

Well, one thing is to examine ourselves in the light of God's word. We should always be examining ourselves of how we're getting on in the Christian life. You will find that in all the different areas of life, assessments are being made and people are looking at our progress charts.

And I suppose so many different companies and industries and governments and so on. They're always examining. Are we making progress? How are things going?

[12:24] Well, the Christian's no different. We're told, examine yourselves. Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Before we come to the Lord's table, we're to examine ourselves.

Self-examination is a vital part of the Christian life.

But we must always examine ourselves in the light of God's word. Because if we examine ourselves one against another, it'll be a ski whiff result we'll get.

If we examine ourselves simply by looking into our own heart, we'll be all over the place. Because some days sin will blind us and we'll think we're not too bad.

Other days we will look in and we will be in utter despair. But the word of God, which is a rule, the only rule to direct us how we may glorify God, is the only rule of how we can really examine ourselves.

And then, as we look at our lives, and as we reflect upon them, one of the things that will humble, there are several things that will humble us. One is when we look at how little we've grown.

[13:29] And I've said this often enough before, but when I started out as a Christian, I thought that if the Lord spared me to be the age that I am now, that I would have grown to be such a committed, holy, devout, zealous Christian.

And you know, when I look at my life, I wonder have I grown at all, at all. That's the way I feel. But of course we have to remember that our growth is downward.

That is the way that we're growing. We're growing down in order that we may grow up. And then we look at not only how little we've grown, but how little we've done. Because as we look back over our lives again, we thought that we would be doing so much for the Lord, that we would serve him in so many different ways.

Then again, when we come to look at where we are, we feel, well, what have I really done? And then again, we look at our own frailty.

And you know, when God is showing us who we really are, that's a great leveler. That humbles us. Remember when God was speaking to Abraham and he was showing things to Abraham.

[14:54] And Abraham began to get a proper view of the Lord. But as he did so, he got a good view of himself. Every person who has a good view of the Lord has a good view of himself or herself as well.

Moses had a real view of himself when he saw the Lord. So did Abraham. And remember what he said. He just, when he saw, I am, he said, but dust and ashes.

Dust and ashes. That was Abraham's assessment of himself in the presence of the Lord. I say his verdict was, woe is me for I am undone. I'm a man of unclean lips.

And if we never see ourselves like that, then we sometimes have to ask, am I actually seeing the Lord? Am I seeing the Lord by faith in the right way?

Because when we see him as we should see him, then we see so much of our own uncleanness. And then we view the Lord, we're amazed at his mercy towards us.

[15:57] And even if we're being humbled by him, we're amazed, in fact, that we aren't even being humbled more. And one of the things that often humbles us is when we view how unready we are for death.

Do you sometimes stop and think and say, you know, if I've been told that this is the last week of my life, how ready do I feel that I am for entering into the great eternity?

And that is something that really humbles us. And it's something that should stop us in our tracks and make us, again, as we say, examine ourselves. But the wonderful thing is that the Lord, who promises that grace to the humble, is in the business of lifting us back up again.

Because we're told that in verse 10, humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Exaltation spiritually flows naturally from humiliation.

It's the way it happens. God makes sure of that. It's what happens when we become Christians.

You see, when you become a Christian, first you're brought low, and then you're lifted up and given this wonderful freedom in Jesus Christ.

[17:18] And those who have been, if you've been brought into the kingdom with an awareness of the law and your own sense of unworthiness, and then discovering that you have been made worthy in Christ, the liberty and the freedom that you enjoy is incredible.

So you've gone from being humble to the dust to being raised and exalted. And God continues to do that with his people throughout their lives.

Just like the Josephs and the Davids, who we so often use as an example. But God does that sometimes in a much smaller way. And he's done it in your life and he's done it in my life as well.

So we have been required to humble ourselves in order that he will, of course, exalt us. And of course, the ultimate humbling and exhortation is what will take place at death.

Because there is an incredible humiliation in death itself. It's unnatural. It's an awful thing. Our bodies disintegrate and being put back into the grave, into the dust.

[18:27] Is there anything more humbling than that? That this body that we put so much effort into and so much pride in, that it's going to disintegrate into dust. Is there anything more humbling than that?

That's not the end. Flowing out of that and from that, the greatest exhortation ever, which was shown us by Jesus Christ, that he rose from the dead.

He beat death. He rose triumphant over it. And of course, what happened to him is a personal guarantee will happen to us as well. The ultimate exhortation, where our body will rise beautifully to be reunited with our soul.

So it's a journey of grace. It's a journey of humbling. But it's also a journey of exhortation. May we ask the Lord daily for that grace, that we might walk worthy of the high calling to which we have been called.

That we might be seeking for the grace to humble ourselves in his presence and indeed humble ourselves before one another. Because that's sometimes a very difficult thing to do.

[19:37] And that we might indeed in due time discover what he has said will happen, that he will exalt us in due time. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time, as it says in Peter.

May God bless these few thoughts to us. Lord, our God, we give thanks for reflecting upon your word a little tonight. We give thanks, Lord, for the way you bring these truths into our experience and show us things that we don't really know and cannot understand, except that you have revealed them in the word.

And we give thanks for the way that your spirit teaches us and opens things up to us. We give thanks, Lord, for our brothers who led us in prayer. And we give thanks, Lord, for our brother who led us in the singing.

We give thanks, Lord, for the gifts that you bestow upon your people. Pray to bless our homes and our families and all whom we love. Protect us and do us good. And please pardon our every sin.

For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.