

Text: James 4:6-12

⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

¹¹ Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.^[a] 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. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?

Main Point

Kill Self to gain life

Introduction (300)

Hook

If you found out you had a life-threatening disease, what would you be prepared to do to get better?

- Would you be prepared to pay 500,000 dollars?
- Would you be prepared to walk 4000 km? (up and down NZ)
- Would you be prepared to sacrifice your arm? Or your leg?
- Would you be prepared to eat only rice for the rest of your life?

Most of us would go to these extremes to save our lives.

But would you be prepared to humble yourself? To completely humble yourself. To remove any rights, any expectations, any notion of deserving anything. Would you be prepared to submit entirely to the will of another?

In a way that is harder than any of the things listed before. To humble yourself is to kill self. To kill that part in your heart that wants to be in control of your life. And that is near impossible.

The fact is we are all faced with a life-threatening condition. It is called Sin. And to escape we must be prepared to humble ourselves. We must be prepared to repent. We must be ready to kill self to gain life.

That is what this passage is all about. The need to humble ourselves before God if we want to accept his gift of life.

This passage is all about repentance. Not just a one-off event at conversion. But a continual act of faith for all who believe in Christ.

We are going to break it up into three parts.

Outline

1. The Need of Repentance (6,7a, 10)
2. The Nature of Repentance (7b – 9)
3. One Fruit of Repentance (11-12)

Part 1 – The Need of Repentance

Exposition

Context

So let us begin with our first section: The need of repentance.

You will remember James is addressing religious hypocrites. And in the verses leading to our passage he has held nothing back.

He has called these “religious people” Enemies of God and Adulteresses. He puts them in the worst category of sinner he can think of.

And then he redoubles on how serious sin is! God is a jealous God. He requires absolute allegiance. He is a consuming fire. And you are in his cross hairs.

Verses 1-5 of chapter 4 should leave us with a dry mouth, empty stomach and dread in our hearts. A sense of fear, apprehension and even terror.

He gives more grace.

But God is not only righteous and just and jealous. He is also gracious.

At verse 6 we come to the climax of the letter.

Yes they are double minded, Yes their hearts are full of evil, yes they are enemies of God

⁶But he gives more grace.

Ours sins are many, but he gives more grace.

- We turn to other gods again and again. but he gives more grace.
- We murder and fight, but he gives more grace.

There is such relief in these few words. He is the one who gives that grace. We do nothing to earn it. He chooses to save even though we have done everything to deserve destruction.

Receive grace

God gives this grace. Like a stunning gift. Like something we always wanted, but knew we could never afford. God extends this gift of Grace.

How can you accept this gift? How do you reach out and make that gift your own? Even today as you feel weight, the guilt and shame of your sin how can you receive this gift of grace?

You accept this gift by faith and repentance. These two are inseparable. By faith, which is shown in repentance.

You take God at his word and you humble yourself before God.

The verse 7 to 9 explains in more detail what godly, faith driven repentance looks like, but first notice the Need of Repentance.

Look at the second half of verse 6.

Therefore, it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Who does God give grace to? He gives grace to the humble.

So what are we to do to receive this gift? Verse 7 tells us.

⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Submit yourselves before God and you will receive this gift of Grace.

And verse 10 restates this.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

This is important to grasp.

You should have no assurance of salvation if you are not repentant. If you do not humble yourself and submit to God.

Repentance a work?

Now just a quick aside.

There are some who will say that to require repentance for salvation is somehow a work that merits us salvation. But that is to completely misunderstand repentance.

Repentance, but its very nature is to come empty handed to God. It is to come in total humility to God. To come undone.

Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. What is your responsibility to accept that gift God gives you? You believe and repent.

If I offer you 100 dollars, and you reach out and take it does that mean you have earned that 100 dollars? Not even close. But you did need to take hold of the money to accept it.

Repentance is our responsibility to accept the gift, and we must not neglect it. It is what Jesus taught and that is what the apostles taught.

The sermons of Jesus are summarised as a call to repentance.

In Matthew 4, at the very start of his ministry we learn: *"¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matt 4:17)*

So repentance is not a work, it is our responsibility to accept the gift of God.

Opposes the proud

But back to our text.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

God opposes the proud. So you should have no assurance of salvation if you are not repentant. You must turn your eyes away from yourself and turn them to Christ.

The thief on the cross is a prime example of that. *⁴² And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."*

And Jesus told him:

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."

(Luke 23:42-43)

But in contrast, the other thief on the cross had no such promise from Jesus. He remained proud and God opposes the proud.

The one who keeps looking at himself, at his achievements or failures. The one who is not willing to trust God, to submit to God or humble himself to God.

God opposes that person.

He will Exalt you

And notice the promise of humbling ourselves before the Lord.

¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

What does he mean that he will exalt you?

- Will you have abundant wealth? Prestige? And Glory?
- Will you perfect health?
- Will you never experience suffering or pain?
- Will you experience a life of leisure and pleasure here on earth?

Friends, these things are nothing, mere trash compared to what he does intend in exalting us.

He promises to exalt us far beyond our wildest imagination. Far beyond our wildest dreams.

You think being a billionaire would be great, he promises something better.

You think a life of Pleasure, Prestige and Perfect health would be great, He promises something better.

He promises that you will be conformed to the image of his Son. Remembers Rom 8:29

Rom 8:29

*²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

That is his promise. To be transformed into a perfect human, with no sin or desire to sin and freed from the presence of sin, to be raised to new life, to be able to fulfil our ultimate purpose of worshiping God with our whole being. He promises that we will be able to fully appreciate, fully know our Lord Jesus to give the glory our Lord and Saviour deserves.

In our fallenness, we want gold, glory and comfort, but he promises us much more. He promises to exalt us to the likeness of his son, for us to know him more so that we can glorify him to the fullness that he deserves.

Everything else is worthless compared to knowing Christ.

Phil 3:8

*⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the **surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus** my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

Link

Friends, our response of repentance is a small act compared to the gift bestowed, but we must repent if we hope to receive that gift. Let us look further at what the nature of repentance is, which brings us to our second point.

Part 2 – The Nature of Repentance

Active Repentance

Between the second half of verse 7 and verse 9 we have a picture of what godly, faith driven repentance looks like. What does it mean to submit to God? What does it mean to repent?

These verses tell us that. And you will notice repentance is no passive thing. Repentance is active.

We can see three broad categories in these verses.

Resist the Devil

The first is in the second half of verse 7.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

A repentant person does not bow to the desires of Satan. Satan knows our desires. He knows the particular sins we love. Not that he can read our minds. We have shown our hand often enough. He does not cause us to sin, he does not have that power. But he can prompt us into situations where we are more likely to sin.

How do we resist the Devil? We flee those situations. We flee those groups of people. We flee those scenarios. We walk away. We don't pick up the phone. We turn and run the other way.

And as we resist the devil, as we flee from enticing situations, our taste for that sin will slowly fade away, and so Satan too will leave us alone on that front; Satan has no power over us. He will flee. Maybe not all at once, but he will flee.

So a repentant person actively resists the devil.

Draw near to God

Verse 8 continues the nature of repentance.

⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Like the prodigal son returning to his father.

He chose to turn to draw near to his father, not some other sin. And his father was standing there waiting to draw him in too.

Us too, when we turn from one sin, we must not turn to another sin. We must turn to God. We must draw near to him and he promises to draw near to us.

But what does drawing near to God look like?

The end of verse tells us that.

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

I don't want you to miss the imagery of the priesthood here. In the OT the priests had to go through purifying and washing rituals before they could serve the LORD. As believers we are all priests in a way, as we serve the Lord and offer our lives as living sacrifices.

The hands and the hearts refer to the whole person. The outer and the inner man must be holy. What you do and why you do it matters.

What you love, what you treasure and what you desire must be holy.

As well as the way you treat others, use your words, use your time and use your money also must be holy.

To draw near to God is to be holy in both deed and disposition.

This is what all true believers strive towards.

This is what true repentance looks like.

Mourn over Sin

And verse 9 rounds off the nature of repentance

⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom

Here we have an echo of how the prophets in the OT preached repentance.

Mour over your sin.

Weep over your sin.

Let the sorrow of sin far outweigh the delight of committing it.

What is the most sorrow you have ever experienced?

- Loss of a child?
- Loss of a spouse?
- Spouse walking out on you?
- Being betrayed by one closest to you.
- Losing a limb or the ability to walk?

If you have not experienced these you know someone who has. Do you remember that sorrow? That anguish, that pain? Maybe you know it right now.

You are sorrowful because you have lost something precious. Something dear.

Friends, when we sin we lose something far greater than anything we could lose here on earth. When we sin, we lose relationship with the Living God.

Isa 59:2 says

*but your iniquities have made a separation
between you and your God,
and your sins have hidden his face from you
so that he does not hear.*

When we sin we are separated from God, His face is hidden from us and He does not hear us.

Separated from the one who is our only hope of life, our only hope of peace, our only hope of hope.

When we sin, we lose far more than anything we could lose in this world.

And so it is right to ⁹*Be wretched and mourn and weep.*

A true repentant will turn laughter into mourning, and worldly joy into gloom.

- What brought us a cheap laugh must cause us to mourn.
- What brought us fleeting joy must stir gloom in our hearts.

A repentant person mourns over their sin, like a mother mourns over a dead child.

Application - Are you ready to repent?

Are you ready to repent? Are you ready to kill self to gain life?

Are you ready to resist the devil and give no opportunity to sin? To take radical action if necessary?

Will you draw near to God, but setting his standard as your standard in your life? By actively seeking to live a holy life? By searching your heart and pulling out the sin that still dwells there as the Spirit reveals it?

Will you mourn over your sin as if you had lost a limb, a child or a spouse? Will you *Be wretched and mourn and weep* because your relationship with the Living God is on the line?

Friends, if you repent, if you humble yourself before the Lord, he promises to give you grace. He promises to exalt you.

This is true if you repent for the first time or for the hundredth time.

Link

Now some of you may be thinking, surely that level of repentance is only necessary with big sins. Surely I don't need to repent like that for small sins like a bit of gossip or a bit of critical speech.

But that is exactly what James is addressing. There is no such thing as a small sin. So yes we must repent of gossip, slander and critical speech.

Which brings us to our final point. One Example of Repentance.

Part 3 – One Example of Repentance

Small sin?

What we might see as “not that bad” is in fact a heinous sin.

In verse 11 to 12 James remove the bonnet and show the mechanic of what is happening when we gossip or slander.

And these mechanics we can find under every “small” or “respectable sin”. There is no “small” or respectable sin.

The same engine may make little noise at idle, or great noise at full revs. The engine is the source of both. Slander or murder come from the same engine.

Speaking evil

Look at verse 11 which shows the example of a “small” sin or “respectable sin” .

¹¹ *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.*^[d]

Now this could be public criticism or it could be private grumblings.

- Complaining about how someone spoke,
- what they wore,
- what you think they should have done.
- Poking fun of mannerisms or
- questioning their genuineness.

This is within the context of a church. It is easy to grumble and criticise people in our family who may annoy us or rub us up the wrong way.

Surely that is not that bad?

But notice what those grumblings or criticisms are revealing about your heart.

Judging the law

Verse 11 continues.

The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

So, speaking against a brother or sister is to judge the law. How does that work?

The law can be summarised as Love God and love Neighbour. James is focusing on Love your neighbour here. (Jas 2:8).

So it is easy to see that to criticise is to fail to love. To criticise is to disobey the law, and hence you have judged that God's law is not worth obeying.

You have judged that the law has no authority over you. You have made yourself above God's law.

Suddenly, critical speech becomes more serious. But James has not finished. He continues at the end of verse 11.

Becoming Lawgiver

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. ¹² There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?

Wow! There is the ugly truth. When you criticise your brother or sister, you are trying to take the place of God.

- You are committing high treason.
- Idolatry of the worst kind.
- You are putting yourself on the throne.
- You are worshipping yourself instead of God.

That is what James is saying.

You criticise and judge your brother. And by doing that you decide that the law to not apply to you, so you make your own law that you like. So you self-appoint yourself as judge and law giver.

But there is only one lawgiver and judge.

Only he is worthy to do these things. Only he has the right. Only He is king. Only he can save and destroy. Only He is God.

Who are you to judge your neighbour when you are commanded to love him?

Repent even of small sins

So yes, we must repent even of the "small" sins. Because in all sins there is much to repent of. These supposedly small sinful actions are the fruit of the invasive tree of sin.

To repent in a godly way, we must cut down the whole tree. More than that we must uproot the stump.

When you repent, you must confess the slander but also the pride, self-worship and the idolatry.

Conclusion

Friends sin is serious. Sin is a dreadful enemy.

- It is a web of our own making that traps us and chokes us.
- It is a consuming fire that we have started and continue to fuel.
- It is a deep pit that we keep digging deeper.

We have no reason to think we could escape.

But he gives more grace. God gives more grace. He gives us what we do not deserve. Everything we do condemns us, yet he chose to rescue us. He chose to give us the gift of life.

Will you accept that gift? Will you humble yourself before the Lord? Will you submit yourself to God? Will you repent?

Will you resist the devil and draw near to God? Will you cleanse your hands and purify your hearts? Will you repent even of the “small” sins in order to uproot all remains of sin?

Will you be wretched, mourn and weep over your sins, like a parent weeping for a lost child?

Friends, if you repent, if you kill self, God promises to exalt you, he promises you life.

He promises to transform you into the likeness of his Son, where you can find true peace, true joy and true satisfaction as you worship him in the fullness of your being.

Our greatest good is to glorify him, so let us kill Self to gain life.

Let us Pray.