

## James 4:9a-12 'Repentance, Humility and Arrogance'

Last week's message was from James 4:7-9a 'Double Minded Man or Woman'. James has dealt with what was spiritual adultery in the eyes of God, because those who are enamoured with or in love with the world are enemies of God. That spirit of natural man within us "envies intensely", wages war within us v5. "But he gives us more grace, to overcome that conflict"; he says in v7: "Submit yourselves (be subject) to God." Remember, that word "submit" brings with it the idea of being placed under something. Here it is the Mind, the Will and the Word of God! Because this is a spiritual war that we are involved in. Ephesians 6:11-12: "Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

Yes this is a spiritual conflict, but it manifests itself in flesh and blood ways! The hatred toward Christians by the non-Christian world is real, even as Satan's legions of darkness are real. Yes the attacks of this spiritual enemy manifests themselves in physical ways.

But James says, "resist" (or oppose) the devil and he will flee from you." And as I explained, this "resisting" is not like saying no to the next bit of cheesecake, trifle or lemon meringue pie, no. It means to be in opposition against. To do battle with. As did Jesus after His baptism, when in the wilderness!: "Get behind me Satan." "It is written." "It is written." "It is written." The Word of God is our weapon of choice to do battle with the Evil One! v8: "Come near to God and he will come near to you." That wonderful imagery of always being within arm's reach of our Heavenly Father! But spiritual adultery, is to "*Boulethe*" is to make that decision, to in effect go beyond the reach (humanly speaking) of God! "*Dipsuxoi*" they have chosen to be those two hearted, those two souled people! v9: "Grieve mourn and wail." Yes grieve: "*talaiporesate*," as with Paul in Romans 7: "Wretched" "Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death?" This body of sin that clings to me of the old man?

"Mourn," we are to "mourn" that which placed Jesus on the Cross. Never allowing our sin to rest easily upon our shoulders. And "Wail." Lament. Shed tears and repent. Tears of repentance! Yes it's that funeral procession isn't it? But it's not a funeral for the death of anyone, no. It is for those bits of hell, that continued to live in us!

And so we pick it up in v9b of chapter 4, under the title 'Repentance, Humility and Arrogance'. 9b: "Change your laughter to mourning, your joy to gloom." As James continues down this spiritual self-effacing funeral procession he says: "*metatrapeto*" it's where we get the word metastasized from. That word which I'm sure none of us wants to hear, either for ourselves or about someone we love. Yes the doctor says, I'm so very sorry to tell you this, but your cancer has metastasized. It has changed into something far more deadly! Well James is telling his hearers who have chosen to go down those old pathways, (while still believing that they are walking upright and standing firm), "*metatrapeto*" change everything about who you think you are and how you are living!

In Isaiah 61:1-3, when speaking of the coming of the Lord Jesus and of what wonderful things His coming would accomplish and bring (and which the Lord Himself takes ownership of in Luke chapter 4 when coming to His hometown of Nazareth) we read: "The spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who

mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise, instead of the spirit of despair". But for these people to whom James now writes, a world of difference! "Grieve, mourn and wail." "Change, (transform) your laughter into mourning, your joy to gloom." You have nothing to be glad or joyful about, he is saying. The way you are living and the direction you are heading in is taking you directly toward an eternal precipice. And unless you change direction, and everything about your current life you are doomed. Even eternally so!

The commentator explains that these words are to be taken in the passive sense. So they are to mean not change yourself so much, though certainly that is part of the equation, but "be changed" by the Power and Truth of God! Yes have "your laughter changed into mourning." Truly be the people of whom Jesus preached in Matthew 5:4: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." You see these people are of Christ's Kingdom. They "grieve" over those things for which Jesus had to suffer and die that they might be set free from sin.

But you "laugh!" Dear friends, is there anything more empty and hollow than laughter at times? You know the kind of thing. When someone laughs at another person's expense. They don't laugh with them they laugh at them. And they do it because by making someone feel small, they make themselves feel big, and yet that has no part in Christ. "Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you," up James writes. And then there is the person who has lost all control, because their "laughter" is fuelled by drugs or alcohol, or perhaps a contempt for others. And those kinds of "laughter," can easily be turned into weapons, can't they? To even show others that we are on the inside, but they are not. Yes how hollow and empty such "laughter" can be. Proverbs 20:1: "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler, whoever is led astray by them is not wise."

And Proverbs 23:29-35: "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. "They hit me," you will say, "But I'm not hurt. They beat me, but I don't feel it. When will I wake up so I can have another drink."

Now friends I know these things speak specifically of drinking to the point of a mindless stupor, but the spirit of these things we can have without being drunk, I believe. That spirit of caring about no thing or no one but ourselves. Yes like an alcohol fuelled night of blurred abandon and empty laughter that often accompanies such things, so too the souls of those who have filled their lives with themselves, to the exclusion of God! Yes: "Turn your laughter to mourning, your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up."

Beloved as I have mentioned before, the true follower of Jesus has always got to remember from whence they've come, and how they got there. And again, where it says: "Humble yourselves," this is in the passive voice. So the idea is "be humbled." Yes "be humbled (by God) and he will lift you up." We are to consider ourselves as those lowly brethren. Remember from chapter 1:10: "But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position because he will pass away like a wild flower." Life is fleeting, life is temporary. It's not our pride, our vanity or our standing that matters. But how we stand before God! We ought to think of ourselves as that person who walks in wearing the "shabby clothes" from chapter two. In that chapter, the warning was that we should never have any less respect for the poor brother or sister than we do for the rich guy wearing his fine clothes and golden

rings. Well may I suggest that the warning here, is that we must never feel the need to measure ourselves against, or exalt ourselves above others. Because God's standard is Jesus!

Beloved, pride and vanity of any kind separates us from God. They lead us away in our own strength back down those old familiar roads. Whereas "humility," will always draw us back to Him!

Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." Friends can you see, those who possess this spiritual poverty of which Jesus speaks, have been brought to understand that there is nothing that they can do to merit His saving grace. No they can only fall before the Cross of Christ! So James tells us: "Humble yourself before the Lord, (yes be humbled by the Lord) and he will lift you up." But it is not that He will lift us up onto our feet so much, although that is certainly true, it is more that He will lift us to the highest heights of heaven, for so the root word implies!

In John 14:1-3 we read: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Yes, Beloved, we are to be "humbled," by the wonder of the mercy and grace of God. We are not to stand upon our own sense of piety or self-righteousness, no. We are to fall before the Cross, and in our mind's eye see Jesus hanging upon it, broken and bleeding, knowing that it was our personal sin which put Him there!

Dear friends, a genuine and humble heart before God, He will always "lift up" and bless. Yes he will always prosper, dare I use that word today. But it is not in the sense that many use it, no. He will prosper them in the things of His Kingdom. He will prosper them in regard to their relationship with Himself. They will grow in their desire to know and to serve Him. In their desire to be more like Jesus! In Jeremiah 29:11 we read: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Dear friends, a believer who is growing in their understanding of who God is, and who they are, and what Jesus has done for them, will always be brought low. Because more and more they come to understand, that it is not all of our great stuff that we can do, wrapped up in our pride and vanity that God needs all wants from us, no.

The prophet Micah put it this way in Micah 6:6-7: "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before our exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with 10,000 rivers of oil? Shall I offer my first born for my transgression the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Friends, can you see that the prophet is answering that deepest of all theological questions. What is it that pleases God? Yes how can we please Him? How can we show genuine repentance for sin? Because that's what he's addressing here. How is a person's life lived, that truly reflects that attitude of repentance?

Well in v8 of Micah 6 we read: "He has showed you O man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? But to act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Can you see? This Christian life is not a complicated equation. Integrity, Compassion, and Humility as we seek to live in obedience to Him in His sight! "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." You see the person who truly trusts God's love to us through Jesus, should never feel the need to justify, to exalt or to vindicate themselves. "Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up."

We sing the hymn don't we? *'There in the ground His body lay, light of the world by darkness slain. Then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave He rose again. And as He stands in victory, since curse has lost its grip on me. Till He returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I*

*stand!* Now I have combined the last two verses of that hymn, because this is what James is saying. Don't exalt yourselves, "Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up." No we don't need to seek to exalt ourselves above others, that's what the world does. We "Humbly" submit ourselves to God through His Word, and in His time, He lifts us up. Even to the highest heights of heaven! Amen!

V11: "Brothers do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother and judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgement on it." In this verse, James returns yet again to the danger of having an unbridled tongue. In the NIV the word is "slander," with the meaning being to speak against. And the verse is a little bit hard to understand, but basically, after saying "Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up," (so don't lift yourselves above your Brethren by what you do) well it's also, don't do this by what you say! "Brothers, do not slander one another."

Now this idea of "speaking against" as we have seen before in this letter, can manifest itself in so many ways. There's that under the cover of a concealed hand behind the back gossip. You know that kind of thing. 'Did you hear what she did and what she said?' 'No way, she didn't, tell me more!' There's that belittling, or having no regard for someone's opinion, on whatever the matter might be. It might be the calling into question of the veracity of what our Brethren say. Well you've got to take what he or she says with a grain of salt, we say. And finally, there is that looking with contempt upon what someone does in service to the Lord. And then wickedly conveying that to someone else!

Friends these are just a few examples, as you are well aware, there are many more! In 1 Peter 2:1-3 we read: "Therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so by it you may grow up, in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." And the commentator explains that just as a child's diet changes from its mother's milk to bits of solid food and then into a complete diet, able to eat all things. Well so too are the things which someone says, an evidence of their spiritual infancy or maturity. And what this particular slander amounts to, is being the "judge." That person who sits in judgement over another believer's worth, or authenticity. And also, amazingly, actually standing in judgement over the Law of God itself!

If we are these people, we are in effect believing that God's Law doesn't apply to us because we are above His Law. We've moved on from there. Yes we've examined His Law, and we've deemed it to not be applicable to ourselves. But Beloved, this is gross vanity and indeed it is blasphemy. And doing the devil's work for him! Now what Law James is referring to specifically here, I'm not completely sure. I tend to believe that we can take his words as pertaining to the whole council of God. As did Jesus when speaking to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He spoke of "all of the law and the prophets" pointing to Himself. Well Thomas Manton directs us to Leviticus 19:16: "Do not go about spreading slander among your people." And Manton translates this verse: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among the people." Perhaps it's where we get the term telling tales from. It is yet again that idea of tearing another person down, so that we can lift ourselves up, isn't it. And of course, it's the complete destruction, of that other Law which flows throughout the whole of the Bible. Which Jesus encapsulated and embodied.

But it's not as the world might have it, *do unto others before they do unto you*, no. It's "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Yes "Love your neighbour as yourself, Jesus said." Ephesians 4:29: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Paul really does capture the spirit of what James has been telling us. When we sit in judgement on God's people (or

indeed on His Law, and again I believe we can supplement Law to mean the whole counsel of God here) when we do this, we think we are above the Law, and it's not applicable to ourselves. Which means unlike everyone else, we are not bound to be obedient to the Word of God. So we can speak and act as we choose. Well both Paul and James say, no. All of our words and actions are for the "building up of others" not of ourselves!

1 Samuel 15:22-23: "But Samuel replied: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the sin of idolatry.'" Yes it's a loving obedience that God desires. "To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Finally v12: "There is only one lawgiver and judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbour?" James brings this section to a close, by speaking to those who feel they have the right to stand in the judgement seat over God's Law and another person's authenticity as a believer. Even over their life lived for Christ! And he does so by stating the obvious. The only One who can rightfully do this, is that One who has made and given the Law. And who also is the Judge, the Righteous Judge, who has the eternal power of judgement in His Hands, the Lord Jesus Christ! "There is only one lawgiver and judge." Blanchard explains that the only one who can rightfully assess any situation according to the Law of God, is the One with all the information, and sees clearly, the whole situation. And of course this is only God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:1: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead." Dear friends, surely it is the greatest impudence, for the convicted murderer as he stands shackled within the courtroom, to then proceed to tell the judge how things are going to go. Well that is what James is saying. To presume to sit in the judgement seat of God over someone's life, and make slanderous running comments on that life. And to even sit in judgement upon the very Law of the Lawgiver Himself, and to assess that Law's worthiness, is vanity, is arrogance, and is indeed an insanity, that beggars belief! No only Jesus has the "authority," and notice also He has the "power!" "The one who is able to save and destroy." Yes only Jesus has the "authority and power" "to save" as the Redeemer praise God, but also "to destroy" as the judge of all the earth. The word means to kill, to utterly destroy, to make void the life of those who fall into His Hands as Judge!

We saw it some weeks ago from Hebrews 10:31: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!" Beloved we should pray that it always ever be that we "fall into" His Hand of Mercy! And let me paraphrase James' final words here: *Who do you think you are to stand in judgement of, or as the judge of your neighbour? You are ill equipped, you have no authority, and your own sinful lives disqualify you from that position!*

Beloved as I close, this morning's message has simply been about Repentance (or change) Humility, and prideful Arrogance. If in our vanity we have wandered from God's ways, we need to "change our laughter into mourning," to repent, to change, and come back to Him! With Humility we are to act with love towards one another. "Building one another up," not tearing each other down with careless and hate filled words! In our arrogance, we cannot sit in judgement of others. For "there is only one judge the Lord Jesus Christ!" Yes "What does the Lord require of you? But to act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Let's pray!