

04.10.11 / James 4:5-10

Passage Insight

In our most recent week in the book of James, we saw in the first few verses of chapter 4 that our conflicting selfish passions drive us to be at war with God and with one another. We see in verse 5 the seemingly impossible response of God. He gives more grace. Although we find ourselves in full rebellion against His mercy and love, he reaches out with a call to see our sin for what it is, weep and mourn over the terror of it, and then willingly and joyfully submit to Him and taste freedom from it. Let's take a look.

God never withholds His grace from those who may receive it, and He always has more to give. There is never any limitation to His mercies. Consider Lamentations 3:22-23, which reads,

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

We have limitations to how much we can love, how much we can forgive, how much we can share, etc., and we usually see these limitations when we hit a point of frustration and unwillingness to love others as we have been loved. God is not like this. Quite the opposite. While we are often motivated to love others if they love us first, God first loved us while we were spitting in His face. While we are quick to withhold our forgiveness when we feel like we've finally had enough, God extends His grace to us without ceasing. And while we find ourselves tapped out in what we can give to others, the Lord's provision is unending for all of eternity. The living water never stops flowing. The bush burns but is never consumed. His love is ENDLESS, always NEW. He gives more grace.

In verses 7-10 there are at least ten different commands to obey the Lord. The Lord who gives more grace to us also requires much of us. Everything, in fact. In Luke 14:33, Jesus says, "...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." This renunciation includes a death to our old self and a putting off of our old ways. Ephesians 4:22-24 says this:

...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

This begins with complete and total submission to God (verse 7). Before we were saved, we were slaves to sin, slaves to our own selfish desires and passions. In other words, we were submitting to ourselves, to our selfish desires. Now that we are saved by Christ, our loyalties change. We have radically changed sides, literally been plucked from the enemy's camp, where we were starving and hungry, killing ourselves and one another, and fighting against God. And we have now been brought to a place where we are loved, cared for, fed, nurtured by God, often through one another, and in deep community with God and the others He has saved from certain death. This is our reality, and such a gift requires a radical response. EVERYTHING about our former life must go. We submit to our new Leader, the Lord (verse 7). We draw near to our new Leader. We wash our hands of everything from the enemy camp. We purify our hearts through obedience to our new Leader (verse 8). And then we turn and fight against our former master, the devil (verse 7). It should be noted here that we have no capacity to resist the devil until we are saved. Prior to that, we are fighting FOR the devil because we are fighting AGAINST God. It is only when we fully and completely submit to God and are saved that our allegiance changes and we then have the capacity to fight AGAINST the devil.

When we recognize what has been done for us, we can't help but lift our hands in praise. When we recognize that we are sitting in the camp of the devil, that everything inside of us is stench and disease that will take us to our death, what follows is a response of weeping and mourning because of what we now see about ourselves. This is what we see in verse 9. James is not saying that we should weep and mourn in order to gain God's favor, and he's not saying that we should do as an act of penance to make ourselves feel better or to convince ourselves how bad we are. What he is saying is that when we find ourselves in deep and true recognition of our sin, we begin to see it for what it is, and when we do, there is simply no room for laughter, only for mourning and weeping at our rebellion towards God. The laughter will come in time, but only as we taste the Lord's grace despite our rebellion (verse 6), submit to God (verse 7), and are thus empowered to flee from the sin that is crushing us.

The most remarkable thing of all is the truth that is echoed in Romans 5:8-9, which says, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God demands everything of us, but because we are unable to give what He requires, He provides it Himself. HE is the one who supplies what we need to meet HIS demands, leaving us with complete and perfect provision. Praise the Lord.

- PRACTICAL: In times of great need – seeing our sin, seeing our impurity, mourning, weeping, incapacity, being overwhelmed, times of great criticism, etc. – we are most primed to accept the Lord's grace, because we finally see how much we need it.
 - o Not to say that we should do penance and somehow earn the Lord's favor through sackcloth and ashes – explain
- PRACTICAL: what are the old ways that you're hanging on to? Where does your life look like you're still in the devil's camp?

Application Questions / Prayer

God Opposes the Proud and Gives Grace to the Humble

- 1) According to Luke 18:14, "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Where do you trust yourself?
- 2) There is pride in this, and God's opposition. What other sins does this reveal that you need to confess?
- 3) He gives more grace. How have you experience God's grace in the face of genuine repentance and confession?
- 4) What hope does this give you?

Weeping and Mourning

- 1) Who has a bead on you and can call you on sin that you don't even see?
- 2) When the Lord reveals our sin, and we weep and mourn, it's not because He doesn't love us. It's because He is FREEING us from death. Where are you laughing at sin when you should be mourning the death it causes?
- 3) What does repentance look like for you in this?
- 4) He gives more grace. Who can help you see God's grace in this transformation?

Sources

- Prayer
- Bible Speaks Today
- New International Commentary on the New Testament

- Tyndale
- Pillar
- The Bible Knowledge Commentary
- The Bible Exposition Commentary