

He Gives More Grace

James 4:1-12

Pastor Tom Becker

Opening:

I'm so glad to be able to share this morning as we continue in the book of James. And this is a passage that in some ways kind of really grabs us, via the by the collar and shakes us. But this morning the verse that we will focus on is so very beautiful. So, kind of need to catch up, it's been a few weeks. Let's read together James chapter four, verses one through 12,

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says:

“God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”

So we started on this passage, it seems like such a long time ago because we had some snow weeks and we had some missions festival weeks. But just to catch us up on where we are at this particular point, James starts out in chapter four drawing our focus to what is going on in our hearts. And he says that most of the conflicts that arise in our lives are rooted specifically in what is going on in our own hearts. It boils down to things that we desire, and if we're not getting this thing that we desire, we get all upset about it, and then we end up in these wars and battles, and our lives are not what God intends them to be. Then he continues talking about these desires. There's not a shift from those first couple of verses to the next few, in which he says that these desires and our affinity towards the desires of our heart, our affinity towards the things that we pursue, towards our passions, towards our own priorities: that is friendship with the world, which is enmity towards God. And what God wants is exactly the opposite, in fact, He is jealous for our undivided heart, for our total devotion to Him, and turning away from those desires, from the things of the world, from those things that well up within our own hearts. And so he [James] is calling us to cultivate friendship with God, by choosing Him above worldly priorities and pleasures of the flesh and the

things that we want to pursue in our lives. And if indeed we are cultivating friendship with God, then our relationships with others will normalize, as well.

But what happens when we fall? What happens when we fail? Because we all do. I don't think anybody gets up in the morning and thinks first thing, "All right. I'm going to go out today. I'm going to go to school, and there's this other person at school, there's this girl there, and I'm going to slander her and tear her down in front of her friends." We don't get up with that in our hearts and determine that. But, bam! We go to school, and there's a conversation, and we do this. We don't get up and say, "I'm going to go to work and there's this position that I desire to attain, and I'm just going to step all over everybody else in order to achieve what it is that I want." We don't get up and say, "I'm going to go to the store and spend these resources that God has given me on my own pleasures to the neglect of the needy around me." These desires, they creep in. They get a hold of our hearts, they get a hold of our attention, and we do things that are a violation of God's image in us. We sin. We demonstrate friendship with the world and enmity towards God. And we all do it. It happens to the best of us. Just this week, I had a conversation with a precious, precious saint in our church who's struggling with a character issue. And they said, "Here I am serving in this area or in the other area, but I've got this battle going on and I'm losing. How can God honor that? What does He think about me? How can I get over this?" What happens when we fall? What happens when we fail? Well, these verses tell us: He gives more grace. Right in the middle of this passage that grabs you by the collar, verse six, "But He gives us more grace." That is why Scripture says, "God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble." If we want more grace, that's the promise of this passage. Among the things I've read, this definition jumped out: "Grace is God's generous, not begrudging, but generous, active, effective help far beyond what we could ever expect or deserve."

And one of the things that we see as we look through scripture is that there are different aspects, there are different ways of looking at grace, and we're going to consider two of them as we jump into this this morning.

Saving Grace:

First, of course, is the understanding of *saving grace*, the fact that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, at enmity with God, totally undeserving of anything except eternal separation from Him, have the opportunity for forgiveness and salvation and adoption into His family, and to receive every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, not because we deserve it, but just like we read, because God is generous and active and effective in giving us help in our spiritual condition far beyond what we can expect or deserve. Ephesians 2:8 is a verse that many of us are familiar with, "For it is by grace," no other reason, "It is by grace that you have been saved through faith. This is not from yourselves. It is God's gift." We come to the communion table this morning to celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ, when He went to that cross, did everything necessary for our forgiveness and salvation. And everyone who places their faith in Him can be forgiven and receive new life. That is saving grace, and it is far more than we could ever ask for or deserve. Glory to Him for pouring out that grace on us.

Daily Grace:

But it doesn't stop right there. God has grace for us for living every day. One author calls it *future grace*, the grace that I'm going to need today, and the grace that I'm going to need an hour from now, and a minute from now, and tomorrow, and continuing. And God always provides that grace that I need for living. The author of the book of Hebrews urges us to approach God's throne of grace, talking to us as believers, come to God's "throne of grace with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Our time of need is that moment when temptation rushes in. Our time of need is that moment when we are beat up by illness or misfortune in our lives, whatever it is that we are going through. And in that time of need today, in a minute from now, and tomorrow, and next week, God promises to give us the grace.

And so we come to him, and we continually ask Him to pour out that grace on us. And we need this grace. We fall short in so many ways, at least I know that I do. And James reminds us that we all do, that's how he starts out in Chapter three. We all stumble in many ways. It's a frank acknowledgment on the part of the brother of Jesus, James the Just, the respected leader of the church in Jerusalem, including himself, along with everybody else, saying, "I fall. I stumble over and over in many ways." And it's not only the actual acts of sin that we are guilty of. It is the condition of our hearts. It's not a matter of, "Oh man, if only I could stop doing that, then I would no longer have this sin nature that I'm battling with." Ultimately, we will always fall short because the greatest command is, what? The greatest command is not, "Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't envy." The greatest command is, "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind." Every word, every thought, every action, being rooted in and oriented towards love for God and your neighbor as yourself. And until the day that we see Jesus and are actually completely sanctified, we will always fall short. We pray this prayer of confession today, and the heart of that prayer of confession is that every sin that we commit is a sin against God., because I have become convinced that this thing that I desire, or this pursuit that I'm going to attain at no matter what expense, is greater than God. Every sin, when it comes down to it, is an act of idolatry and a violation of the command to love the Lord our God with all of our being, and to love our neighbor as ourself. We will ultimately always fall short and we are constantly reminded of it.

I don't know about you, but in some ways this journey through the book of James has been a real challenge. James is rough. I get through with some of these studies and, personally, just feel so beat up. You start out, and he's talking about how we need greater faith in the midst of suffering and trials. And then he hits us with our attitude towards money. And then he hits us with merely listening to the Word and not actually putting the Word into practice. And then he hits us with how we relate to the needy, to the orphans, and widows in their distress. Then he hits us with the constant stumbling of our tongue. And then he hits us with conflicts. And then he hits us with values that are opposed to God and are at enmity with God. And then he hits us with pride. And he goes on and he keeps hitting us, and hitting us. We need God's grace. And the good news is, right here in the middle of this challenging passage, He gives it. Even when we fall, God's gift is greater. His generosity is more abundant. His love is deeper. What happens when we sin and when we fail? All is not lost. There is a far greater graciousness to God than we can ever outrun. We need this grace, and He has more than enough of it.

First of all, we know that He has more than enough of it, simply because of His character, because of His nature. He is God. He knows no limits. He always accomplishes what He sets His purposes to. He cannot be foiled by any of our sins or stumbling. When God introduces Himself to Moses, when Moses said, "Show me who you are", and He describes Himself in His glory and beauty, and holiness. He says that He is abounding, He's overflowing, in His love towards us. That's rooted in His nature. In that passage that we just read in the book of Hebrews, we are called to come to what? We are called to come to the throne of grace. What is a throne? A throne is the seat of power of the one who rules in majesty, right? A king, in the morning, he's got to put his pants on the same way as everybody else, one leg at a time. There's no way around it. He's just like everybody else. But when he is sitting on that throne, that is the seat of authority. That's an earthly king. When we come into the throne room of the King of heaven, we are entering into His place of authority and majesty and holiness. But what is it described as for us? Grace. "Let us come before the throne of grace." For you, son or daughter of the living God, entering into His presence, coming before the very seat of His Majesty. It's not a place of fear. It's not a place of judgment. It's not a place of condemnation or dread or trembling. It's a place of grace, because that's who He is.

Scripture also describes Him as the God of *all* grace, there's nothing that's excluded. He encompasses every facet of grace that can be imagined or described, and then that is shown in who Jesus Christ is. One of the things that I love again about the book of Hebrews is the description of how much greater Jesus is than any human priest. In fact, one of the fundamental teachings of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus had to be both entirely human and entirely God in order to accomplish our salvation. He needed to be entirely human because He was purchasing redemption for human sin. He was able to take sin on Himself because He was just like us in every way except without sin. But no human can die for somebody else. Jesus had to be God, so much greater than any human priest, so that He didn't have to bring one sacrifice, and then another, and then another, and then another; but rather once for all. Hebrews 10:12, "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, because it was accomplished." The point here is that grace is rooted in the character of God, but it is magnified in the sacrifice of Christ. That is super sufficient for every single sin that has ever been committed, for my sin, both past and present and future. We need grace, and He has more than enough. That's why Paul says, "The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more." It never runs out. Hallelujah! What happens when we fall, when we fail? God's grace is completely adequate to meet the requirements imposed on us by the law by His holiness, by His image in us that calls us to be holy as He is holy. God's grace is completely adequate to meet those requirements. As Saint Augustine famously prayed, "God, grant what You command. You command me to be holy. Grant me holiness."

In this verse, we do see that the actualization of that grace is dependent on our approach. He gives more grace, as it is written. God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble. And so we are called to approach Him not with pride. That places us in opposition to God. Basic biblical definition of pride would be "too high a view of oneself; thinking about oneself above and beyond what is proper". In regard to God's grace that can be seen in this idea, "Hey, I've already got it." In other words, what is described through Scripture as self-righteousness, "I have attained something. I have achieved a certain level of spirituality. I don't need any more grace. I already have what I need." That is too high a view of oneself in light of the holiness of God and our place before Him. Conversely, and interestingly, too high a view of oneself can also be seen if we say, "I could never deserve God's grace. Oh, Pastor Tom, you have no idea how bad I am, or how, or what I have done.

God could never forgive me for these things.” That is actually too high a view of ourselves, as if anything that we could do is more powerful than what God has promised. No. There's nothing that we can do that places us outside of God's ability and willingness to forgive, to pour out His grace on those who will ask him for it. This too high view of oneself can also be seen in a stubborn unwillingness to even accept grace, “I have nothing to repent of. I've done no wrong.” That's called hardness of heart, and there's pride, and that hinders receiving God's grace. Instead, we are called to humility. Humility, the opposite of pride, is a proper view of oneself before God. “Oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Recognizing that we can in no way be worthy, in no way be deserving. In no way have already attained a certain level that we no longer need it, but always in that position of needing more and more grace. And interestingly, in scripture, if humility has a proper view of this vertical relationship with God, it is then also properly expressed horizontally, that is, in relation with each other. Romans Chapter 12 is a great example. After speaking of the glories of God's grace for eleven chapters, Paul gets into the practical section about how we should live and he draws our attention to our inner world, being transformed by the renewing of our minds. He calls us not to think too highly of ourselves, but to think of ourselves properly. And then the rest of this chapter is about serving each other and living with each other and relating to each other in the attitudes of humility. 1 Peter Chapter 5 does the exact same thing, Peter actually quotes the same verse, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” And he says, “humble yourselves before God.” But he also says, relate to each other in humility. The two things go hand-in-hand. A proper view of myself before God allows me to relate and humility to those around me. Jesus's own commentary is far better than anything I could ever say [Luke 18:9-14],

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

That's what God responds to, and to anyone. Seventy years in the faith and still recognizing how far my heart is from wholehearted devotion to God. Brand new baby in the faith, still struggling with some of the fundamentals of sanctification; someone who has resisted the faith for years, even decades; someone who's maybe hearing for the first time: It doesn't matter who you are or where you are in life, to the one who will come to our Lord, before His throne of grace, in humility: God is inexhaustible on your side. He always has more grace, His resources are never at an end, His patience never runs out, and His generosity knows no limit. So back to that dear church member who was struggling, failing in one area, wondering, “ow can I ask for God's blessing on my life?” He is pleased, brother or sister, with you. We recently read that great chapter of faith, Hebrews Chapter 11. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God, because he who comes unto him must believe that he is, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Someone who is coming before the throne of grace, saying, “I've fallen again. Help me, God. Have mercy on me.” He is pleased. He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. He is not withholding His blessing. He will not fail to give His grace. Keep coming before Him in humility.

Conclusion:

So this week, there are going to be struggles. There are going to be failures. You might lose your patience with your kids or with your spouse in the car on the way home. It might not even make it to the car. It's bound to happen. Let's look on our struggles and failures as an opportunity to cultivate humility. "Well, God, there I go again. Have mercy on me, a sinner." Don't listen to the voice of the accuser. He's the one who wants to tell you you're not worthy. He's the one who wants you to think God will withdraw His favor. He's the one who wants to destroy you. Don't listen to the accuser. Look at it as an opportunity to cultivate humility before our Lord, who is always merciful and receives us graciously. Rest in God's grace. And then look for opportunities to express that grace to others. That vertical relationship of humility with God will inevitably find itself expressed in humble relations with brothers or sisters no matter what the situation might be.

So here we come to the cross, here we come to the table. It's not just this morning. That's the other thing to do all week. If we stumble, if we fall, just come right back to the cross. It's a great thing that we can do this entire season of Lent. Be cognizant, be attentive to our need for what Jesus has provided.

Let's pray together, "Heavenly Father, human words can never be adequate to describe the glories of Your grace. Thank You for Your word. Thank You that, in Christ, You showed us grace. In Your word, You opened up so much of Your heart, of what You long for, for us, of the relationship that You invite us to, of the means of receiving Your grace and living in Your grace. Father, I pray that this little dip into an ocean of mercy would awaken in us a greater thirst to know You more, to pursue You with our whole heart and soul and mind and strength, to cultivate friendship with You, to live out Your grace in our relationships. I pray, Father, that by Your Spirit You would speak to us about some aspect of this grace that we can know more, not just in our minds, but in our hearts and in our lives. What a what a fountain of mercy! Give us just a taste. In Jesus' name we pray, amen."